

UTOPIA FALLS

By

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## CHAPTER 1

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Melanie Hamilton, M.D., didn't know much about the world around her, but she did know that at the present time she had just left a space and time defined as Los Angeles, 1920. She also knew that this small town founded by a rowdy bunch of cowboys, working stiff Latinos and outcast Easterners half a century ago was about to blossom into something a lot bigger. She knew that most of the Westerns were being written in New Jersey and for the most part filmed there, through Thomas Edison's contacts with equipment he wanted to stay in the East. She knew that this genre of story-telling in print and on screen was not going to go away, despite the fact that there were few real Cowboys left and, unless they were in the mountains south of the Rio Grande or north of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel, wild Indians. She knew that writing Westerns was a man's business, designed to serve the interests of men, and that being established in that genre was the most effective way her, so far unpaid and under-published, skills as a wordsmith could have an influence on men, and women. She also knew that despite the recent Amendment to the US Constitution that finally allowed all women to vote, few would go to the poles, and even fewer would vote according to their conscience rather than the wishes of their husbands.

But the still-single 35 year old, born and bred in very urban upscale New York physician also knew that she was a woman who would not bow down to any man. Melanie had clawed rather than climbed her way into becoming a doctor. A small-framed, big-brained woman who had cured the physical and mental ills of so many men and boys, many times having to pretend to be a nurse so she would have access to them. A woman who knew she was smarter than most of the men around her, and certainly more caring than such, which made her even more intelligent, and alone. A woman who somehow didn't fit the WASP blue-blood heritage she was told that produced her. A woman who was brought up by a man-serving mother with whom less was said and more was withheld in any conversation, from both directions. A woman who was now an orphan, courtesy of an automobile accident involving her mother's overpriced Rolls Royce Phantom I hitting a horse drawn ice-delivery wagon when the brakes on the former failed, instantly killing her father and putting her mother into the best of hospitals with the worst of injuries. A woman who now had to endure, and honor, one last request from her mother, delivered on her death bed.

"See to it that this woman is taken care of, and that you do everything you can to make her last days in the realm of the living peaceful and meaningful," Melanie re-read yet again on the copy of the Will she had received in the mail as she walked through the hallways of the Sanitorium in Denver, past the guards who seemed to be more concerned with keeping patients in rather than un-infected people out. "You will be well compensated by my estate and by God for doing so," the pledge in Melanie's mother's Will, put into print an hour before she passed due to un-repairable injuries. Injuries that maybe Melanie, if she had stayed at home in Long Island like a good, obedient and

properly married off society girl, could have treated. Or, maybe not. It all was academic now.

Melanie showed her credentials to the orderly at the ward where this special patient, or perhaps soul, was being held. She looked away, seeing her reflection in the glass. She found herself primping up her stylishly chin-length bobbed hair under a fedora, then noticed in the reflection three traditionally clad nurses with long hair tied up in tight 'granny' buns who were not any older than herself looking disapprovingly at the trousers she was wearing. "It's called liberation," Melanie smiled at them.

"So's death, ta the poor souls in this here ward anyway, Miss Hamilton," the very male Orderly whose boots reeked of horse hair and cattle dung said as he pointed to a hastily put up sign above him with a western twang that made him sound both authentic, and illiterate.

"*Doctor* Hamilton," Melanie reminded the jaundiced, and armed, yahoo whose breath reeked of tobacco of booze as she read the sign above the door reading 'Spanish Flu Ward' in paint that was still drying. "A Doctor who has been assigned to see a patient by the name of Maria Gonzales," she continued, knowing fully well how deadly, and contagious, and painful, this new epidemic that came back with the Doughboys from France was.

"Assigned by who, 'Doctor' Hamilton?" the out-of-work cowboy asked with a sneer, more like a guard than a than an orderly.

"By the head of the hospital," she said, placing her scarf over her mouth with one hand, handing over a letter from the Chief of Medicine at the hospital with the other.

"Whose signature I don't quite recognize, Doctor Hamilton," the guard replied with a sadistic grin.

"Which maybe you will, on these documents?" Melanie shot back with a sharp, academic Southampton blue blood accent, presenting the guard with another envelope, retrieved from under her bra.

The guard gazed at the greenbacks in the envelope with satisfaction, then with desire at the location from which they were retrieved. Then finally at Melanie's eyes, still wanting more.

"Alright, then," Melanie offered, pulling out a larger stash of money from her waist-attached purse. She placed it into the jar labeled 'Children's and Widow's Hospital Building Fund'. An act she had done many times for many patients, usually anonymously. Particularly the ones who were related to patients she couldn't save.

By the way the orderly glanced at the roll of Hamilton, Jackson, Lincoln and Washington portraits, Melanie knew the three chinned bubba bellied stubble faced orderly in white

with a black soul would extract more than his share of commission fees from the jar. And that she was running low on cash herself, barely having enough to get train fare back to her home in San Francisco and destiny in Los Angeles. But, if there was one thing Melanie's mother was, it was being true to her word, economically anyway.

The three local yokul nurses still gazing at Melanie's short hair and manly urban attire, one of them now with envy, another with fascination, were dismissed by the orderly requesting that they tend to their 'divinely-assigned' duties of 'cleaning bedpans, rustling up some grub and lookin' as pretty as they can'. Out of habit, fear or trickery, all three smiled, then went on their way. With no one watching, the orderly opened the door to the ward. "Twenty minutes, Doc," he said to Melanie, as an order and warning. "After that, I ain't responsible fer nothin' that happens ta you in there," he continued in a fatherly tone that, despite its ignorant

If felt like a warning given by Melanie's father about being too independent, brave or honorable when it comes to dealing with men, or for that matter, other women. Or what would happen to her if in her urge to write the truth about humanity in fiction, like Melanie's inspirational doctor-author Anton Chekov, she would find herself very broke, ostracized or perhaps dead in fact. Still, Melanie was on a Mission here. Even though the woman who sent Melanie on it kept it was an expert at telling lies, and even better at concealing the truth about anything.

The only thing Melanie had by way of identification of Maria Gonzales was a picture. An old one at that, which by the sepia tone and wardrobe had to be taken at least 50 years ago. Having seen young people age very quickly when their bodies acquired diseases, and being an underappreciated ace at facial reconstruction for soldiers wounded at the Front in France, Melanie had a sense of how young people looked, or would look like, when they became old. Maria Gonzales in her picture had eyes too expressive for her time and large for her small round face. Long black hair flowed over her slender, narrow shoulders. Her aristocratic Mexican presence seemed to be mixed with a small portion of Indian breeding somewhere in her pedigree. Most importantly, she had caring, intelligent and 'wanting to trust but can't allow myself to' smile which reeked of self-infused intensity which honored defiance of herself and serving others, both at the same time. But there was something about this strange perhaps historically-significant woman who seemed to want to say so much to the camera, and those who would look at her photograph, that felt... familiar.

The woman in the bed bearing Maria's name bore little resemblance to the photograph to any normal or objective observer. Her hair, what was left of it, was white. Her olive Iberian face was ghost white, her slender yet muscular arms now reduced to sticks of bone with thin, saggy slabs of thin tissue which barely looked like viable skin. From her once cautiously smiling lips came a death rattle. But her eyes were still Alive, the coral blue color of such attracting and not letting go of whoever dared, or chose, to look at her. She was strapped to her bed, bruises on her legs and arms most probably caused by futile attempts to release herself from them, or, according to her chart, uncontrollable seizures.

“I’m Melanie Hamilton,” Melanie said to the woman afflicted obviously with more than merely the Spanish flu, still keeping her scarf over her mouth. “And you are Maria Gonzales?” she continued in a soft, slowly delivered voice.

The old woman defiantly shook her head ‘no’, as affirmatively as her painful neck allowed her to do so.

“But the sign on your bed, says Maria Gonzales,” Melanie asked, gently, knowing fully well that patients of her age and in her condition were.

“Not me!” Maria pushed out of her mouth in a voice that Melanie could barely understand. “Who are you?” she pressed, demanding an answer.

“Melanie Hamilton,” Melanie replied as she took the woman’s hand. She then released the restraints from her arms and legs. “*Doctor Melanie Hamilton!*” she repeated, loud enough for a passing nurse pulling a rope out of his pocket to keep her distance. “Who was sent to help you, by...this women.” Melanie pulled out a picture of her mother from her jacket pocket, showing it to the patient. While doing so, Melanie shooed off the nurse like she was an unwanted servant, a trick she had acquired inadvertently from her mother, but one that always worked.

When ‘Maria’ glanced at the picture, her tired, death-welcoming eyes turned into oculars emitting primal rage. With all the strength she could, ‘Maria’ ejected a wad of blood-tinged spit at the picture, cursing it with phrases in Spanish that Melanie had never heard, but struggled to remember for future literary use.

“Then who are you?” Melanie asked, putting matters medical in front of literary, yet again. “Tell me who you are. And what you want me to do.”

Instantly Melanie knew that she had asked Maria, or whoever she really was, too many questions. She prepared herself for a constellation of answers.

“You go here,” Maria pushed out of quivering lips, in Spanish, a language that Melanie had learned despite her mother’s saying it was a useless tongue for American women. Maria requested with her shaking fingers to grab hold of the photograph of herself as a young girl, then a pencil. Melanie put herself in between Maria’s writing and onlookers, which now included a second concerned nurse, a young male doctor who rolled his eyes with condescension, and three other patients whose bodies and minds were well on their way to the other side of the veil. One of the patients, a tall emaciated man with uneven sideburns and a partially shaved off goutee pushed himself out of bed, slapped a children’s sheriff’s badge on his chest and shouffled towards an alarm bell.

“Here!” ‘Maria’ said, pulling Melanie’s attention to her as she continued to write, then lost a grip on the pencil, after writing ‘Utopia Falls, Wyoming’. “Go there, now!”

Quickly! Get my book, and write yours,” she said before closing her eyes and slipping off into a deep slumber.

The patient sheriff did reach the alarm bell, which brought in orderlies armed with muscle rather than kindness, accompanied by a small framed man in a clean, non-blood tinged suit. “I’m afraid Maria has to get some sleep now, Doctor Hamilton,” the chief administrator of the hospital said to Melanie through a mask that protected him from both the Spanish Flu as well having anyone he spoke to be able to see what he was really saying, and meaning. “We’ll notify you if there are any changes in her condition,” he continued as the restrains were put back on Maria’s wrists and ankles. “Her condition is very contagious. And unless we’re sure you are vaccinated...”

“...I know,” Melanie conceded, fully aware that enlightened madness and insight was a ‘condition’ far more contagious, and dangerous to the status quo, than the Spanish Flu..

Melanie was escorted in a professional manner out of the ward by the hospital administrator, then into a car waiting for her, the driver asking what hotel she wanted to be driven to. Playing along with the game, she requested a drop off at the Drover Inn. She entered, smiled goodbye to the driver, then looked at the scribbling on the back of ‘Maria’s’ photo, looking up the location on a map in the lobby. She couldn’t find Utopia Falls, Wyoming on the map in the lobby. Nor in the library, until she went to the historical section, and found it prominently displayed. In writing that both clear and which appeared ominous.

When Melanie inquired about the fastest way to get to Utopia Falls, the logical answer was of course the railroad. The iron horse that blasted its way through endless stretches of wild grasslands, mountains that defied any engineer to plow a road through, and bridges over rapidly flowing rivers that could swallow up even the best manned ferryboat across that were as high as any skyscraper in Manhattan. Indeed, such means of transportation allowed any mortal to go anywhere, especially those who were far more endowed with muscles between the ears than below the neck. The 1870s maps proudly portraying the Union Pacific Railroad name and its routes clearly indicated Utopia Falls in writing as bold and large as Laramie, and even Cheyenne. But as for the maps printed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Utopia Falls was not mentioned anywhere.

Armed with the assumption that money could buy anything or anyone, Melanie started out asking the clerk at the Railroad Station in Denver if the train going through Southern Wyoming could make a special stop at the location she had extrapolated as being Utopia Falls for a special fee of course. The senior clerk a middle-aged gentlemen with a clean shaven face and a Chicago accent containing no trace of Western twang, and not an ounce of charm or spice in his demeanor, had never heard of Utopia Falls. He informed her that if it existed at all, the wind had taken it away in many directions. Still, Melanie insisted that the railroad line DID go there and that there was a special off line that went directly there. “Maybe the train did go through there,, Ma’am, in the 1870s” the senior clerk at the Denver trains station finally conceded. “But the lines now, the ones that

haven't been torn apart or repossessed by mother nature say different." Begrudgingly, he produced a large map of the railroad lines in Northern Colorado and Wyoming. "But maybe one of these routes may get you closer to where you think, or want to believe 'Utopia' is."

Melanie's jaw dropped when she looked at the large network of rails, and drivable roads, that now traversed what was the Old West. Indeed, it was a complex network in which one could not go twenty miles without hitting some kind of path carved into the earth, except for 'holes' marked Indian Reservation or nothing at all. The largest 'nothing at all' holes in that network corresponded to where Utopia Falls was, theoretically anyway.

"So, it's a ghost town then," Melanie surmised.

"If it was a town at all, but if you're looking for ghosts, I suppose you can find them there, so I heard anyway," the clerk said with an indifferent tone with a face that revealed absolutely no trace of emotion. "Besides, Utopia is the name of an ideal place and as for 'Falls', as there's no big rivers or waterfalls there, suppose that town means a place where dreams fall apart. Maybe put on those old maps as a warning for those who think there's gold, glory or something else worth building or getting there."

Though Melanie outgrew the fear of ghosts at the age of 8, and the fascination with angels when she hit 12, she did sense something ominous about this quest, as well as practical. As for the latter, there were lots of reasons to go to this town with a defeatist name. 'Mother dearest's money. The chance to get a story about the Old West that no westerner could come up with, so she could make a name for herself in the East. And, most importantly, the chance to fulfill a promise to Maria, or whatever her real name was, and maybe still is.

As for the train ride to Laramie, it allowed Melanie to fully appreciate just how big the Wild West was. And how different every sparsely populated valley, snow sprinkled meadow giving way to spring, and mountain still holding onto its blanket of snow really was. Each seemed to speak with its own voice, allowing her imagination to put cowboys, Indians, Mountain men AND mountain women into them in the movie writing itself behind her wide open eyes. She envisioned wagon trains traversing the wide expanses being watched by curious buffalo conversing in their own bovine tongues what these ill prepared yet adventurous palefaces were doing here. She imagined herself on a horse interviewing the wagon masters, cooks and pilgrims from every country in the world, along with the bison and on-looking Indians. She couldn't wait to rent a horse and, by necessity, a guide, to take her to Utopia the way the original settlers, perhaps Maria, arrived there over half or more of a century ago. But after arriving at Laramie, the only option was a car, which she had to buy, which eventually became lame on its two hind quarters with an engine that decided to smoke itself into an early grave once it reached the location which her map, and no road sign, said had to be Utopia. Or maybe it wasn't.

Utopia was now a scattering of rotten smelling lumber on its way to being petrified wood, broken steel rods that penetrated up through the snow threatening to cut open the feet of anyone not wearing thick heels and fecal-smelling sagebrush inhabited by mice or some other creatures hearty enough to make something of the place. Everything that seemed burnable looked charred, and seemed to smell of such, no matter how much spring snow or winter moss had covered. Indeed, some destructive force of man or vengeful act of nature had vented its full wrath on this place. All but for one building whose sloping roof still kept the snow from falling through, with four walls that seemed to have been repaired by mismatched lumber and metal siding. It was connected by wires to the sole surviving windmill, whose wheels creaked loudly with a ghostlike shrill as its moved in time and tempo with the gusts of wind that kept changing direction. Through windows covered with spider-webs on the inside, Melanie could discern stacks of books and tables which seemed to be covered with medical equipment and scientific instruments from both the last century, and some from centuries still to come.

A thought came to Melanie as to who the sole inhabitant of this seemingly functional one man laboratory in the middle of nowhere as an old man with a thick white beard in an Eastern European waistcoat and 19<sup>th</sup> century wide brimmed stetson hobbled out of the front door, with a welcoming smile on his face. “Mister Tesla?” Melanie inquired, thinking that perhaps the elusive genius who was kicked out of Colorado Springs for tapping the electrical power of the sun and the depths of the earth. And evacuated by Federal order from his Long Island Laboratory for building towers that could transmit electrical current throughout NY City without wires, cables or pollution, which Melanie had seen only after they had been destroyed. “Is this Utopia?”

“To some, yes, and to some no.” the old man said with the diction and mannerism of a hard grading Yale University Professor, as his smile turned into a distrusting frown. He pulled a very low tech, authentic vintage sawed off shotgun from under his coat, pointing it at Melanie’s head. “Whether this is Utopia or not depends on who you are. And what your business is, aside from driving that piece of gasoline powered, air toxifying junk into my facility, expecting me to fix it.”

Melanie raised her right hand into the air and carefully pulled out the photo of Maria with her left. “My business for being here,” she said handing the photo of the young, beautiful, optimistic Hispanic woman to the old, now ugly and bitter beyond cynical man.

After an intense moment he shared only with himself, the old man looked into an through Melanie, still holding the gun on her. “Where did you get this?” he inquired, demanding nothing less than the truth.

“My mother, as part of what she willed to me,” Melanie answered, lowering her hands slowly. As she did, the mad scientist lowered the business end of his shotgun accordingly.

“And the other part of what your mother willed to you?” the old man asked the young woman, in Spanish. This time requesting the truth from a deep and vulnerable place.



“That’s my own business, Sir,” Melanie asserted, in Spanish. “Along with seeing if any of the books in your ‘dwelling’ there were written by her.”

The grimace on the old man’s face eased into a wide smile, which was made even bigger by a loud laughter emerging from his gut. As to what the old man was feeling as he put down his shotgun, looked to the ground, then the sky, then into somewhere behind his eyes with a blank stare, Melanie had no clue. A constellation of emotions seemed to be competing for his consciousness, with no doubt, even more memories behind them. She had never experienced such a lunatic, madman, psychopath, or saint.

Finally, the old man came back to the here and now of 1920’s Wyoming, planet earth. “Come, inside,” he said to Melanie. “I think I’ve been waiting for you for a long time,” he related and confessed as he led her to the ‘house’.

“And if you were waiting for someone else?” Melanie inquired as she walked slowly behind him.

The old man stopped dead in his tracks, then turned around and intensely stared at Melanie for what felt like hours. In those few seconds, she felt as if he had dissected every part of her soul, done exploratory surgery, then reconstructed the mess into a concoction that suited his own purposes. “I know who you are now,” he said, kindly and affectionately. “And you’ll soon find out who you are too. If you listen to what I have to say now, what this woman in the photograph you just met had to say then, and, well...hmmm.” The old man looked Melanie up and down, three times, the stared into her ocular portholes again, unlocking the protective blinds she tried so desperately to keep shut.

“Well what?” Melanie asked, then demanded, doing her hide the stench of fear in her sweating brow. “Are you sizing me up for intellectual amusement, carnal pleasure or cannibal stew? Make up your mind!”

Finally the old man smiled, in the manner of Old Saint Nick and Sir Walter Raleigh. “What do you want me to do for you, who fate has delivered to the doorstep of my humble abode where I negotiate with God on behalf of a hurting, yet undeserving, humanity?”

“The truth about this place, and her,” Melanie answered. “For my own reasons.”

“Which just may be ours,” he speculated with an aura of hope giving new life to his tired eyes. “And if not, I am assuming that you won’t take it personally if I do what Universal Justice demands,” the old man replied, after which he retrieved a rod from the ground. He aimed it at a snake about to help itself to Melanie meat. With the kind of strength that only primal rage could unleash the old man reached down to the still moving snake, breaking off its head with his bare hands. “So, the story of this garden of Eden,” he said with both the optimism of a naïve child who believe in the eternal power of goodness,

and the cynicism of an adult whose punishment for living a non-virtuous life was to know too much.

## CHAPTER 2

Utopia Falls was a unique experiment in how you could come from somewhere else and create what you had where you came from, but with you on top of the totem pole of course. But such did create some complications when someone wanted to be on top as well. Yet, somehow there were enough different totem poles Utopia Falls for it to be a place of ‘golden opportunity’ for those who sought to create a new life and, to be fair, and honest, two qualities which sometimes are not in conflict with each other. Most of the early inhabitants of Utopia Falls came there with misinformed brains and bold hearts, those two qualities more often than not co-existing together. But before describing the ‘before’ events in this Sagebrush Laboratory where cultures and perspectives jockeyed for survival, and dominance, it behooves one to consider where the name came from.

Though the river running through that town could hardly be considered a location for waterfalls, or during dry seasons, even a river, it was a Utopia, an ideal place for living, working and when the time came, came, even dying. At least according to Jean ‘Beaver whisperer’ LeFevre, a French-Cree mountain man, who could be considered the founder of Utopia in 1860, the year the States to the East decided to make War against each other. When previously working for the English owned Hudson Bay Company in Canada, LeFevre was said to be able to talk beavers and any other animal into humanely designed traps. Some of the beavers LeFevre turned into pets, and some he employed building dams in the river when the snow melt was excessive in the spring, so that it wouldn’t overflow and bring his Trading Post, which he ran without the knowledge or permission of his Limey employers to the North.

A Mormon Geologist from Ohio, who got lost on his way to the promised land in Utah intersecting with a wagon train of greenhorns and tenderfoots, as the locals who ridiculed and pitied them called them, heading back East to collect what was left of their lives after failing to make a fortune for themselves in California, admired the way nature had carved out such a natural series of dams. Some of the prospectors when they were washing out their pans, pots and life-weary bodies discovered gold in the river. Most didn’t.

Whether LaFevre planted that gold (some of it real, some of it fools’ gold) so that he could build a town around his trading post, no one knew. But the General Store and ten bed boarding house the eccentric hermit Frenchman rented to both real guests, and imaginary friends became a hamlet, then a village. And as such had to have a name. Utopia Falls was a natural choice, the name providing a picture in words. One which was a White Name and not one adopted from the Brown Skinned original inhabitants of the region like Laramie and Cheyenne. Unfortunately, the overly literate French-Indian half-breed who was highly prolific in writing books in languages few could read, and some of which he invented himself, didn’t survive long enough to serve a second term as ‘Philosopher King’ of this potentially idyllic community which could spawn a second Atlantis.

He predicted his own death, by spontaneous combustion, in at least three of the many books which I, as the anonymous narrator, had the good fortune and curse to stumble

across when going through the trunks of useless items the ‘citizenry’ didn’t bother with after his demise. As for whether Beaver Whisperer’s mass became Energy and sent him to the beyond realm because he was ‘philosophizing’ too intensely, or it was just an accidental fire that happened in his cabin when he dozed off and knocked down the lamp that was never known for sure. But stories told between gossipers and potential dime novel writers all indicated that there was some other kind of oil in the lantern that LeFevre used to keep himself able to be productive when the sun went down and everyone else had to sensibly go to sleep.

After the War, people from both sides of the Mason Dixon line headed West to build a new life. Unlike most of the settlements in the recently ‘Indian-vacated’ southern region, there was an equal number of Northerners who came here relative to displaced Confederates, and Confederate sympathizers. Smart people said little about their War experiences and affiliations, as such would revive the conflict yet again. Passionate, dedicated and dumb ones did, absorbing, for good or bad, the consequences of such.

But though Utopia Falls evolved into a rather unique experiment, in its beginning, when the narrator arrived in 1867, ahead of the railroad this time, there were some constants that defined it as uniquely and typically Wyoming. By the Spring of 1869 there were still no more than one woman to eight men in Utopia Falls. For every person there were no more than 50 saloons. Said refuges where men could dream about women, or recreate with those women who had given up their dreams of going to the altar a virgin, were serviced by no less than ten distilleries that were established ‘legally’ and of course two times that number which operated on their own, until the competition, the elements or ingesting too much of its own brew put the independent owners out of business, and body. Money could be had by being lucky or hard working. As for the former, those who discovered gold or silver on their land got rich quick, and soon learned how to underpay then enslave the latter category of hard working souls, even, and especially, if they came West as ‘fellow pilgrims’.

The Union Pacific Railroad was making inroads into Wyoming, but had not yet committed to anything. Still, the Eastern based owners of the Iron Horse wound up establishing a monopoly on the coal rich deposits around Utopia early, and, as some speculate, deposits of other natural resources which were soon to become more valuable than gold, coal or silver. Some say those resources only obtainable by making the ground bleed with the plow, shovel, drill or dynamite were the ghosts of dead Indians who fought to the death rather than deciding to join their fellow Caretakers of what was left of the Earth to the North.

Most of the 1,000 Utopians came without families. Some did. Each had their own challenges and opportunities given where they came from, who they came with, and what they came to do. Very much including me, who will be referred to as ‘Doc’ from this point onward. But enough about me, for the moment. Now... about ‘them’, in whom perhaps you will see yourself as you are, as you want to be, or as you don’t want to be.

There were many traditions that Beaver Whisperer LeFevre set in motion. Most of them were discredited as ritual which was more in service of the dead or missing than the live and present. But there was one event that survived the crazy, feared yet very much needed French-Canadian Mountain Mensch, a man whose orientation was always to the seasons rather than the calendar but who never lost track of what day, date, and year it was.

It happened every April twenty first, whether the snow was still on the ground or whether it had faded into the sky after being dried up from the mud. The banquet was free to anyone who brought anything to the table, even if it was an empty stomach. The first 'Surrender to Spring' was equally attended by Indians as well as Whites, the former bringing most of the food, the latter providing the firewater that, by intent and accident, soon diminished the amounts of the former who were in attendance.

By the time 1869 came to pass the pot luck supper had turned into a first class banquet in an open aired dinner where all the tables were equally adorned with the same cutlery and dishes, coordinated by the best cook in town. My skills as a biochemist at Harvard Medical School had been easily translatable into keeping my fellow students fed, and later, my fellow faculty members and their dates sufficiently impressed with my ability to turn grub into food, to be invited to host every party for those of power and influence. It therefore fell upon me to be the key chef and distributor of the food, and grub, at the Surrender to Spring Banquet in Utopia Falls.

It was an elected position of course, and I obtained most every vote in town, except of course for five citizens who were, to be fair and honest, better cooks than I was and who, to be accurate, had more skills at turning grub into food than anyone I knew. I paid them well enough with dollars to be my subordinates in preparing the feast so that I was not required to compensate them with compliments for the quality of their food, nor for the effort they put into making their particular specialty. As the town doctor, who knew not only how to dissect a pig, but the name of every structure extracted from it for culinary pleasure, it was my honor, and burden, to be the first to receive the diners as they approached the table to get the first helpings of food, after their souls were fed, or burdened, with Pastor Horatio Johnson's Thanksgiving prayer praising the law as the Lord's extension of Moral Justice and every lawman who administered it as 'God' elected them to be in such position. The freckle-face, frail twenty five year old with thinning hair due to worrying about other people's souls, was originally from a Christian denomination honestly I never heard of, and didn't bother reading about, was barely old enough to grow a mustache. But his naïve beliefs in the importance of law, no matter how oppressive to the undeserving it was, were contagious. His fire and brimstone five minute sermons before every public function, which lasted at least twenty minutes, about sinners going to hell for the slightest of misdemeanors, did indeed diminish the occupancy rate in the town jail by three fold and the number of deaths due to unnatural causes by two fold. But until a law was put on the books that a Preacher was supposed to not go over his allotted time for pontificating to sinners Pastor Johnson, continued his preaching, as usual. Until finally enough members of the congregation, most of them

being atheists, yelled out glory halliluyahs' louder than the young, most likely not ever surviving to be old, preacher did.

As a physician assigned to look after the bodies of my fellow Utopians two years earlier, it fell upon me to do more 'soul ministering' than that ever did, or attempted to do anyway. But before treating the pathology of the individual or collective human soul, one has to observe it in its natural state to assess its true nature.

A person gets to know who they really are when in jail, a war, or at the time of dying. A person can determine what someone else is about when observing them alone, in the company of other diners, or how they did said dining. From how that 'subject' eats a piece of pie, to how he or she fills their plate, to what she or he says to others around them when the contents of that place go into their mouths.

One thing can be said about my fellow Utopians. They were all different in some way that mattered to this social experiment that sort of evolved, and needed tending to so it would continue to its natural, or desired, end. But some were more different and critical to the ultimate outcome than others.

Joseph Adams came to Utopia Falls in 1866 from the once great, and now destroyed by Sherman's 'liberators', Union Army. By political affiliations, he was of course a Democrat. By cultural passion he was still as a die-hard Confederate who had reached by aristocratic birthright as well as merit, the rank of Colonel Jeb Stuart's cavalry, one of the last portions of the Southern Army to surrender. Colonel Adams lost his parents to cholera in Vicksburg, his older brothers to bullets at Shiloh, his younger brother to starvation in Elmira Prison in the rich, futile farmlands of Upstate New York and his fiancée Joleen to suicide, after she had been raped by renegade Union soldiers, according to what he told me confidentially when he came to me to remove a bullet in his back that was edging its way to the spine. He had also lost the lucrative family farm, which had been maintained for generations by Negroes who were never whipped, always respected, in some way or another always paid, and, 'selectively' of course, taught to read. Having discovered that what and who he had fought for was gone in '65, he retrieved a stash of buried jewelry and gold that the Union Army, vengeful ex-slaves or Yankee carpetbaggers had not discovered on what was left of his family's Georgia plantation. He headed West towards Texas to join a Ezekial Youngblood's band of fellow Confederates, who were determined to set up a New Confederacy in South America. En route in Mississippi, he encountered Sally Ann Jackson, a voluptuous, soft spoken, cultured widow with long brown hair and who at the age of 33 still maintained a body that was the envy of most 19 year olds. Sally Anne was now charged with keeping her two nearly teen aged daughters and as many younger son alive, and on the path to something right, and sustainable amidst 'legal' issues that said that since she was a woman, and a former Confederate, the Plantation she grew up on was to be taken over by 'gentleMEN' who would take possession of the land, and, if she was compliant with their whims and wishes, her.

Perhaps due to seeing his dead fiancée Joleen in the sparkling, deep brown eyes of very much alive Sally Ann, finding out that oppression rather than regulation of the inferior races was the mandate of Youngblood's New Confederacy in Brazil, or stories about grass that could feed as many cattle as you could raise in Wyoming, without the frigid winters encountered in Montana, discharged-but-still-Colonel Joseph Adams decided to make his new fortune, and life, in Utopia Falls with Sally Ann and her children. Upon arrival, he found that the Paradise of warm grasslands with gentle, kind, cultured people was as much hogwash as the promise of 'malice towards none and charity for all' pledged by Republican President Lincoln. Still, he smelled the opportunity to make something of himself, in the frigid-in-winter and boiling-in-summer collection of shacks, cabins and lean-tos, having obtained a plot of land with the Homestead Act. And, most importantly, Sally Ann suggesting to him that it his 'destiny' to build a Paradise out of a wilderness, as his great grand-father did in Georgia, and as her ancestors did in Mississippi. His first step towards doing so was to become Mayor of the town in its first election, a democratic process at which he was enormously successful relative to the locals. Whether it was his gift of gab, his charisma, his Vision of bringing an orderly Eastern-based civilization to the wild and potentially deadly West, or simply his ability to buy votes, no one knows. And never will.

As for the present Mayor Adams, after receiving the food allotted to him and his family at the serving table as first helpings, under my supervision, lost no time in taking a chair at one of the circularly placed tables, moved it outward by 3 feet, so as to make it look like the head of the circle. "My, an interesting fare of food we have here," he commented with a big, bold and colorful Georgia drawl which could not be ignored or, until he continued what he was talking about, un-liked. "Potato pancakes, beef rouland, red cabbage and for dessert, Konig cake, and sour kraut," he proclaimed, after which he took a generous bite out of all three. "Pancakes that are as flat tasting as they are flat on the plate, bacon sprinkled beef spices that have as much kick to them as straw, 'king's cake' that somehow makes whatever sugar in it taste like dried out Injun bannock, and sour kraut that only taste sour if your nose and tongue are better at imagining than smelling and tasting," he noted. "But then again, German cooking is all about giving the taste buds nothing to negotiate with, and ordering the tongue to tell the mind there's actual flavor in it."

Laughter arose from the penis-bearing prospectors, coal miners, railroad workers and prospectors, then, afterwards, whatever women were accompanying them.

"And as for this collection of beans and I hope non human meat you call 'Tex-Mex chili'," Mayor Adams continued, moving his attention to other portion of the entrée delivered to his plate. "Sure, its got a kick to it, it's been doused out with potatoes. But the only danger it carries is that it will kill you with boredom, like the culinary mistress who prepared it if you listen to her discourse too long."

More laughter emerged, this time from some of the younger Utopians as well as book-hating older ones, as all eyes went to Hanna Steiner. The blonde, blue eyed hard working, underpaid and still very attractive 30 year old schoolteacher instantly rose up.

“And you can make food that sustains and delights with your down home Dixie cooking, Colonel Mayor?” she blasted out at him in a heavy Bavarian accent. Thankfully with her mouth and not the hand pistol she kept under her long sleeved dress, which she had drawn on several occasions, but never fired, when dealing with a difficult students twice her size or drunk, abusive parents who wanted to take their children out of school so they could get proper education at home. At least to my knowledge, as no one came in to see me to have any of her bullets removed from their ass. “And as for cooking, what do YOU know about the culinary arts other than how to excrement that comes out your rectum, and detritus flavored comments about other people’s cooking that spew out of your mouth,” Hanna continued.

Those smart enough to know the meaning of excrement and detritous chuckled. Most bore vaginal organs inside of them. Their number included Mayor Joseph Adams’ 11 and 13 year old daughters. Their mother, Sally Ann, hushed the girls into holding the laugh behind tightly closed lips, just before their father could turn around and see it.

“Miss Steiner,” Adams continued, sticking out his chest, drawing attention to it with his thumbs like a rooster whose natural place was to be the boss of every chicken coup he created or stumbled into. “Perhaps if you learn the art of interesting cooking from a cultured Southern woman,” he continued, smothering his small framed wife with a ‘protective’ large bear-like one armed ‘hug’. “And learned that the way to a man’ heart is through his stomach, and other bodily pleasures, you’d actually be able to find a suitor who would marry you.”

The male portion of the congregation ‘oohed’, the women having mixed opinions.

“I’ve had plenty of offers,” Hanna replied. “And plenty of suitors who were paid, perhaps by some of you ‘gentlemen’ here, to sweep me off my feet and take me away to somewhere I wouldn’t be a challenge, nuisance or disruption to you here. But I’m very particular about who I like, love and respect,” she continued with an eye-line that only I could see, I hoped anyway. A brief look at, toward and into a not unattractive Lydia Thundercloud, a Cheyenne hybrid, otherwise known in ‘these here parts’ as a halfbreed, who decided to not join her First Nations mother on the Reservation in the Northern portion of Wyoming Territory, and who was disowned by her White father in Colorado to the South. “Besides,” she continued, after which she looked, and into, all of the men, including Noah Winter, a Negro cowboy with a laugh-inducing smile who knew horses and cattle better than they knew themselves, and then me, somehow all at once. “If women were allowed to vote, I’m sure you would have been elected dog catcher or shit shoveller instead of Mayor three years ago.”

Half of the women nodded yes, or said so with their eyes as their husbands rolled their eyebrows. The other half offered no opinion. The demographic of this split went across employment lines equally, the dance hall girls equally split as to whether they wanted to be liberated relative to the women whose occupations and social status were legal.



Of particular note, to me anyway, was Kitty, whose changed last names according to legal needs and client wants, who smiled in delight when envisioning the shithead top dog mayor cleaning up other people's shit, most particularly 'Sir' (as the illiterate limey bastard called himself alternatively with Lord) William Samuel Gunderson, her current boss at the Wildcat Saloon who struck it rich by legally stealing his partner's gold claim and who provided top flight entertainment and contacts to the Union Pacific Railroad bosses. I observed Lilly spend more than a passing moment running her fingers through her chin-length straggly red hair, having chopped off three feet of such a year ago when a dis-satisfied customer grabbed her by that most luxurious expression of her beauty and threw her down the stairs. Still, Lilly was skilled enough in the carnal arts to be of service to the Wildcat no matter how matronly she appeared to be. And at the end of each month still owed the owner of that establishment, and others she never told me about even when inebriated with badly needed laudanum, ten dollars more than she earned, due to many addictive and self-destructive habits encountered in a gambling, drinking and doping town. Lilly would give anything to get out of the business she was so good at, but still lacked the courage or desperation to leave it in a pine box.

Lilly, Kitty's 18 year old apprentice who retained her hour glass figure, long mane, and alluring eyes, she rolled her eyes at Hanna's man bashing remark, ridiculing it along with two well dressed gentlemen from the Union Pacific Railroad en route to Cheyenne. Lilly's real parents in Missouri, who somehow were able to locate her here, repeatedly begged me to use whatever medical means or trickery possible to make her think she was pregnant, or sick, so she would go back to a stable, normal, secure life in Saint Louis. But Lilly loved her job, and had a gift of making a man feel special, and even loved, which I can, confidentially to you of course, attest to personally. The only thing she feared was dying of boredom and, for reasons she never revealed to me, the prospect of going back home to a coffin of comfort.

As for Alicia, a hybrid who was a chimera of White and Black blood, not unlike so many 'Coloreds' I encountered after leaving Boston, she was a loner, displaying a poker face with regard to Hanna's attack on the Southern born and still Confederate Mayor's station and manhood. As for next of kin who lamented Alicia's choice of occupation, or who volunteered to change it, she had no one, a fact I found out when I had to treat the 20 going on 200 year old loner for an infection she encountered during a week when she was with, so she thought, the most hygienic clients who frequented the WildCat Saloon.

Meanwhile, Hanna continued her sermon with a loud and proud voice from the apple box higher than the pulpit that Pastor Johnson had used for the benediction.

"And as for Revolution, equality and freedom, which we all came out her to have, one way or another," Hanna said, addressing the entire congregation, seemingly not giving any special distinction to gender, race, income level or perceived social station. "You, who were born in this country, and those of you who came here, should all derive inspiration from 1848. The year when all over Europe, the common people and the thinking people rebelled against the kings and the capitalists."

“In a revolution that produced more chaos and bloodshed than results,” Mayor Adams countered. “Because before you give people freedom, they have to be educated enough to use wisely.”

“While those of the superior gender and superior races keep everyone else from being educated,” Hanna blasted out, looking selectively at those who didn’t possess white skin or male genitalia. “Which is why I came out here.”

“In the footsteps of your ‘Freethinker’ father,’ right,” Adams replied. “Whose 1848 revolutions said nothing about liberating women,” he added. “Who when he lived in Texas, as a Texan, refused to answer the call of duty to defend his fellow Texans against tyranny.”

“Who refused to join the Confederate Army because he didn’t believe in Slavery, and never owned anyone in name or act. Who was slaughtered at Nueces River by the Confederate home guard when trying to leave the state.”

“Because he was going to join the Union Army in New Orleans like the other Dutchie traitors with him, Miss Hanna!”

“You don’t know that, ‘Colonel’”

“And the other time he refused to defend his White Christian brethren?”

Hanna took in a deep breath, then blasted out with bridled fire. “He refused to massacre Comanche women and children because we German made peace treaties with the Indian that we kept, and that they kept.”

“And if left to his devices, and the other Communist, Anarchist 48ers’, he was advocating complete disruption of the democratically elected, social structure that keeps this country going.”

“It’ called freedom for everyone,” Hanna asserted.

“Which is mob rule, when given away too quickly, before it’s time, Miss Anarchist. Like the French Revolution that made everyone equal all at once. Where the poor got to take what the rich got due to hard work, and sometimes good fortune that the Lord bestowed on them. Where not only Marie Antoinette lost her head but a whole shitload of naïve, idealistic liberty spouting intellectuals like yourself, and your father. First comes law, then comes order, then comes this garden of Eden you keep dreaming about Miss Hanna, by God’s design, not mine.”

“Amen to that,” Preacher Johnson said, after which all of the Utopians on top of the various totem poles said their version of glory halleluiahs, along with half of those on the bottom of the socioeconomic scale. As to the other half of the have-nots or the have-littles, their firey eyes and clenched fists told me that the cutlery was about to merge into

everyone carving open each other rather than the food I and my staff had so diligently repaired. “Amen to morality and order before freedom.” Preacher Johnson asserted, to everyone.

“And amen to...everyone listening to each other in the meantime?” Sally Ann offered in a meek voice that somehow found its way to being listened to as gingerly worked her way between her fire breathing husband and the ‘reason before yelling’ preaching schoolmarm who was well on her way to losing her composure entirely. “We’re all here to work together, and if we fight against each other, well, quicker than you can whistle Dixie, battle hymn of the Republic or any other song that makes people scream out political ideologies instead of cooperative, respectful social suggestions,” she continued, with a modest bow. “Song like...”

With that, Sally Ann pushed out of her small, parched throat a beautiful rendition of Lorena. The song about yearning to live peacefully with your beloved sung by Union and Confederate soldiers alike. A song that the Officers had forbid fighting men to sing because they would have the heart and courage to stop fighting. A song that reminded the men of how loving a woman can be, and women of how natural it is to use love to get the freedom you need rather than hate. Giving texture to the tune, and meaning to the lyrics of longing for peace and final fulfillment of the heart in that wondrous state that occasional befalls a self-destructive humanity, gruff, dirty and liquor addicted Liam Casey, unofficial head of the emerging Union of Irish mine and railroad workers, played Lorena on his fiddle, converting it to a violin that sounded as masterful and expressive as any concert I experienced in the fine concert halls of Boston, New York or even Philadelphia. Next to join in on the accordion, providing unsurpassed harmony that even Bach would have been proud to have scored, on a harmonica, a nearly elderly Chinese laborer who had walked away from a ‘lucrative’ two dollars a week job working for the Railroad in Colorado to open a small cookery with an adjoining herb dispensing shop, which I availed myself of on many occasions, paying double the asking price, then secretly administering those ‘Yellow horde potions’ to unsuspecting patients who paid me generously for my ‘made in Boston’ treatments.

The dance hall girls, dressed in alluring and expensive multicolored cotton and silks garb that were the envy of most of the ‘respectable’ women whose drab brown and black dresses were made of uni-colored wool and flax, joined in of course, swayed their bodies to the music with grace and style. These money hoarding and often clandestinely wealthy ladies with many hidden expenses partnered with each other in an erotic uni-gender dance. A few jaw dropping measures later, they invited whatever ‘strong and independent thinking’ gentlemen had been drawn to them with dropped jaws and pliable wills to join them. As I saw it, those gentlemen, were in need of a fantasy more than the ladies needed their money. The left over bucks who needed to lose themselves in the arms of a REAL Lorena rather than the memory of one who was still waiting for them, or who had passed on to the other side of the veil, invited the ‘respectable’ women to dance with them. It is worth noting the most interesting of them, as they became very instrumental in the various social experiments and benign interventions I tried to initiate through my role as a respected doctor whose real motives were always thought of as

being benevolent and whose conversations with patients were, theoretically anyway, supposed to be confidential. And which I was intimidated into being true to, most of the time anyway, while trying to integrate the ‘make a big impact on the world’ that I was born with, and the ‘above all do no harm’ mandate that was impregnated into me in medical school and subsequently in a variety of peacetime and wartime practices. But, there I go losing myself in myself and my ongoing search for a unifying theory that would both explain human pathology and transform humanity into something far more enlightened than it is, rather than absorbing myself, and you, in others.

My scanning glance that day stopped unexpectedly longer than planned when it reached Catherine Mary Brady Irish laundress, cook and cleaner with her long, flowing black hair and eyes a green as the Emerald Isle. On this occasion her appreciably under-nourished body was clad in her every day skirt of black wool with a brown flax-linen blouse she had made herself, covering her from head to toe, which was not all that different than the dark, somber ensemble she wore to church on Sunday. Standing next to her, somehow well, fed 8 year old daughter and twin boys, each having somehow made it through a difficult childbirth 4 years previously. The not yet thirty year old woman who appeared to be at least four decades old politely refused the offer to dance a drunken cowboy who wanted to drag her away from her children. Next to make an offer the widow who had lost her husband to a still not found bandit’s bullet and the right to own the property he had paid for was well dressed Union Pacific boss Jack Williams who offered candy to the little ones while he entertained their mother with sleazy oculars, all the while gazed into Mary’s bosom more than her eyes. Sheriff Sean McDonald approached and reminded Williams that though the coal pits around Utopia were owned by the Union Pacific, the women in town still weren’t.

When Sean opened his arms inviting her to dance, Catherine accepted. True, McDonald was the kind of sheriff who could bend the law in your favor if he liked you, or if you paid him enough. But with three hungry mouths to feed, and if she had the audacity to think about herself, four dependent on food bellies, she had no choice but to pleasure McDonald to the extent that her moral principles allowed. Catherine’s left leg dragged behind her right, as the injuries inflicted on it by her ex-husband had not healed, and would probably make her a ‘gimp’ for life. But despite the scar on her left cheek after left by her husband after a night of ‘passionate love making’, and no doubt numerous other injuries to her self-deprecating soul and self-inflicted cuts on her arms as a result of such, Catherine was still a good catch for any good man. Perhaps the Irish born and Scottish raised law enforcement officer who had earned his stripes fighting Confederates, Indians, Mexicans and any other people his adopted country deemed by his bosses to be dangerous to the Pax Americana.

Tasha Lazinski actively showed no expression at all regarding Hanna’s attack on everyman’s man, Mayor Colonel Adams. With the not yet thirty year old, as best as I could tell anyway, dark haired woman who always kept her mane covered was her always expressively optimistic genius inventor (yet still only part time handyman and full time farmer) husband, Jakov, and the three children whose biological and psychological traits oscillated between the extremes of their parents. Tasha was considered slow and

dumb, particularly when she tried to speak or read English, and her mispronunciation at the Feed Store was a source of ridicule for both men and women, but she was fluent in Russian, French and two other languages that even I couldn't recognize when she babbled off to her husband Igor about, most probably, why she should take herself, her three children, and if he could invent a machine to put brains into his own head, Igor, back to the Old Country, even if there were pogroms on those who believed more in the Ten Commandments from Yahweh than the Divinity of Jesus. Some speculated that the language Tasha argued in and Jakov tried to discourse back with was a tongue they invented themselves. In 'Christian company' most of the townsfolk looked down on the six foot three 'Judas killing' Jewish inventor (whose ignored devices in my hands did, indeed, save more than one life in my more often than not portable clinic) and his high-pitched voiced wife. But everyone, especially Mayor-Colonel (and aspiring Governor) Adams, knew the value of an inventor who could repair everything from the so essential for possible statehood telegraph machine to the broken parts of badly built distillery machines and a woman who let herself be the butt of jokes, be they made in her presence or not. Yes, an old trick that went back to the days of Ancient Greece known to Socrates and the lesser known genius inventor, Mechanos. Those whose brains are too developed for the (by intent or biologically born) ignorant masses must survive by providing those deplorable and pitiable souls with technology they need, and entertainment they want.

Then there was Delfina Valdez, a very single, childless Tejano who was barely as large and muscular as any of the 13 year old girls who had the good fortune or misfortune of representing the new population to grow into womanhood in a territory founded by men, and designed for boys who would soon become men. With long, black curly locks which in the right light seemed to be the most wondrous hue of blue, complimented by big brown Iberian eyes you could get lost in, she was a prime catch for any man. And one of the original inhabitants of Utopia, even before Beaver Whisperer LeFevre had stumbled upon the place. She was born in 1843, to a self-educated Mexican scholar and rancher whose routes in the Panhandle went back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Antonio Valdez fought with General Houston ten years earlier to make Texas a Republic free of the oppression from General Santa Anna, but he neglected to figure out that he would have to battle the oppression from White Texans, which resulted in his land being stolen by Alabama slave owners and Pennsylvania land speculators in an offer he couldn't refuse, if he wanted his family to still stay breathing. He moved to California, still part of Mexico, turning ten sections of scrub brush into a flourishing ranch that fed happily raised cattle, horses and family. When the Americans won the Mexican War in 1848, Antonio was evacuated again, when the most racist propositions ever imaginable, North or South of the Mason Dixon line, were made law in Sacramento. Antonio's last and final move was to the territory of Wyoming, where as a present to his oldest daughter Delfina's 16th birthday, he willed her a tombstone bearing his name and the opportunity to raise her 12 year old sister and two even younger brothers alone.

There was no shortage of gentlemen who asked Delfina to dance, but she refused them all. Perhaps because she had a good memory about who they were, and what they really

wanted. And that though these Anglos thought they loved this Mexican beauty, few really respected her. Both because of her Hispanic pedigree, and what was between her ears. It was a brain that remembered everything she saw, heard and experienced. She asked me to teach her medicine, so she could help me as a nurse and I knew that someday she would surpass me as a doctor. Indeed, had I or any of my male colleagues in New England had her ability to absorb information like a sponge, we all could have been deans of our own Universities. And as for Delfina's hands, once they connect to medical instruments or human flesh, they displayed the artistry Rembrandt had with a paintbrush, moving musically along so flowingly that you could hear the healing music of Beethoven entering the tissue, and the patient. But, as I came to know all too painfully, healers are allowed to negotiate with Mother Nature but not master her. Delfina took every patient she could not save as something that was her fault, no matter how much I explained why they were beyond saving according to the laws of biology. Still, she defied the immutable laws of biology. And distrusted the laws of men, having learned how easily they could be used to defend the guilty and punish the innocent, and crucify the righteous.

'Lorena' was played three times, followed by several other tunes given voice and instrumental expression by part time musicians who had I paid, in favors, cash or valuable information about their fellow Utopians, to play what was on MY list of requests. Yes, Mozart did calm people down when the dancing stopped and the feast continued. And Beethoven did instill somehow a sense of rugged individualistic brotherhood, and amongst the women, perhaps a privately shared sisterhood. And Bach made everyone's thinking somehow logical, and clear. But not clear enough, thus far anyway, for anyone to figure out the it was me who decided who got served what, so as to bring preparer of the food in contact with specific diners. Yet, Delfina seemed to know what was going on, by the way she looked at me every time my usually dour face broke into a smile after bringing ideological opponents together to air their differences, or to reassess the value of what 'good buds' thought was an established friendship or alliance.

But what as to Delfina was thinking, or feeling, I was never sure. She knew what to say and what not to say, knowing her place in the natural order of things. So far anyway.

In any case, as the eating ended, the cleaning started. The women, those who earned a living by being virtuous as well as those who survived by being flirtatious, did the cleaning, by habit or unspoken command mostly. The men smoked cigars. But not all women adjusted to this custom and convention. A rotund, multi-chinned old hag who introduced herself as Ester Morris emerged from the crowd. She grabbed hold of one of the cigars and sat next to 'Governor' as he was now addressed by his buds, Adams. "Anyone have a light?" she inquired of the gentlemen who had apparently not such a display of bravado, or rudeness. "No, I suppose you don't. All smoke and no fire. And, pitably, no warmth. Typical men."

With that, Ester retrieved a match from her own pocket, flicked it on the bottom of her shoe, and ignited it with the force of a man and the grace of a lady. After two well

satisfied puffs she reached in for another stogy from the box bearing Beaver Whisperer LeFevre's name and likeness. Sheriff McDonald's large hand prevented her from accessing it.

"They're for Utopians, not strangers," Adams explained. "Sorry, Ma'am. It's a tradition."

"To deny those who do most of the work the lesser portion of the reward, or acknowledgment?" Ester continued, diplomatically and logically, referring to the women who had stopped cleaning dishes, the ones who continued doing so.

Sensing another showdown, that I didn't anticipate, I put down my cigar and approached Ester. "You have interesting eyes," I said her, ignoring the other features about her which were anything but alluring, nurturing or maternal.

"These are interesting times, or will be anyway," she continued, taking another puff of the cigar, then blowing it into my face.

"It's not me who are oppressing your sisters!" I wanted to inform the over the hill, probably childless and husbandless Suffragette. "In the process of elevating women to equal status of men, placing them above men will be destructive to both genders," I felt an insatiable urge to blast at this woman who I wanted to punch the mouth but knew, for reasons practical and moral, I couldn't. "So, you're from out of town," I finally said, with a calm, inviting voice, an idea merging in my head that I had not envisioned before.

"Out of Territory as well," she replied, proudly.

"As am I," I replied with a courtly bow, but proud, defiant eyes. "And your purpose here is to participate in interesting times, and do your part to make them better times, like everyone else here in Utopia. Utopia, a word that means Paradise, in a different way for everyone of course, in a place where dreams and Visions could co-exist and perhaps one day even merge together."

I tried to make myself believe those words, as I spoke them. But the placebo worked. Somehow. Ester surrendered her cigar, but refused to put on the cleaning apron offered to her by Sheriff McDonald, at the request of all the members of the Town Council. All of those members being men, of course. With that, Molly announced that she had money to pay for the best hotel in town, flashing a fist full of greenbacks in the air as evidence of such, till 'the next coach came through.' After being pointed to a building with an attractive facade and the shabbiest of interiors, she gathered her belongings and headed over to 'Alpine Manor', followed Oliver Nordenstrom, who no doubt overcharged her in an attempt to keep from losing the hotel that was two more vacancies away from going bankrupt.

CHAPTER 3  
1921

“So, do you believe me so far?” the hermit doctor asked former socialite Melanie Hammond with a confident smile bordering on cocky as the wind blew through his unruly thin white hair and thick beard, while he adjusted his ass on the hard backless chair, otherwise known as petrified tree stump, so as to allow his less worse hip to bear the weight of his somehow still muscular body.

“I don’t know what I believe,” Doctor Mel, replied, feeling herself being absorbed by the Bigness of the horizon that seemed to close in on her from all directions. “Or who to believe perhaps?” she continued, looking straight at the story teller who seemed to want to tell her everything, except his name, or other truths she sensed were still being hidden from her. “What do YOU believe about, say, what you did as the organizer of the ‘Utopia’ experiment.”

“Before or after I became part of it?” the Old Man asked the young woman as he pushed his torso onto his legs and hobbled over to her viewing position of the Infinite. “But as for beliefs, no one really knows what they believe until their internal hypothesis about the particular matter is put to the test. Such as, say, the belief in a benevolent, forgiving God.”

“Yes, I know,” the young Doc said to the older one, recalling the devout religious patients who believed in a Heavenly father who would take them to Heaven who were afraid of dying, and when they did, retained terror and fear that remained on their face when their soul presumably left it. Or the atheists who offered their souls to the ‘non-existent’ Divinity above them, passing to such with contentment and fulfillment. “But as for all of those ideological beliefs the Utopians had when this place was occupied by two legged people instead of six legged parasites,” she continued, flicking off yet another insect who somehow found it possible to emerge from the snowy ground to suck out the blood of human invaders to their territory two months early. “Who really believed what they were championing?” she inquired, recalling how so many of her proudly proclaimed White Democratic Socialist Liberal friends in California lived in mansions built on the blood and sweat of underpaid and underappreciated Colored laborers. And how many of her Right Wing Capitalist ‘survival of the fittest’ opponents in New York kept so many ‘lazy, undeserving’ unfortunates fed, sheltered and educated through backdoor contributions, including herself after she had divorced herself from her blue blood family and its ill-gotten assets. “Tell me why I should believe your side of this story, or sagebrush fairy tale that seems too real to be believed.”

From the narrator who seemed so full and ashamed of himself came nothing. The wind filled in the quiet, then blew in ear-deafening silence. Finally, the ‘good’ or perhaps not so good former Doctor, and present madman, spoke.



## CHAPTER 4

Ester Morris didn't stay long at the Alpine, claiming that she was overdue to visit her two sons. But she did have a plethora of female company during her two day stay in Utopia, starting with Sally Ann, who came out of the meeting with her with eyes that seemed more alive. Yet their spirits that seemed a bit colder to the gentle pleasures of life and more resentful of any man who offered sincere compliments regarding any aspect of their outer beauty. As to what conversations took place behind closed doors at her overpriced and underserviced hotel room, or behind hearing distance when they dined at tables separated from the main body of Utopians at the Del Ray Steak House, or on long walks taking 'Mother Ester' and her newly adopted daughters to the outskirts of town, I cannot attest to the exact words.

When working with and on patients together, I repeatedly asked nurse (and soon to be doctor, if I had anything to say about it) Delfina, one of the few women who visited the self appointed Head Nun in this, to my disappointment, male excluding New Religion, to relate to me, in confidence, what was being said between 'the women' and what those female only discourses were about. Each time Delfina looked away from me, as if at a distance horizon that disallowed me entry to it, and said, 'The right to vote, the right to hold public office, the right to own property and the right to equal pay for equal work' then went back to the work saving and improving the quality of lives for which I was paying her what I could afford.

Finally, after two days of transforming women into something else, or scaring them back into what they had been before her 'accidental' visit to Utopia, Ester Morris' stagecoach came in, a day early. In actual fact, a collection was taken at the bars and barbershops so far only frequented by penis holding citizens, to provide Miss Morris with non-scheduled stagecoach out of Laramie so that she could find her way to be reunited with her sons in South Pass City.

While waiting for the stage to come down from the top of the Eastern overlook, Ester plopped her very large, and probably not very desired, ass on a bench in front of the General Store, requesting of any who wanted to see her that she wanted to be alone, to write entries into very private diary and to privately absorb the family news that had just arrived via the Telegraph, which was thankfully up again thanks to 'handyman' Jacob Lazinski's expertise in reconnecting wires that Mother Wind and Father Lightning had decided the night before should be useless debris. By the way Ester was writing, I saw from across the street that it was something intended to be read by more than her sons, and grandchildren someday. Picking up my leather medical bag engraved with Latin letters that read 'Above All Do No Harm' and 'Those Who are Not Initiators of the Solution are Part of the Problem', I sloshed across the mud and manure covered street and looked into her face, with concern that escalated somehow into understanding carrying with me a mixture of agendas.

"It's impolite to stare at a lady without her permission," Mother Ester said with even more of a learned properly but not pretentiously stated Eastern diction than she had used

at the Surrender to Spring Festival, without eye contact, closing putting another layer of scarf over her lower neck with her non-writing hand. “What do you want, besides showing off your impressively inscribed medical bag, Doctor,” she continued, with a still voice that seemed to actually understand what the writing said, and meant.

“To help you,” I said, suddenly smelling the aroma of another social experimenter, and a fellow human being assigned to do time on this planet with hint of acetone coming out of her mouth and the tinge of yellow in her temples, from a woman who was as adamant against drinking as most men were against putting on a corset. “You who, by your breath and complexion, may have a set of developing maladies which need, as the locals say here, ‘tendin to lickity split’.”

“You want me to come to your office, where you can give me medications to loosen my tongue and weaken my socio-moral commitment,” Morris shot back at me, reading my initial agenda for giving her a cordial Utopian farewell. She turned the page and began another entry into her novel, treatise, unifying theory of human personality and/or Manifesto, reminding me that I was remiss in continuing the daily quota in mine. “Well, as the locals say here, ‘I’m a headed ta greener pastures’. And to have those symptoms that you THINK you see taken care of by a female doctor when I get there.”

“I can have my nurse, I mean, doctor in training take a look at you,” I said.

“Delfina and me already talked, and she already gave me the medicine I need,” Ester replied as the stagecoach made the final turn down the last hill outside of town. Refusing to let me help her with her bags, the elderly woman with one of the strongest muscle between her ears lifted up her suitcases and commanded her shaking arthritic legs to push her way across the street. Those appendages gave way three steps before her destination.

Saving her torso, dress, and most importantly, her bag of books, from falling into the mud, she stood back up on her feet. “It’s a temporary condition,” she explained. “A pathology that comes and goes. Thank you.”

“You should consider resting, particularly at your age, no disrespect intended,” I said with a courtly bow and, as I self observed myself, a voice that sounded genuinely caring rather than professionally compassionate.

Esters thin, chapped, most probably over 60 year old lips broke into a youthful grin, accompanied by a white glow that overshadowed any hint of jaundice I saw, or thought I had seen. “And you should know that the only rest is in motion itself, at your age,” she proclaimed, after which she looked at my medical bag. “From an old initiator to what I hope is a young one.”

The cowboy riding shotgun lost no time in loading Ester onto the stagecoach, offering her a blanket and knapsack filled with what smelled like sweets ‘on the house’. As the team of horses headed West, I looked to the Eastern horizon, revisiting my experiences in the

East, the goals I set out to achieve here, and how far I was from achieving them. So that I could one day...”

CHAPTER 5  
1921

“...Return home to Boston a hero rather than an adventurer who fucked up on his explorations, or who had to invent a success story that would allow you to sit down at the Thanksgiving table with your ‘so what have you done with your life’ parents and academic ‘friends’,” Doctor Melanie blasted into the ears of the old man whose mouth had turned silent and whose ocular portholes became lost again inside his head. “Or Christmas dinner with your other ‘accomplished’, or saying they were accomplished brothers?” the physician/writer blasted into the ears of the old man whose mouth had turned silent again.

“And ‘accomplished’ sisters,” the old Doc said, after which he looked at and again, into Melanie.

Being seen through was something Melanie had somehow gotten used, but never liked. Indeed, she realized that she had the same motivation for her actions now as the Doc did when he was close to her age. Such made her feel bonded to him, somehow. In ways that felt way too familiar, and scary. Then terrifying. His face seemed to be something she had seen in her past, somehow. His blue eyes felt like those that had looked at her from a distance from up high in every one of her instructive dreams where she had somehow learned the art of flying on her own. His voice now registered a vibration in her spine that both chilled and warmed it.

“So,” the old doc said to the young one, after having completed his diagnostic. “You look hungry.”

“I am,” Melanie replied, feeling the pang in her rumbling belly as well as a portion of her brain box expanding, and yearning to be filled.

“Come, we’ll talk, and eat, Doctor Melanie,” the man who still had not given his name said as he led Melanie to the cabin, his crackly old voice breaking into a youthful and flawlessly delivered accapella rendition of “Lorena”. En route, wondered if the somehow still standing cabin with the sloping roof and scientific equipment from several centuries in past and few in the next one was where she would get sustenance of the body, mind and soul, or whether her body and mind would meet its end. The wind answered ‘both’ to ears that were far more open to Melanie than she bargained for.

An observation about war so often put into unforgettable diaries and wanting to be forgot memories of those who have gone through this legalized criminal enterprise, is that it is long periods of boredom punctuated by brief periods of terror. Such is not restricted of course to situations where bullets fly through the air and bayonets tear apart flesh that even the most brilliant Doctor can put back together again. A little known fact about the

West is that it was a boring place to be, involving long periods of ‘waiting’ for Nature to push something eatable out of the ground for you, calves to eat enough grass to become sellable cows, or people to deliver to you what you needed where Nature outnumbered people infinity to one. If you didn’t know how to keep your mind occupied with something substantial, and sustaining, depression then madness was the inevitable outcome. Few knew this better than the women minding homesteads alone, or with newborns they could not talk to, while their men were off trying to ‘bring home the bacon’, enjoying the pleasures of a more attractive woman, or on the other side of the veil having died with the only tombstone to mark their passing being a coyote or wolf who shit out the remains of their dead, or slain, bodies. As for the men, they sought solace from boredom and the monotony of labor which became boredom at the bottom of a bottle more often than not.

Former Mountain man Beaver Whisper LeFerve, who knew all too well how a sane and kind man could lose both qualities in the presence of too much boredom, had known the value of establishing ‘holidays’ with events that presented to the participants doing, and observers watching, that magical experience (and underestimated basic human need) between terror and boredom known as challenge. Such was the bronco riding and horse breaking event which he declared to happen on July 4. Such a day was celebrated by the Yankee Utopia as the War of Independence that led to a unified country. For those still loyal to Dixie, it marked the FIRST American Revolution, the second one having been lost in 1865, the third one to take place globally as well as locally sometime soon.

A majestic equine example of Independence was corralled into the large round pen on the outskirts of town. The stallion nayed with yearning to the mares on the other side of the community stockyards. “I’ll be with you soon to perpetuate us, the superior species, after I teach these two legged idiots who think they are more intelligent than us or any other four legged creatures, or make an agreement with them that will work for all of us in the end,” the Appaloosa seemed to say, after which he eyed everyone on the other side of the fence which HE decided not to jump over. Daring whoever who looked back into his big, brown, proud eyes to attempt to ride him, own him and take care of his needs to be fed, watered and sheltered for the rest of his life.

Those two legged members of the ‘superior’ species included most of the men in Utopia, and all of the influential, or wanting to be influential, women. After assessing his captors, and perhaps providers, the stallion bearing a partially put on brand, which disabled anyone to declare clear ownership, kicked up its fetlocks, bucked his way around the coral, then eased his way into a magnificent lope, then, with head held high, a trot accompanied by tail straight up into the air.

“So, this stallion’s got Arab in him as well,” Mayor Adams noted of the steed whose brain seemed to be a size larger than his head. “Flighty brain. And easily spooked.”

“But good for endurance,” Jakov Lazinski said, seeing something familiar in the horse. “In the old country, we always valued Arabs because----”

“---You didn’t have solidly built quarter-horses,” interjected Sir William S Gunderson, semi-literate Limey owner of the Wildcat Saloon with a snooty Oxford accent. “Or other horses of proper breeding. But at least you acquired your horses honestly, unlike others,” he said, accusingly staring into Irish born and inferiorly bred Liam Casey.

“Who decided to give horses who had the good sense to run away from you English a better home, training them to mount on the right side of course, like those born to us. So’s if your Lords, Ladies and Magistrates decided to re-possess what’s rightfully ours, you’d get thrown on your fat, royal, overfed asses, which you no doubt inherited due to proper breeding ‘Sir’,” Liam Casey shot back with a mischievous smile and exaggerated bow that evoked laughter from the crowd.

“In any case, he does look like a magnificent piece of horseflesh,” Sheriff MacDonald noted before Sir William had time to draw his gun on the Irish laborer and union organizer, or the Irish laborers behind Liam Casey and the goons of various other extractions behind Sir William began another brawl. “Who, according to rules of the round up and the laws I am honored to uphold, belongs to anyone who can break him,” MacDonald announced to every man in the congregation while stepping onto an apple box. “For which we’ll draw lots as to who gets the right to

Every ‘real’ man in the congregation grabbed hold of his nerve, rope, or combination of such. Except of course Oliver William Walton, lastest and he thought greatest, fat cat Union Pacific representative who had enough money, powers of persuasion and proper breeding to have everyone else to sweat, bleed and dying for him. And Wang Lee, who scratched his thinly bearded chin, glancing at his herb shop, then, pointing my attention to that establishment. Then dared me to consider his unspoken plan.

While I contemplated which herb combination would seduce the stallion into passivity, or perhaps obedience, the men drew lots as to who would risk life and limb to own the now most prestigious stallion in the valley.

When the drawing of straws of various lengths was passed around, Noah Winters wisely and angrily declined, bore as little weight as possible on his broken and, in my hands anyway, unfixable left leg. Said appendage acquired three sharp bone breaks with pulverization of any nerve, muscle or tendon in their vicinity three days ago during the round up of the stray horses and cattle. I recommended amputation, suggesting that it was inevitable. But the proud to stand proudly against any man, particularly a White one, on his two feet, straight up, refused to consent to such, claiming that with enough prayer and will power, his busted leg would decide to heal itself. Of course if it did, he would thank God. And if it didn’t, he would blame me, the Doctor, or perhaps Delfina, who assisted me in the operation where he was anesthetized with the best drugs I could obtain from Boston, herbs from Wang Lee’s shop and, so he was told, the most expensive and potent rum from the Wildcat. Yet, when waking up, he seemed more perturbed by taking a look the book I wrote between medical and interpersonal Utopian responsibilities, where he recognized himself in the narrative. He tore the page up, throwing it into my face, pledging and asserting that no one would tell his story except himself.

Maybe I did get Noah's real life story, present psychological profile, and projected future wrong. As I often miscalculated what many of the Utopians were capable of doing to each other in a town still defining its own legal system, and underestimated their ability to break such laws, or endure them. Or perhaps change them as the social hierarchy kept shifting, depending on whether it was a day, month or season when cattle, horses, saloons, the railroad or natural resources within and under the ground brought in the most money. Indeed, when there was big money to be had, and much to lose if you didn't get it, I had no shortage of patients who felt underserved by me as a Doctor, and betrayed as a man in a world where shifting alliances not only kept life 'interesting' but was also the way most REAL business was done. But for the moment, the largest flow of money in Utopia was on gambling on whether the first man to draw the shortest straw could break the stallion, and how quickly.

That 'chosen one' was none other than Francisco Fernandez, known previous to the post Civil War invasion into Utopia as Sheriff Pancho, who was displaced from power by a Latino hating, and mistrusting, Anglo population from both North and South of the Mason Dixon line. In the 'pre-'65' era of Utopia he enforced frontier justice on a gang of Mexican bandits who had stolen horses, rustled cattle and kidnapped young women intended to be sold into slavery. But in '66, when Pancho went after a band of White good ole boys who decided to extract livestock, land and scalps from Indians, it was discovered that one of the men he hung was a blood relation to Oliver William Walton, the representative of the Union Pacific Railroad. One of the girls he had saved from the slave traders two years earlier decided to spread around a story that she was raped by her rescuer. Convinced by a false rumor that he was to be hung, it was suggested to Pancho that he head out into the hills to take care of whatever halfbreed or other misfits were still there, the Deputy on duty leaving the door to his cell open at midnight with a horse outside waiting for him. After that, Pancho took to robbing banks to feed the people civilization had forgot, and those who were living on their own outside of any civilization. Lydia Thundercloud, a hybrid whose genetics and view of the world didn't fit into her mother's Native hunting and gathering tribe in Montana nor her White father's agricultural-industrial realm in Denver was but one example of the 'displaced' and poor, from which I extracted information from the Robin Hood who now took to robbing banks, so far jurisdictions other than those of 'duly elected' Sheriff MacDonald. I still don't know why Pancho Fernandez was not put in chains when he emerged from the crowd. Maybe the new Utopians recognized him. Or perhaps he had become one of those outdated bandits and ineffective social revolutionaries who were considered harmless. Or, as each man was allowed no more than 5 minutes to tame the wild stallion, it was a sure bet that he'd wind up getting his outlawed revolutionary brain kicked out of the skull by the stallion's hoofs.

"You show them what we misfits are really made of," I could hear Thundercloud whisper as I edged my way close to her, so as to find out why the most Enlightened, brave, misunderstood and therefore outlawed social revolutionary who ever knew, thanks to my being called out in the dead of night to do a house cal in the hills which I did keep confidential. "But not like that!" gasped the half-Indian, half-White, all secret lesbian,

according to the way she and Hanna looked at each other, as three cowboys pushed the stallion against the fence, a fourth tying its right front leg against its torso.

“That’s the way they say I have to do it,” Fernandez replied back in Spanish to Thundercloud, a tongue that I did bother to learn, despite being informed by my academic colleagues in Boston and fellow pioneer brethren in the West that it was an inferior tongue spoken by an inferior people who would wise up soon and speak English. The still very Wanted outlaw boldly strode his way to the coral, to be stopped where his progress was stopped by a man connected to a very high authority placing his firm hand on his chest.

“Bless this man,” Pastor Johnson said with his tiny, blisterless hand laying over the eyerolling outlaw’s strong and well tested broad shoulders, perhaps knowing who he was, or perhaps not. “And Lord look after his welfare, family and legacy, as you, Lord are the Mighty All Powerful All loving. All merciful...”

Before Pastor Johnson ranted on praising the Lord he privately feared (as I assessed when he thought he was dying from a bladder stone I removed) but publically loved, a rousing of Amen’s came from the crowd, followed by a tomato being thrown into the Pastor’s face by a parishioner whose daughter killed herself after he had proclaimed that she was not worthy of going to heaven because of a carnal transgression with a young man who was not yet her husband.

With Johnson out of the way, and the crowd watching on former Sheriff now outlaw Pancho climbed into the round pen, grabbing hold of the prescribed equipment for the stallion’s first lesson. Fernandez placed the loop of the war bridle onto the lower portion of the horse’s jaw, grabbed hold of the reins, and was pushed atop the magnificent, now three legged creature onto the saddle that had earlier been forced onto the horse. Two bucks later, the rope broke, freeing the stallion from its rider. And the rider from his insistence at acquiring the animal as its own, as he become the star attraction for all with open eyes.

With his quick reflexes Fernandez, escaped the round pen with his legs, torso and brains intact. Using his necessarily acquired gift of stealth, he disappeared into the crowd, made his way to his horse, and slithered out of town.

“Okay, next up?” Oliver William Walton, fat cat, overfed and (truth be told) ugly as all of his previous sins Union Pacific Railroad representative, and now local boss over more than just surveying and laying down rails, said. “The winner not only gets this magnificent horse but, this!” he proclaimed, pulling out a wad of bills from his breast pocket larger than any I had not seen in a long time.

“But we drew straws!” Sheriff McDonald insisted. “Fair and legal, Mister Walton,” he continued, pulling back his assertive intension, with, to the observer who was really watching anyway, a subservient bow.



“Not all of us drew straws,” a voice in the crowd from a man I didn’t see, and who didn’t want to be seen said, after which I noted several straws hit the ground.

“But those of you who did, get an extra prize for teaching this unruly and rude stallion some civilized manners,” Sir William S Gunderson, owner of the Wildcat Saloon and, according to him anyway, everyone in it, proclaimed. “All the spirits you can drink for a week and the company of any of the fillies in my establishment.” He pointed those gentlemen still interested in the wager to three favorite employees’

“Who will kick your asses into the ground if you even attempt to put me under-saddle,” I heard Kitty bark back to her boss with her angry eyes as she threw down the spatula at her assigned position as food dispenser at the buffet table.

“Only if I want to,” 18 year old Lilly appeared to say with a smile that was not so compliant as it had been, ever since having an unsolicited talk with Ester Morris during her un-solicited visit to our fair city.

Alicia wavered between choices as she was being assessed by the potential winners in the horse breaking contest which, if allowed to continue, would result in broken human and equine legs, given the method of braking that was not about to be changed.

The horse ran around the pen, displaying its magnificence with its fluid gallop, and power with his bucking hoofs. All of the still straw holding men bit their lips in fear, a gesture they all did before I would say to them ‘hold on, this is going to hurt’. It was accompanied by wide open eyes, and, if one observed closely enough, a step backward.

“Gentlemen,” elitist asshole Sir William said, faining commonality with the Colonial hombres he always considered inferior to himself, perhaps because he most probably came from commoner British stock himself. “Do you have sand or not! No real man backs away from a challenge.”

“Particularly when the women are watching,” Union Boss added.

“And we do have an obligation to serve and show that we can protect the fairer and weaker species,” Sir William continued, getting nods of approval from all of the men he bestowed his Kingly eyes upon.

The women of most influence and varied mentations gathered around me and Thundercloud, having deserted their assigned stations of preparing food and drink.

“All of these men are idiots as well as cowards,” Hanna commented.

“And you’re smart enough and brave enough to reach an agreement with that magnificent beast, I assume,” Sally Ann proposed to Hanna.

“Of course she be,” Catherine Mary Brady boldly said, surprising me, everyone and herself with an unprecedented burst of bravado. “As a member of our superior gender.”

“Whose Daddy stood up to kings and capitalists back in Germany and the slave owning Confederate Home Guard in Texas,” Alicia added.

“Yes,” Hanna replied, boldly and proudly, with an arched back and determined eyes.

“Who stood up to ignorant boys as big as men when they talked back to you in your schoolhouse, then taught them that it’s only a brave man who doesn’t expand his mind,” Lilly added as the underpaid Schoolmarm who aspired to turn her one room schoolhouse into a University seemed to bite her lip with a tinge of apprehension.

“Who scared drunken parents from taking their kids out of the schoolroom so they could beat them senseless in the woodshed,” Catherine Mary Brady added.

“Yeah,” Hanna replied with a face that, if you were observing with an open mind and heart, was overtaken by fear.

“Who, with a little instruction as to how to reach an agreement with a horse rather than how to break them, is our elected choice to show these men just how smart, powerful and caring we women can really be,” Thundercloud suggested. “All in favor?” she said raising her hand.

All of the other women raised their hands, except one.

“Sure,” Hanna replied after a tense, terrifying delay. She slowly raising her hand up in the air.

Without anyone else seeing it, except me, I hope, Delfina prevented the now terrified Bold Revolutionary from raising her hand. “I’ll do it. I had a lot of experience with mustangs here in Wyoming before it became Wyoming,” she said by way of explanation.

I knew it was a lie, but did the rest of the ‘girls’? How many of them saw the fear in Hanna’s face, I’m not sure, as their eyes were all on the stallion who, if he disagreed with the rider, would indeed end that bold human’s roping, riding and reading days forever.

But the die was cast, particularly after Delfina opened her mouth. “A bet from us, of the inferior and weaker gender, to you of the superior and stronger one,” she announced to the men as the four foot six spitfire pulled up two apple crates so as to be three head above everyone else, then invited Thundercloud to join her on the lectern. “If you give me and my partner here, ten minutes, I, no we,” she said, motioning to the women under her. “We women folk will make this stallion a friend who works with us rather than a slave who works for us.”

“Impossible,” Pastor Johnson said. “This is a killer horse. Possessed by the devil!”

“Who is dangerous,” Mayor Adams added. “I propose a statue that no woman is allowed to get herself hurt, or killed, attempting to ride this beast. All in favor?”

Every man, then boy, within sight raised his hand in favor of the proposition by the ‘law suggester’ who always got his way, somehow. Every man except Wang Lee, Noah Winters and for reasons that overtook me at the time, myself.

“And all opposed,” Hanna belted out, after which all of the women of influence around me raised their hands, then every other women in sight. Including Mayor Adams’ two daughter, both of them yet to experience the full biological manifestations womanhood. Then all of the rest of the girls within sight of me, and the still defiant, magnificent and proud horse.

“So, what do you propose, Comrade Hanna?” Adams challenged his usual adversary.

“Another wager, but for something a lot more personal and important than money,” Hanna, once again bold Revolutionary proposed, stepping up on another soap box. She looked down at the five women below her asking their, and then to Latino-Native duo of Delfina and Thundercloud. All gave an affirmative nod to the proposition in her head which I could feel, but not quite understand. Then Hanna looked to whatever women in the crowd who would look back at her, asking for their nods of approval. Most gave it. She smiled at the town’s girls, all of which had been taught to learn on their own under her mentorship, getting the heartiest and warmest of approvals.

“Ok, so does your coven of wannabe’ witches and bitches’ decide,” Adams shot back, concerned that the men under his influence were losing their sand, and ability to reason.

“We, all of us, who are cursed to not have been born with male genitalia, will do all of your bidding for a month,” Hanna announced, evoking bold affirmation or terror from the vagina bearing citizenry. “But you are not allowed to rape, insult or hit us!” she added, assuaging the fears of most of the female congregation.

“Agreed,” Adams said. “We’re all gentlemen here,” he said of the army under his command in this war. “Right, Sheriff MacDonald?” he said to his second in command.

“Damn straight!” MacDonald replied, laying his hand on his pistol, staring determination into the faces of the, presumably anyway, unarmed men around him, all of whose arms had been surrendered, he hoped anyway, at the sheriff’s office in town.

“And if, if, if, by the grace of God, who his neither male nor female, out champion Delfina, can ride that wild killer stallion out of the coral, and then around town, you gentlemen will do what we do, as us, for say two days,” Hanna proposed, to the jovial approval of her hard working, underpaid and underappreciated female Comrades. “And we pledge that there will be no ridicule from us for your doing so,” she continued, turning

the vengeful grins of her sisters into pensive smiles. “And none of your fellow men will make fun of you becoming us either, right, Mayor, Sheriff?”

“For a bet that you women folk have little or no chance of winning, given this horse here. A horse that even I, if I had two good legs, wouldn’t try to put under saddle,” Winters added.

Assured by the word of the Negro cowboy who was never known to lie, nor be wrong about any matter dealing with horseflesh, Major Adams and Sheriff McDonald agreed to the deal. As for the rest of the men, they boldly and humorously announced their wants for the month regarding the women who they were bound to by marriage or desire. Such included everything from breakfast in bed to wiping their asses after eating it.

CHAPTER 6  
1921

“And speaking of eating, who ate crow and who got breakfast in bed, Doctor...?” Melanie asked her still nameless host as she detected a strange brand of flavor in the ill-defined stew she found herself liking so unexpectedly.

“Take your best guess,” the reply from the cook, preparing desert in the cabin on a wood stove heated in part by chopped up lumber and partly by kerosene, according to her still functional olfaction as she seemed to see the shadow of a second then third spoon in front of her mouth.

“Okay,” Doctor Melanie Hamilton as she laid down the rusted wooden spoon during the middle of her self-examination, trying to determine if it was exhaustion, the food, the trip or something in the air that made her feel...different. Turning to her host, she continued, “By the dress you’re wearing so comfortably, and naturally, I suppose that Delfina was able to befriend that belligerent wild stallion and ride him around town as if he was a kid’s pony.”

“Yes indeed,” ‘Doc’, replied in a soft and relatively high pitched voice as he set to pull an apple cobbler out of the oven which smelled exactly how that dish was prepared at Melanie’s parent’s mansion back in Great Neck, New York. Negotiating the limitations of movement afforded by a calf-length black skirt, frilly blouse and three inch booties. He offered Melanie a whiff of the cobbler, waited her approval, and upon getting it, proudly cut out a man sized piece for his guest and a slender slice for himself.

“A woman has to do what she can to retain her girlish figure, and her man has to develop strong muscles,” Doc said by way of explanation in a hushed voice with a big smile on his reddened lips as he ran his fingers over the corset around his belly and adjusted the pads inserted over his hips.

“How, and why did all it happen?” Melanie asked.

“Making apple cobbler without apples, and beef stew without real beef?” ‘Miss’ Doc said as he pushed up the backside of his dress and twisted his way onto the least comfortable chair at the table. “Applied biochemistry, old memories and recalling old recipes that---“

“---I was talking about how Delfina, who lied about her skill as a horseman, was able to survive a ride on a horse that no man in his right mind would get on!” Melanie interjected into Doc’s smiling, and, beneath the remaining stubble on the beard he had shaved off in her honor, not too unattractive face, from a male or female perspective.

“Well then,” Doc said between two small ladylike bites taken from the cobbler that, according to his grumbling stomach, he most probably wanted and needed to gobble down. “Many possibilities to explain why Delfina reached a very favorable agreement with the stallion. There was Thundercloud’s method of braking which involved

breathing into the horse's nose, moving its neck gently till it let you put your arm over it, patting him everywhere on his flank, then up and down his now-freed four legs. She then gently put a sliding tie down around his snout to prevent him from rearing up, then adjusted the rest of the tack so he can't bend his neck and buck up his rear end. It seemed to work, like magic, the horse offering no resistance to any of the equipment on him, nor the tugging of such. She then lit a stick of grass, giving the horse a healthy whiff of its smoke while she talk-sung to him in her native tongue. More magical moments of agreement happened between 120 pound human and 600 pound wild horse.

The metaphysical explanation was that there was something in the sweetgrass that de-possessed the wild horse of any MAN spirits who were still haunting it. Then there was the effect of the herb Wang Lee snuck into my pocket, which that I snuck into Delfina's, which she snuck into the nostrils of the horse as she approached him, just before mounting, naming the stallion..."

"... a name that, let me guess, I wouldn't be able to pronounce," Melanie replied with rolling eyebrows.

"Yes," Doc replied without any reservation or hidden meaning underlying the words, this time.

"And, can I pronounce the names of the Chinese or other herbs which you put into this food that makes me feel so...different?" Melanie asked, feeling her arms to be lighter, the tightness in her chest loosening and observing her the 'brains in her feet' guiding her as she got up from the table to walk to the stove to examine the spice shelf. One of them smelt ominously familiar. "Arsenic? Or maybe Mercury? Or Lead?" she said regarding the 'mousy' flavor of the third jar sampled with her nose, the faded Chinese writing on the sepia label feeling to be a century old. "Which I remember smelling on Maria's breath."

"Ingredients that we used to think were harmless, and for some, beneficial," Doc said, picking up the jar, looking at it fondly.

"Which we now know are deadly," Melanie insisted.

"A fact which is all too well known by...others," the petti-coated Doctor's reply as his voice and mannerisms reverted back to his biological gender.

"Others being who?" Melanie pressed as her host, and only connection to perhaps still alive Maria, the promise she made to her, and any chance of returning back to the 'real' world as something resembling a successful or sane woman, started to lose himself behind a blank stare again. "Others being who!" Melanie yelled again and again as she tried to shake him back from impending unconsciousness as his complexion grew paler with each memory he seemed to be seeing, or present ghost he was seeing in the present, or perhaps enemy who had bodies elsewhere. The latter possibility seemed most likely

when Doc turned his ear to the open window, hearing something outside that Melanie didn't.

"Others who aren't going to kill anyone else!" he asserted, after which grabbed hold of a 19<sup>th</sup> century shotgun converted into a 20<sup>th</sup> century machine gun, pushed Melanie down onto the floor and fired away at the intruder outside.

After unloading a full magazine into still unseen intruders approaching from the East, North and South, Doc breathed a sigh of relief. "Okay, we're alone again, Delfina, staring into space," he declared, after which he pulled Melanie from the floor.

"You mean Melanie?" Doctor Hamilton felt like saying but didn't give voice to. Instead, she decided to play along with whatever game was going on in this intelligent, kind and self-tortured hermit's head. "Thank you," she replied.

"For what?" Doc asked, his consciousness between realms, typical of patients who were afflicted with dementia due to normal aging, or ingestion of too much food containing lead, mercury or the most recent 'wonder metal', aluminum.

"Thank you for saving my life," Melanie replied, in Spanish.

"You're welcomed, Doctor Mel," he replied in English, a glow of 'realism' taking over his face. "But, you came here for a story," he said as he turned around to a cracked mirror that had been glued together in such a way that it distorted every feature of whoever looked into it into something it wasn't.

"And a diary which Maria said you would give me, and which she wanted me to have," Melanie replied.

"Only after you get my side of the story," Doc said as he turned around, looking more ladylike than ever, adjusting his wig. "About this experiment," he said in a male voice regarding the kind of attire that, to Melanie's knowledge anyway, no 19<sup>th</sup> century man was ever photographed in. "And more."

## CHAPTER 7

Before going on to describe the social experiment in how one can experience and hopefully learn from living in someone else's boots, shoes or moccasins, it is perhaps worth noting how it happened. Even today in your 'anything goes' modern times, this gender exploration that adopts the hypothesis that basic human traits and attributes should not belong to belong to one gender exclusively, would be considered perverted or sick. Taking that into account for the present, the still-all male town council, of which I was still a part (though unlike the other members by necessity rather than choice) decided to isolate Utopia from the outside world for two days. Various means were done to do this. Out of town railroad and coal minding workers were given extra duties by now 'Regional Railroad Supervisor' Walton. Signs were to be posted on every cleared entryway into town travelable by wagon, horse or foot, reading 'Entry Prohibited: Under Two Day Internal Reconstruction' with the appropriate dates for the 2 day experiment listed, but as 'Reconstruction' was still a hotly debated and misunderstood term, it was decided to put 'Temporarily Quarantined' in its place, despite the ranting and warning from Walton that it would scare away any new business investment or, more importantly, visitors from Washington who sought to convert the 20,000 population Territory of Wyoming into Statehood ahead of President Grant's or our time table.

As for encouraging the men who had lost the bet on the horse breaking to keep their promise, no less than 30 women's signatures, or in some cases X marks next to the printed names, declared that if the men did not become women for 48 hours, said women would withhold 'the kind of carnal pleasures they liked most' for a year. As incentive, they offered said carrot to the, sadly to say, still-sex craving men for a week, if they did comply. The 'Sisterly Pledge' smartly did not mention anything about banning alcohol as part of Wyoming's plan to become a civilized and prosperous state which would attract families and, for those who already had families of sort there, money. And the Sisterly Pledge declaration reminded British commoner 'Lord' Gunderson, whose connection to increasingly legal criminal enterprises in this place where he could be a big fish in a small pond, that it was the highly respectable custom of British Aristocracy, the Swiss Elite and the Czarist Court to crossdress as the opposite gender for special occasions. Not put into the declaration was the observation that the best male actors were always the ones who had crossed the gender line at one time or another. Delfina reminded me that male Sioux medicine men were not given their diploma to practice healing arts for their patients until they had lived as a woman in the tribe for a year. At the end of the declaration, written by someone's handwriting I did not recognize, the most effective 'dare' was slammed onto the table. "Perhaps your reluctance to do this is because you will discover that you like wearing dresses and corsets, or are really insecure in your manhood."

I honestly didn't know whether the new women of power and influence in Utopia had formulated this strategy on their own, or whether it was pre-orchestrated by Ester Morris. Neither did any of the men on the town council, no matter what method they had used to cajole or force that information out of the women under their care, or domain.



But one thing for certain was that none of us (those blessed with being born with a penis and white skin around it anyway) had even experienced what it was like to be denied the right to vote, to own or inherit property, to hold public office as well as equal pay for equal work, the prime political mandates for the Suffrage movements everywhere I have been. None of we men experienced other conditions women that underwent, including carrying around someone else's child for 9 months in their belly and, assuming it didn't kill them, enduring the (as all male doctors have said, even myself on one occasion) 'temporary discomfort' of childbirth. Other unpaid extra services women were 'blessed' with included laughing at 'your better's' jokes, even if they degraded you. Letting your male counterparts take the compliments for any work you did, and all of the credit if it was to be a publishable paper describing such. Or fading into the woodwork, letting your less talented brother Felix take credit for the music you wrote so that it would be heard by anyone, as was the duty and 'pleasure' of Fanny Mendelson.

As for this experiment which I had always envisioned as a possibility, but never put on my list as doable options, it did happen, despite what you won't read in anyone's journals or diaries written at the time. Surprisingly, the two day 'Quarantine' was good for business. Particularly the clothing stores, seamstresses and tailors who were called upon to sell dresses, corsets, shoes, cosmetics and the supply of wigs in town which, tragically, were often made from hair extracted from dead or temporarily immobilized Indians. Or even more tragically, from Indians who came in to town, or were forced into doing so by economic necessity, to get the 'assimilation' haircut so they could be employed by wampum paying Paleface idiots and assholes. As for those barber shops, their leather sharpening straps were worn down to into thin sheets on razors used to remove beards, and in cases of those men who really wanted hot sex after the experiment, mustaches from faces of bold pioneering men who were now to be challenged with an internal frontier.

The town certainly looked different, as the tallest citizens strolled around in dresses and skirts, the shorter ones in trousers. And, relating and confessing, it felt different, from the tight clothing which alternatively 'hugged' a man's affection-starved torso and legs, to the loose garb that let air blow onto the skin underneath, speaking something to it that had never been heard before. And something does happen to you when you are called by a name that is your own, but with the addition of a vowel at the end to feminize the method of address. It indeed proved that you are, or can so easily become, what you are called rather than who you are. And to feel like a lower caste citizen who is required to find 'Mastery in servitude,' a noble Christian ideal which, unfortunately, so many male white Christians had never had the burden and blessing to experiment, as there was always a person of color, or of the opposite gender, beneath him.

There those who sought medical exemption from this conscripted duty to experience woman hood. A most notable qualifier for this was Noah Winters, a Negro cowboy who asserted when he came in to have his busted and increasingly degenerating leg looked at that he knew what oppression was like as a Slave and 'didn't need no more lessons in humility'. Still denying my offer to take off the leg that he still claimed was un-savable because of my and Delfina's incompetency, he decided to take a holiday in Cheyenne, to

see a REAL Doctor. And, so he boasted with a mixture of vengeance and price, anyway, to plant the seeds of a new business that would put him on top of everyone. Such an aspiration was, after all, what we all came to Utopia to do, one way or another as we are by our lower and perhaps inescapable natures, a pathologically competitive loving species.

As for the specifics of the menfolks' trial run of Mastery in Servitude, some learned this hard-inflicted lesson easily, and some not at all. One of the main schoolrooms for such was the WildCat, where, as some mathematicians would say, we all experienced the 'inverse' of the male dominated Surrender to Spring Festival. For the first time in its history, women were allowed entry into the establishment as clients rather than upstairs entertainers and downstairs servers. The culinary fare was whatever the dress-wearing men could cook at home or in the saloon's kitchen, which thanks to my intervention, was transformed into something non-toxic, and edible enough for the palate to be both enjoyed. But the trouser wearing women in town, most of them experiencing the sensation of wearing such practical garb, were all there to feast on something more than food or watered down spirits.

"So, what do you have that's delectable tonight, excluding you of course, Lady Willamina," veteran-out-of-necessity dance hall girl Kitty, now Kit, with a recent hair trim matching her rented gender, said through a big, smile as she perused the menu at the table with one hand, giving 'Sir' Gunderson a hearty 'love pat' in his ass between the pads underneath the red silk dress specially tailored for him by her and her fellow pleasure providers. "Feeling a little cold and exposed under there," 'Kit' continued as she took a drink from the tray held by Gunderson while his thinly stockinged, visible clear up past the knee, shaved, legs were shaking, due to cold, the height of the high heeled booties they were balancing on, fear or perhaps a newly discovered brand of vulnerability the 'openness' of female garb conferred on all of us penile bearing souls during those two days. "But in the meantime, allow me to unburden you of these," 'Kit' continued in a baritone voice, taking three glasses from the tray, giving one to her fellow diner 'Cowboy Al', aka Alicia and 'Lilly', known for the next two days as 'Lord Larry', clad in Lord Gunderson's best duds.

"Anything happens to that suit you're wearing or my reputation, I'll hang you all out to dry," Lady Gunderson pledged.

"Not if we air out your dirty laundry first, Miss Willimana," the normally quiet and always watching rather than acting Alicia interjected, in the voice of Sally Ann. "Isn't that so, Josephine?" she continued, turning her attention to Mayor Joseph Adams, clad in a purple silk dress Sally Ann had worn when pregnant with their last child rather than to turn her awakened wrath on now fellow sister, and ex-slave owner Sally Ann.

"This isn't proper, or right," Mayor 'Josephine' said through a wig of ringlets that kept blowing onto his recently, and reluctantly, shaved upper lip. "What you women are trying to do to us, Sally," he said, directly into his still loving wife's pensive face.

“Neither is what you’ve been doing to all of us, including you, ‘Salvador,’” Hanna, now ‘Professor Harry’ shot out from another table reminding her fellow sister of her duty to the Cause. Professor Harry then adjusted the collar and excessively loose crotch on the suit which had been worn by her father when posing for the photograph in front of the Free Thinker School he established in Texas, open to all whites, Indians, Mexicans and Negroes, and the suit he was hung in a month later by the Confederate Home Guard. “And neither is it proper or right that his people, and my people, have been doing to you,” Professor Harry related with the most extreme of pathologies to Lydia Thundercloud across the table from her, clad according to her biological gender and Native mother’s soon to be extinct ethnicity.

Thundercloud lowered her head, then took a sip from her ale, the color of which indicated that it had not been watered down as most of the rest of the drinks being served. The sight of a woman, and a Native one at that, drinking from a man’s glass in a man’s saloon seemed too much for a most of the feminized servers to bear. I could feel the testosterone build up behind their mascara framed eyes, followed by retrieving knives, guns or raw fists coming out of their garters, all of them aimed at ‘witch’ Thundercloud and her Latino Minion Delfina for winning the bet that set up this ‘inversion’. Then, a second before I could hear the silent volcano in the room blow up, spilling lava over everyone, Hanna put her hand over Thundercloud’s wrist, lowering her mixed blood lover’s arm and the glass containing brew which made stupid whites dumber, but made Indians mad. The men in dresses and petticoats went back to their womanly duties.

From my position behind the bar as head serving mistress, and nurse should things get ugly, I nodded a thank you to Hanna for her discession and courage. She pulled back her lips, seeming to rely on restraint again as a strategy against oppression rather than direct defiance. Then, ‘Professor Harry’, without warning to anyone, including Thundercloud, placed her White hands behind the mixed blood misfit, pulled her in, and planted a kiss onto her lips that expressed Eros, Agape and Phillos, all at once.

Who in the room saw it as Eros, love of body, Agape, love of Spirit, or Phillos, comradeship between fellow humans doomed or blessed to do the best they could with what they were given on their life shift on this pathetically inefficient planet, I could not say. But I did know that the kind of Liberation Hanna and Thundercloud wanted, and deserved, was at least three Revolutions away.

As for this Revolution, or Evolution, Tasha, aka Tom Lazinski stuck a bold cord on her violin, turning it into a fiddle. His wife, ‘Jakova’ joined in the piano. They broke into a song from their homeland that I had heard before in its native lyrics. The English translation they sang contained words that were both mispronounced and highly non musical, but the message within it was both clear and just what the Doctor, the one Upstairs who I negotiate with, and me, ordered.

“So, like the song says, there’s more we got in common than that’s different,” I heard Catherine, aka Cowpuncher Carl, say to her server, still Sheriff Mika McDonald.

“And if this experiment we’re part of is going to work, we have to recognize and celebrate that,” McDonald replied, doing his best to not put any more tears into his perhaps future wife’s Sunday going to church dress. “Shall we?” he asked Cathleen Mary Brady, opening his arms.

“Yes,” the scarred face, gimped widow said, accepting his invitation, which this time, seemed to have no strings attached. “Yes,” Catherine repeated again and again while losing herself in the apolitical soul love that had evolved between her and, perhaps, the man who had taken it upon himself to allow the murder of abusive husband remained uninvestigated, or maybe had done it himself. “Yes, yes, yes,” she continued while falling into romantic love as the romantically played music to the Revolutionary lyrics calling all to bond in Universal Brotherhood that goes beyond family, friends and country kept transforming the stagnant air into magical motion.

“Yes, you heard the lady, I mean gentlemen,” McDonald informed the citizenry who he could arrest at any time for any crime he saw fit to prosecute, or invent.

All seemed to join in the dance, and hope for something Revolutionary to happen. Verifying an observation I had made in more than one location, 12 percent of the men (whose identity I am honor and practically bound to not reveal) seemed to enjoy being women. I anticipated between 50 and 80% of them coming to me at a later date to ask about how that transformation could be done on their flesh as well as with wardrobe. But there were some who didn’t join in the dance, belligerently leaning against an isolated wall in the anonymously locked from the outside saloon. They included, most notably, to me anyway, Mayor Josephine Adams, Lady Gunderson and Pacific Union Railroad Regional Supervisor ‘Olivia’ Walton. And of course Pastor Johnson, who was, with the exception of a womanly hat worn upside down, still clad in his male clothing, having claimed that to take on the guise of a woman was an offense that would earn him a permanent place in hell, even though he really wanted to participate in the ‘be a woman for two days’ experiment, according to stories I heard about the manner in which he wrapped himself in a towel after a shower. Secret stories like so many others that I was, well, selectively confidential about keeping confidential. After all, Pastor Johnson, from what I had heard, and verified when I told him some harmless falsehoods and half truths about myself, didn’t maintain the seal of his confessional any more than I did.

Indeed, I sensed then that these aforementioned ‘gentlemen’ were the most dangerous adversaries to the Revolution about to happen here, and would be the most vicious opponents to the experiments I had set in motion here, stumbled into, or would transform. Unless of course I made them rats in my own social, psychological and morality experiments. Put into service of course for the common good of the species and, by necessity for the former, my own reputation in the world back East I would return to, which would ultimately control the one being created now in front of my own mascara and eye shadow framed oculars. Which were taken into another place when one particular ‘gentleman for 48 hours’ asked me to dance.

CHAPTER 8  
1921

“And ‘his’ name was Dare Devil Dan, AKA Delfina?” Doctor Melanie inquired of the old doctor as he relieved himself of the skirt, blouse, heels, wig and finally corset he seemed to be so fond of. Perhaps as one of the ten percent of men who discovered after the two day experiment that he wanted to continue experiencing life as a woman. Perhaps seen by, encouraged by, or inadvertently opened up by the woman ‘Doc’ always spoke most passionately about.

The expression of that Passion went into places dark, light and in between as he lost himself in the picture of Maria which Melanie had brought him. Just as Melanie seemed to figure out where Doc’s soul was and what his mind was thinking, he attached the photo of the old woman in the hospital onto a splinter on the picture-less wall of his cabin. “Ya know, Delfina had several opportunities to be photographed in Utopia, but no one would take the picture,” he said as he hobbled to a small window, his back turned.

“Why?” Melanie inquired, still seated at his table.

“Because she always broke out into one of these,” he replied, turning around displaying a smile as big and bright as the sky outside. So as to make that expression seem real, he broke out into an unbridled laugh, which turned black, then silent again. “Especially that night when we connected in ways we never had before, shedding our alternative gender clothing in the private bedroom in my clinic which, for the first time, was inhabited by someone other than the ‘me’ who I usually was, and my ever-present assistants, the demons which kept that ‘me’ moving forward.”

“So what happened?” Melanie asked, getting up, doing her best to look at, and through the old man, a task which was made harder, and easier as he averted his eyes from hers. “To you, to Delfina, and to the demons?” she pressed, after which she pulled away, breaking into a smile of her own. “Or to the male demons who decided to dress as female angels, or vice versa?” she mused.

From Doc, a mild chuckle, which diminished into another pensive stare into universes in the past, which somehow Melanie felt she needed to fully understand life in the present.

Again, he seemed to want and need to talk about other things, and Melanie was required to listen. But before doing so, he pontificated in a voice that seemed to come from the bowels of the most Ancient of Libraries... “It’s a great student who excels her teacher in the Science of medicine. And it’s a dangerous student who is just as inexperienced in the Art of love as he inexperienced instructor,” he addressed to the gods, ghosts or goblins outside, after which he turned to Melanie, delivering into her. “With the most interesting, and dangerous of consequences.”

“So, back in 1869...?” Melanie inquired, taking out her third pad of paper and fourth worn down pencil, hoping that averting the truth she felt emerging would be more palatable and less terrifying if it was discovered after a few more ‘side issues’.

## CHAPTER 9

For the three subsequent months after the ‘gender exchange’ experiment, Mother Nature saw fit to provide us with ample sunshine for crops, and not a lot of snow to hamper our mobility. The number of respectable women who came into my office with black eyes, bruised ribs, lacerated cheeks or broken jaws after ‘falling’ while doing chores, or being kicked by a cow, dropped to zero. As did the number of women who offered pleasures of the flesh to love-starved or power-seeking men with similar biological afflictions, or advise as to how to ‘safely not become a mother’. I cannot say if it was because after the two day holiday from being oneself that most everyone in Utopian of adult age participated in, men getting an insight into what it is like to be a member of the ‘fairer and gentler’ gender, or members of that aforementioned gender becoming smarter as well as stronger. And I didn’t press the issue with any of my patients, though if I had, the fortune I could have made by blackmailing the least deserving of them would have been enough to buy Utopia everything it needed, and wanted.

There was one event that I completely unexpected. Hanna Steiner, who finally confirmed the unspoken suspicion around town that she preferred the love of women to the insincere affection of men, did keep her job as a schoolteacher, promising to teach the girls in her class how to be better people rather than better lovers to those of their gender. Whether the teacher who educated the children of Utopia so well that as adults they would no doubt leave for, and transform, more cultured, civilized and open-minded locations actually did keep that promise, I do not know. And why Thundercloud, Hanna’s lover and assistant teacher, to children of parents wise enough to want their offspring to learn about Traditional Native Life and Spirituality before it disappeared from the continent for good, was neither killed, raped nor scalped by the ‘good God FEARING Christian folk’ still egged on by Pastor Johnson, I do not know.

But what I do know is that on one particularly windy day when the brilliantly autumn colored leaves had surrendered their leaves to the first layer of snow that covered the ground, word came in through the telegraph that the first Territorial Assembly session was to take place in Cheyenne on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of November. Why Cheyenne was chosen for the capital, only God knew, and of course Regional Union Pacific Supervisor Walton’s temporal bosses. There were many things on the agenda, most of which would be found out by the representative of our perhaps fair, and sometimes unfair, city when he, or she got there. The latter was still an unthinkable possibility, even for me, as though women in Utopia had acquired the right to be listened to by men, but not vote in any political matter. However, their ability to influence their husband’s or soon to be husband’s vote, was definitely on the rise.

I do not know if that was the reason why I was elected, without my intention or initial approval, to represent the people of Utopia at the assembly in Cheyenne, during our monthly town meeting before working hours on the bottom floor of the Wildcat. It was commemorated by the newest delicacy of industrial agriculture, canned peaches, which, I must admit, did taste far better to the palate than any fruit dish I was able to prepare.

“It’s because you know how some small towns work and lots a big cities don’t, an MAYBE can be sure that this small town don’t become the kind of city we all left behind us,” came from former freelance laborer turned union labor representative Liam Casey.

“And because honorable man who speaks language of tyrants cannot be tricked into being their servant, or enforcer,” Wang Lee quoted with a bow from somewhere in his vast and underappreciated academic training back in China.

“And because no one who wants to be President, or Governor, should be trusted with the job,” mused Union Pacific representative Walton, who had just finished building a mansion with four stories on main street informed me with a hearty pat on the back.

Mayor Colonel Adams, who still lived in a humble three story mansion bit his lip, then finally opened up with, “And since you’re a Yankee, maybe you can talk some sense into appointed Republican Governor Campbell . Or tell him something that’s wrong with him, so you can get him into your office, get talking about his own private matters with your tongue loosening medications. In this rapidly increasingly ethnically diverse powder-keg we find ourselves in, he smirked.

“Or your gift for extracting information from people that could be used against them,” Sheriff McDonald added before I could really read what was in Casey and Wang’s eyes as to the ‘truce’ each had, so far, established with regard to whether Irish or Chinese immigrants would have a chance to work themselves up the ladders of opportunity in Wyoming. “Which of course, you, Doc, would never do with us, because you’re a doctor, who is sworn to keep anything your patients tell you confidential,” the always heavily armed enforcer of the law ‘reminded’ me with an accusative stare..

“Yes, I am,” I replied to the congregation in the still smoke filled testosterone fueled room. “But I have a practice here that needs tending to,” I asserted.

“That can be taken care of in your absence by your Nurse, and apprentice, Delfina Valdez,” the Mayor asserted, taking back his throne. “Who’s a lot prettier than you to look at,” he added with a cordial grin under his recently re-grown mustache.

“And a lot better with her hands and head, as I heard you yourself said, from confidential sources who will be kept confidential, of course,” Pastor Johnson offered.

“Of course,” I nodded back, sensing that the meek, naïve, still wet behind his elephant ears Preacher was on to how I selectively spread things said to me in confidence to advance the effectiveness of my practice. Such did require certain manipulation of investments to obtain top grade instruments and medications. And I had become quite accomplished at planting seeds from one person’s head into another. How else could one grow an enlightened town in a highly unenlightened country. And derive a construct of the human psyche that would make me a Savior who could cure diseases of the collective human soul that the Almighty had decided were not worth eradicating. Indeed, such seemed to be Pastor Johnson’s ‘ends justify the means’ Mission as well, as I noted a



sinister maturity that overtook him, making him yet another adversary for my Mission here, and survival.

“And besides,” Mayor Adams said with a big, wide Southern Colonel smile, leaning back on his chair. “If you don’t represent us all equally and effectively, and don’t report back accurately, we’ll just have to hang you when you get back for dishonesty in the line of duty.”

The rest of the congregation laughed at the joke. I pretended to, knowing that it perhaps was time for me to try a new experiment with regard to making people do what was best for them, and me. Honesty, maybe. As I knew at that moment that on that day when I would become an outlaw, instead of the man who making the laws, I’d have to remember the code that ex-sheriff Pancho Fernandez was forced to live by. If you live outside the law or religion, that other artificial replacement for morality, you have to be honest, as the ultimate law of what goes around comes around works far more swiftly and intensely.

In any case, it became necessary to bring my experiment, and newly evolving psychologico-political perspective, into the political arena in Cheyenne. The town gave me a free first class ticket with a valet to carry my bags out at the other end on the railroad line that had just been completed. A line of steel and rails build with more blood, sweat tears and dead bodies of Irish and Chinese laborers than would ever reach the newspapers. The send off was complimented by a large basket containing six days supply of food of to keep my body in shape during the early winter journey, most notably featuring Catherine Brady’s can’t be beat strawberry-rhubarb preserves, Hanna’s surprisingly well spiced Tex-Mex Bavarian sausages, bannock from Thundercloud which were better than any scones I had ever experienced, and from Wang Lee, jerky from meat he mused was not obtained from either human or canine sources spiced with herbs that, he claimed anyway, would satisfy my sense of taste without altering my faculty to reason. I was also provided with a crate o of the finest local whiskey available in Utopia so I could endure the bankers, lawyers and other wannabe shitheads who I was warned about having to be friends with, a stipend of thirty dollars to use for appropriate ‘entertainment’ expenses with influential politicians. Topping it off was a new tweed suit with a selection of shirts made of cotton and silk, all free of blood stains and odors from other bodily fluids that I had somehow gotten used to.

But before setting out on the journey on the 2:15 train heading West on that very eventful Saturday, I lingered in Utopia for a few hours to witness another journey which was about to begin its first joyous steps into romantic bliss, in which I was to be a most honored participant.

Why Catherine Mary Brady felt I was, according to her, the kindness father she could ever wish for, I do not know. Perhaps it was because during all of those times she came to see me with injuries incurred by ‘accidents’ while married to her thankfully now dead husband, she appreciated my listening to her half stories and lies about home life, and perhaps the medical skills that allowed her to go back home on her two beaten, bruised and broken feet instead of a pine box so she could take care of her children. Children

who she insisted that I promise to take care of if anything happened to her. As such, it was my duty, and pleasure, to walk her down the aisle in Hanna's schoolhouse (a location she insisted was not haunted the demons who occupied Pastor Johnson's church) to be united with her new husband. Waiting for the gimpy, facially scared, still outwardly at best plain looking widow who finally did wear her 'going out for special occasions' dress, was none other than the handsomest bubba bearing eligible bachelor in town. Certainly Sheriff Sean McDonald could have done far better for himself with regard to a wife. Here he was, driven by a sudden sense of urgency which no one anticipated, marrying a thirty-five year old laundress, cook, housecleaner who most men endured rather than enjoyed looking at, who had three children to take care for, and whose only financial assets was a section of rocky un-farmable and arid barely-ranchable land to which she still had no legal claim after her husband had died. Still, Sheriff Sean wanted to take on responsibility of it all, including now being the ward of the 'garden of Eden' which Catherine's ex-husband bought as a homestead property. Yet, in his wedding vows, he promised to make Catherine as rich as any manor to the born English duchess, in ways that mattered. And to convert the wind-blown plot of scrub-grass he now was owner of into a paradise that produce 'apples of gold that the Good Lord wanted us to eat.'

It was a vicarious pleasure, seeing Mister and Mrs. McDonald hand in hand, strolling to the 'Just Married' wagon waiting for them after the ceremony. After seeing them drive away for their honeymoon, I turned to my own escort to the joyous occasion. "And where should we go for our honeymoon?" she asked me.

"Weren't we already living it, even before we got involved?" I replied.

"Yes, and no, but," she replied, gazing down at her belly. "What do you think?" she inquired speaking to something, or to her anyway, someone who had decided to take occupancy in her womb. A womb she and I thought was uninhabitable.

"You mean you are?" I asked the woman with whom I experienced years of Agape and Phillos with, but only one night of Eros.

"Yes, we are," she said with a warm, yet life-loving smile. Hoping that I would reply in kind.

A war between my mind and soul ensued. The former wanted to belt me in my own belly for jumping into waters I was not ready to swim in. The latter said that I had been standing on the hot, dry shore way too long. Both said that I would make a great father, and, perhaps if I tried hard enough, a decent husband. As for my reply to all of Delfina's unspoken questions regarding making her four still living, and all things considered, almost on their own younger siblings Aunts and Uncles within the next 8 months, I was speechless, unable to take the frozen look of shock off my face.

"We'll talk after you get back?" Delfina affirmed, as a question. "I know you have a lot of important business to conduct in Cheyenne at the Territorial Assembly, which will

affect both of us,” she stated, pulling her body away from me, averting her eyes to the horizon over which I had to disappear beyond.

“Which will affect ALL of us,” I self-observed myself saying, looking as fondly as I could, and dared to, at the mass of flesh which, once it acquired a brain in 5 months, would be my very alive child. I appended the freely interpretable pledge with a hug that firmly embraced Delfina’s shaking upper arm scapulas, and gently felt her abdomen, still, yes I know, still, yes I know, defining them in anatomical terms. Yet I could feel the muscular contractions of her cardiac tissue. She felt the beating of my heart, something which I was, due to my ‘noble profession’ or maybe lack of humanity, unable to do. Perhaps such had to do about me being all about doing, and her about ...being.

## CHAPTER 10

The first meeting of the Wyoming Territorial Assembly took place at Rollings House in Cheyenne, a humble two story building which resembled on the outside every other store in town built with whatever lumber was available to men whose fingers sported blisters obtained by doing hard work rather than gold rings obtained by doing less of such. On the inside, such was a different and hastily put together story. At the 'get together' on the first floor of the establishment vacated of whatever wares it sold prior to first gavel of the assembly hall upstairs, there was plenty of cigars, food, liquor and, to my disappointment, bullshit. Representatives from all over the Territory lost no time introducing themselves to me by name, location from which they hailed, and how successful they were at what they did. Perhaps the latter boast was so I could not see who they really were. Cattlemen boasted about how many head of cows bearing their brand. Saloon owners ranted on about the 'international' sources of the human entertainment they imported, the amount of spirits ingested and the sophisticated quality of the clients. Lawyers pontificated about how they saved good men from hanging. Law Enforcement officers regaled me with accounts about how they brought bad ones to the gallows. Bankers proclaimed how the assets of their establishments. Owners of mining companies provided unsolicited reports about how much wealth they had extracted from the ground, and the amount of manpower or machinery it took to get it.

Due to my knowledge about their various businesses, the source of which I didn't reveal of course, I knew that they were lying about their assets, wealth and worth. And that they were smart enough to provide facts that most anyone else would not be able to verify. Indeed, they wore as well as spoke 'embellishment of the truth' as well as fabrication of lies. There was no shortage of men with bald spots on their head which they hid from others, and probably themselves, with comb-overs. As for their attire, each man present adorned his torso with garb that accentuated the strongest and most powerful aspects of their pathetically common and often ugly anatomy, from shoulder pads to boots with lifts in them, to corsets that pushed their fat bellies up into their ribs. Then again, such was nothing new in American politics, all the way back to the days of George Washington. Father of our perhaps one day great country who claimed that he 'never told a lie'. The master of stealth and deception during the Revolutionary War who had his uniforms tailor made to look like a invisible god of a General. And whose Presidential suits made the old man look like a spry Sage who would never age and who received instructions from, and at times dictated them to, the Almighty above.

Indeed, there were many issues to be discussed at this forum for Frontier Democracy. Most seemed to be related one way of another to be about the prospect of Statehood for the 20,000 citizens of Wyoming, a region which would have to no doubt acquire more people and exportable wealth to qualify for that benefit. And most importantly for the right to have a Governor we elected ourselves rather than one assigned to us by President, and in his own way, still General Ulysses S. Grant. Republican John A Campbell, with his long 'reverend' beard and fat cat belly, waddled his way through the crowd of us commoners, shaking hands with us, asking us our names like Headmaster would to a group of boys at the first day of school. How much he was getting paid in money, glory,

compliments, land, or women other than his wife for 'taking care' of us Western ruffians, I don't know. But I do know that there was an agenda we all had to address, whose outcome we were all responsible for.

Prominent on the agenda we were going to discuss after stuffing our faces with food and hopefully not pickling our brains too much with free spirits was the Railroad Issue. Would the Union Pacific Railroad, who somehow had now owned most of the coal rich regions of the Territory, be our new rulers? Indeed, we came to need them to transport both us as well as imported and exported goods, and coal was needed to keep not only the trains moving but our own dwellings warm in winter and machinery operating year round. And there was no shortage of Railroad bosses who stole more than their share of pastry from the cookie jar than even Utopia's own 'sticky fingers' Walton.

There was the Yellow issue. What to do about Chinese laborers who were paid half as much as those with White or Black skin, yet did two times the work, in a world where those with the money always preferred to hire those who worked cheapest and hardest. And there were the 'smart slant eyes', like Wang Lee, who knew how to integrate with we pale faced round eyes who would, according to anyone with open oculars, potentially overtake us economically and otherwise. Such is what I saw in the faces of the slim Chinese cooks who provided food at this function for us to fill our already overfed bellies.

Then there was the Black issue. The sparsely populated wide open spaces of Wyoming provided an opportunity for emancipated slaves to become everything they could be. Black soldiers, none of whom had been granted any rank above Sergeant of course, had distinguished themselves in the War between the States, and they were on their way to becoming the best soldiers to keep the frontier safe from renegades, bandits and hostile Indians. One fifth of the cowboys moving cattle herds and maintaining them had black skin. Utopia's own Noah Winters was the most trusted cattleman and valued horseman in Utopia, even after having lost a leg. But, if honestly asked...how many White fathers, even those who wore blue in the War to Preserve the Union and End Slavery, would take to one of his daughters marrying a Colored suitor. Or having a man of color become his supervisor, boss or military commander? I was reminded of how far we were liberation of this oppressed race by the looks of anger and subservience on the faces of the Negro 'butlers' and maids at this event.

Then there was the Red issue. What to do about the Indians, most of whom dwelled now, to the best of their ability, as their wheel-lacking, hunter and gatherer ancestor had, in the Northern region of a Territory that would no doubt extend its influence beyond the belt of towns in the southern regions. No representatives of that 'problem' were present at the banquet, except of course for perhaps their scalps as wigs on the heads of two elderly follically-challenged gentlemen at the function.

Then there was the Brown issue. What do with, for or to the Mexicans who had been legally de-possessioned from their land and hard earned social station by Anglos with paler skin than theirs. Such very much included Delfina, the most intelligent, gracious and law

abiding woman I ever met, and Pancho Fernandes, ex-Sheriff, now bandit, who was taking it upon himself to rob from the rich and who really did give most, and sometimes all, of that stolen booty to the poor. “We should send the strongest of them to Canada, and cart the rest of them illiterate Wetbacks back south of the Rio Grande, if we know what’s good for us, and them,” I heard from one of my fellow assembly members who was, thankfully for him, and perhaps me, far enough away for me not deliver a violent and emotionally charged retort prior to the debate upstairs.

There was the Union issue of course. What to do about ‘godless’ Anarchists like Liam Casey, who was determined that men cursed, and blessed, to have to earn an honest living to feed their families bring home as much bacon as the lazy fat cat bosses above him who had stumbled onto or inherited their wealth.

There was the alcohol issue. Over indulgence in spirits were the leading causes of brawls, domestic abuse, depression and, in all too many of my patients, death. Perhaps liquor could be taxed in the hope that people would drink responsibly, an experiment that Lincoln had tried with amazing success economically and, according to some reports I read, otherwise.

There as the cattle vs sodbuster issue of course, to see whether the big wide open wild grasslands of Wyoming would be turned into ranches to produce meat or farms to produce wheat, barley, corn and other plants that could be eaten directly by us, or converted into spirits to alter out mentation. And between the cattlemen as to what imported livestock had the honor to be raised by us, raisers of cows reminding everyone that sheep ate down the grasslands so low that it prevented any kind of cattle or horse grazing, the ‘sheepers’ (whose odor even I could smell, no matter how well they washed their boots) insisting that if the beef producers wanted coats to keep them warm in winter, they would need wool coats made from lambs. Of course the emerging farm barons ignored the fact that they were making the land bleed with the plow, as Thundercloud stated so many times, and that they were creating an artificial environment which the wind would one day blow away, leaving a dust bowl in its wake. The beef barons made up very believable lies about how buffalo meat was toxic to the brain, claiming that the reason why Indians were so technologically behind the rest of the world was because their diet consisted of such. And the sheep people claimed that ‘medical studies’ from a famous group of investigators as Harvard, who I knew to be fictitious, claimed that eating lamb meat made you both ‘smarter in the board room and more potent in the bedroom.’

Underneath and over every other issue of course there was the honesty in government issue, which of course every man said he championed above all of the others in a new territory, for a new vision. I glanced into mirror, to see if there was at least one face in the reflection to whom this was the key issue. I did see one, in form of a thin gentlemen with a large handlebar mustache who happened move to my side.

“You must be the politically unaffiliated Doc from Utopia,” he said to me with a Virginian accent.

“Someone has to be,” I replied, feeling the need for joke to break the tension and the relief of a smile briefly cracking into my cheeks. “And you are?” I asked the gentlemen, not wanting or for reasons beyond me, caring how he recognized me.

“William Bright, Democrat, from South Pass City,” he said, extending his hand to me. “Who is about to propose a bill that Republican Fat Cat Campbell probably will shut down, then laugh at. Then make every other red blooded self-absorbed man in the room laugh at,” he continued, his optimistic voice diminishing into defeatism, or worse, learned helplessness, looking at a folded piece of paper in his breast pocket.

“Not everyone,” I said, not knowing what he was proposing but somehow sensing that it was important, most particularly because I smelled not an whiff of bullshit, or booze, coming from his mouth. “Can I see that proposal?”

With caution, the pride, Assemblyman Bright gave me the paper. Upon folding it, I felt and smelt sweat on it, the hands of many men having been on it. But the writing was readable, bold and jumped out of me from the page.

“So, being a Utopian, can I have your support on this bill?” he asked. “Giving half of humanity we have been ignoring, neglecting and abusing the right to vote, hold office, serve on juries, own property and---”

“Get equal pay for equal work,” I interjected, reading the words that had heard from so many women in Utopia, from those who cleaned laundry to those who dirtied it while pleasuring male clients under the sheets. “Yes, indeed.” I found myself saying, a sense of purpose coming into my life, somehow. “But as for the others here?” I continued, looking over the room of men.

“We have some allies here,” Bright continued as he took back the bill, then inserted it into his pocket over his heart. “And some tools of persuasion that, well, we do have to employ in...” the Southern gentleman who spoke like a dedicated Northern Abolitionist retrieved a pocket-watch from his right vest pocket. “Just a few minutes from now,” he said as I noted in its lid, a picture of a woman with eyes like Delfina’s and a face like Sally Ann Adams in its case. “My wife,” John said regarding the woman. “Who deserves us doing what we can, even if we lose. For her sake, as well as our daughters, and sons.”

“For mine as well,” I added, presenting a picture of my own new family with my voice and eyes to the best of my ability.

“Before I left, Julie convinced me that we need a female perspective represented in the ole boy’s club, and our lives, so we don’t destroy each other in the process of trying to better than each other,” her related with determination and kindness. “Inspired by a soul awakening talk she had with---”

“---Ester Morris?” I self observed myself interjecting, after which I tried to pull back my invasion into this seemingly enlightened man’s private moment.

“Yes,” Bright said. “Who should have been given the right to be in attendance here, but wasn’t,” he bitterly protested.

“But who maybe can speak through us?” I proposed. Yes, it was a political slogan that as banal as it was pretentious, but it evoked enough respect from Bright for me to propose another question that I wanted more than needed to be answered. “How did your wife, or perhaps others, convince you to champion this liberation? This liberation of this group of oppressed people that, potentially, can lead to liberation of all oppressed people. Even us. Enable you to see the world through her eyes, and the potential for such an expansion of consciousness?”

Bright held back the answer, his tight lips keeping the details of whatever happened to him or his hometown of South Pass City behind his averted eyes. Finally, after deciding that the details were too important, personal or incriminating, he turned to me. “We had a talk,” he said a born again liberator as well as crafty politician. “And you?”

Quicker with deception than he was, for better or worse, I forewent the aversion of my oculars, saying to him, “We had a talk as well.”

A bell rang, summoning us up the stairs from the cigar smoke filled room, above the cloud of fragrant tobacco. Feeling like a mortal being invited to confer with the gods atop Olympus, I walked up the staircase, Assemblyman Bright to my right and the spirit of my yet to be born daughter on my left. Or perhaps the soul inhabiting that felt but as yet unidentified ether was---



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----“ME?” Melanie replied, finding herself closer to finding some kind of connection to the still unnamed former Doctor, now madman, that she yearned to know, but seemed to want to deny as the sun set over what, for the moment, was still the Western horizon.

“Yes, my child,” Doctor Melanie’s newly discovered grandfather replied, turning around to her, the sun illuminating emotions of fondness, as well as a full expression of madness, no matter which side of his face you looked at. “And, as you know, certain traits do skip generations,” the Old Healer assured the young Doctor as he lit another lantern with an oil which he poured out slowly, then hung with reverancy onto a rope he released from the roof which was tied in was hangman’s noose. “No blood on it so far, and used for hanging inorganic objects only, so far,” came from a face whose left side was possessed by grief, the other by unfulfilled rage.

Melanie felt the fire of the lantern with her skin more intensely than her eyes saw the intensity of light that it emitted. There was the option of running with feet that could outstep ‘grandpa’s’ knobby arthritic hindlimbs. But where to go? And what half truths would haunt her for the rest of her, hopefully, long life?

“You undoubtedly have questions about the rest of the proceedings at the Rollings House Assembly Hall,” he said as he hobbled over to the cupboard, then retrieved two jars that smelled like had the odor of lard. Having laid them on the stove, he reached down to the bottom of a large barrel, pulling out a large potato. “Pomme de terre, en francais,” he said. “Warum wir heissen diese das?”

“Apple of the earth... Why do we call it that?” Melanie translated from Doc’s immaculately pronounced French and German. “Some things we do because we do them,” she continued, in Spanish.

“And some things we do because they befall us,” Doc answered as he took out a knife, gently peeling the potato then, abruptly and for no reasons, demolishing it into small pieces if it was a snake discovered in the Garden of Eden. Then, nearly doing the same to the fingers on his nine and a half-digit hands. Melanie halted the conversion of those hands into eight finger appendages with a firm grasp of his wrist, and gentle laying of hands on his shoulder.

“So,” she said as she led him away from the blood soaked potato, then under the lantern hanging from the noose. She eased his shaking body onto the most steady chair she could find, then took over the culinary skills. “So while I cook us both some of Hanna’s tastefully bland potato pancakes, as a prelude to me reading my mother Delfina’s account of what happened in the diary you will miraculously be able to find tomorrow morning after breakfast, tell me about what happened at the Rollings House Assembly Hall.”

Life came into the old man's dying face, light surging into his sunken eyes, pushing them back into the land of the living.

## CHAPTER 12

There were newspapers at the time, providing half truths on good days, believable lies on the bad ones. But, as now, and always, any reader who is unable to smell the bullshit or feel the hope between the lines should be disallowed the privilege of literacy. Part of the deal that Prometheus back in Ancient Greece didn't consider when his fellow gods allowed him to experiment with democracy in his time. But as for my time, the newspapers had ample pictures of me with John Bright, seeming to be comrades in arms for the most innovative legislation West or East of the Mighty Mississippi.

As for the reason why men who valued and needed superiority over woman to feel like men, there were several well-worded and logically-official reasons why they gave the members of the fairer and more sensitive gender the right to vote, own property, hold public office, and receive equal pay for equal work. As the newspapers and other distributors of printed impressions of the real world, wrote, that legislation would 'attract women of culture, breeding and intelligence to move to Wyoming so as to create an environment for families in Wyoming which would enrich the quality of life, promote population growth towards required for statehood, and result in wealth, peace harmony and sustainable happiness.'

Such is what William Bright stated elegantly before the first ballot, which we lost, a little known and for most part lost fact. As for what I said to my fellow penis bearing compadres during the recess before the second ballot, I appealed to their lesser virtues. I reminded them that in a Territory where there are 6 men to one woman, there were slim pickings indeed if one wanted a wife, mistress or lover. And as for extracting pleasure from women who were paid to provide the illusion that they were any of the above for an hour or a night, I informed them of new transmittable diseases which were on the rise at the brothels in Utopia and other towns, which I was honor-bound as a doctor to not reveal. I related to them that the afflicted man were impotent for life as well as blind and paralyzed from the waist down if they accidentally had any carnal dealings with the pleasure providing women, particularly the asymptomatic carries of the yet to be medically named disease. I also reminded them that a happy wife who thinks that she has a voice in politics is one that is less likely to make your life less miserable. I assured the gentlemen at the assembly lobby while puffing cigars and sipping whiskey, in private and in selected groups they formed on their own, that most women would tire of law making, doing the same job as a man does, and the burdens of land ownership very quickly and return to their natural station in life as nurturers and baby makers at the earliest opportunity. To those seeking political office above their current station, I reiterated that a wife will vote the way her husband does, thus doubling his impact at the ballot box. And as for the ballot box, the old and never provable maxim that 'it's not who does the voting but who counts to ballots'.

Whether it was William Bright's wisdom or my trickery, or a secret bribe from Esther Morris' secret treasure box, I don't know, but on the second ballot, his Proposal passed.

You no doubt know, or should know that before Christmas 1869, ‘Granny’ Louisa Ann Swain of Laramie was the first American woman to cast a vote in a State, Territorial or Federal election since 1819 in New Jersey. Three other fellow Wyomingans of her gender in Wyoming would become justice of the peace with a matter of weeks, Ester Morris being the first.

As for the free people of Utopia who entrusted their freedom to others via the ballot box, there were several issues up for grabs. One was the yearly re-election of Mayor, which, for the first time in 6 years, did not go to Colonel Joseph Adams, but to a write-in candidate.

“So, you seem to be some kind of hero after what you did in Cheyenne to the 50 percent of voters who wear skirts instead of those who have the balls to use their brains,” Adams blasted into my bloodshot, sleep deprived eyes when as he stormed into the Beefery café refilling my stomach, and replenishing my nerves, between having spent all morning extracting a bladder stone from a cowboy from Laramie, and preparing to remove a cancerous lump from a breast which hopefully had not spread to the bearer’s liver, kidneys and lungs. “Congratulations,” he said, adopting a more civilized demeanor, extending his hand to me.

“I had no idea they would elect me, really, Colonel Adams,” I related, and confessed as I shook his hand and invited him to join me in a lunch where the steak delivered to me seemed too much like human flesh for me to have any more appetite for. “The last thing I ever wanted to do here after leaving Boston was to hold political office.”

“Which is why maybe it’s time that you should,” the deposed Mayor replied as he grabbed a half cracked mug from the adjacent table. He poured a generous portion of my non-fermented hot apple cider into it. “To those who are great at doing their job because they really want to do something else,” he proposed as a toast.

“True enough,” I said, knowing that amongst the other secrets about me that former Mayor Adams had was the fact that I became a doctor because people needed healing, rather than because I enjoyed taking care of them. And that whatever fascination I had with the human condition it was about what was the psychology between the ears, not the various physical maladies below the neck.

I didn’t have the sand, or stupidity, to ask what Adams was going to do, now. What real Purpose he had to get up out of bed for every morning now that he wasn’t Mayor, and that the Confederate Army he had been a Colonel was now four long years disbanded. But he did have some advice for me, delivered as a friend, before he would turn into an enemy in the political, and perhaps other arenas.

“Liberating oppressed people isn’t as easy and quick as you think,” he related and confessed as he rose onto his two very steady feet. “Your fellow Yankee carpetbaggers back home are going to learn, just as we did when Georgia was my home, that if you give oppressed and enslaved people of Color too quickly, they will turn their plows into

swords and use them not only against us, but their most well intentioned liberators, and against themselves. Which you will learn, all too painfully, in this present experiment of yours in women's liberation." Having finished spinning that fairy tale spun in Dixie to keep the Darkies under foot after Emancipation, and in Wyoming to keep the Indians out of the civilization we were bringing in to the wilderness, he bid me a good day with a bow of his head and tip of his hat.

But I had other matters to deal with other than baby-sitting, or watching, a disgruntled, smooth talking and, when pushed to it, ruthless ex-Confederate who had lost the second Lost Cause of his life. I was to be a husband. And, courtesy of the extra tissue in Delfina's uterus which she didn't dispose of, even though it would have made life easier and less complicated for both of us, I was to be a father with my own family. "A family of only THREE, including you and me!" Delphina growled at me every time I asked her to imagine us with a photograph full of children, half bearing her last name, half carrying mine. many "Unless we have twins of course. But no matter how many of few babies I have to give birth to, this ONCE, we will raise it or them TOGETHER."

On the walk up to the alter at the ceremony officiated by a new Justice of the Peace, Hanna Steiner, I secretly wondered why Delfina, who was more loving to children who became my patients than I ever was, and who guided every first, second, third and fourth time mother in the county through pregnancy, delivery and the depression accompanying the joy of having a newborn child, did not want to have children of her own. Perhaps it was the three other Hispanics bearing the Valdez name who had found their way to the ceremony. Delfina's little brother and significantly younger sisters who she had to raise, alone, as a duty rather than a passion. The duty of raising parentless siblings that left no energy and less time for her own travel, education, professional development or romantic inclinations. Indeed, had I not run into Delfina the year her younger siblings had finally acquired the life experience, sand and ability to take care of themselves, our inevitable meeting would never have happened. Such is what I thought to myself when I danced with her at the reception, an open invitation to everyone, an all the food you could eat and all the non-alcoholic beverages you could throw down your gullet. Some called it a political move, but based on the number of drunks whose bodies I had to put together after a brawl, or I had to bury if there were any guns or knives around during those altercations, it was both a smart and compassionate political gesture.

Still, people being more destructive than they are kind to each other, or themselves, Gunderson brought a complimentary keg of beer to the celebration. Along with enough of his pleasure providing girls to insure the citizens of Utopia that it would not be turned into a community of gelded, church going men and emasculating women. Such would, the self-proclaimed English Lord hoped, tempt the married men to dance with women other than their wives, who would extract vengeance at home, and thus more desire for said men to seek out comfort, companionship and love with his 'courtesans' at the Wildcat. Union Pacific Supervisor Walton supplied the railroad workers with Irish Whisky and Chinese rice wine, along with a new foreman charged with telling the 'Chinks' that the Irish considered them as subhuman, and the Micks that their slant-eyed

co-workers on the rails and the coal mines were conspiring to undercut them in wages, stealing their jobs.

The winners in the brawl would be chosen to take the place of the losers on the rails, culling the herd of weaklings. Former Mayor and Confederate Colonel Joseph Adams provided to Noah Winters, Alicia, and any other Negroid of African descent with a large jug from his 'special stock' which Wang Lee sampled first, noting that it contained loco weed and was intended to convert those Colored pioneers into 'crazed monkeys' to prove his point about their inability to handle freedom or social responsibility. The accusation was not affirmed, the demonstration stopped by Adam's wife, Sally Ann, who accidentally slipped on an apple core, sending the bottle onto a rock, and transforming it to pieces.

But some firewater did get into enough of the attendees, many of whom I didn't know, to start the most favorite past-time for men released from their inhibitions. I do not know who started the fist fight that became a knife fight amongst the large group of guests, then a gun fight started by riders who arrived at the top of the hill overlooking the yard outside Hanna's schoolhouse. No bullets hit their mark, but they did stop the knife and fist fights.

Delfina and me were called into action as Doctors, adorning her white dress and my brown Rollings House Assembly suit with red blood from the wounded. Sheriff McDonald gathered together his deputies, and all of the men who came to the occasion with firearms, and fired upon the riders atop the hill. They all fled as soon as they were fired on, except for one of them, who charged our assembly bearing a rifle which he then held up in the air, displaying a white flag. Delfina's now fully grown Mexican brother and two sisters welcomed Pancho Fernandez, the outlaw who kept them fed during three harsh winters during which mother nature and their Anglo neighbors did everything possible to starve and freeze them out of the valley. McDonald didn't. He and his men pointed their rifles and revolvers at the now heavily bearded as well as overly moustached Hispanic Robin Hood sporting bandeerlo spurs, hand-embroidered chaps and a sombrero. He halted his horse, retrieved a folded up piece of paper containing the likeness of a wanted man, and threw it into McDonald's face. "An enemy of you haves and my have nots," Fernandez proclaimed after which he flicked his Winchester towards a man in the crowd who had ducked his head while attempting to slither out of the crowd, then fired into his left leg, converting the scoundrel into the snake in the grass that he was. "Wanted for robbery, murder and rape in Texas! Irrespective of what color their skin was!" Fernandes proclaimed. "I've been tracking him now, and trust that you, Sheriff McDonald, will see that justice is done. Credit for bringing him in and reward money goes to you, in exchange for---"

"---You riding off into the hills, and disallowing any of us to collect reward money on you, Pancho?" McDonald challenged, pointing the business end of his Colt at the gentleman bandit's head.

"Yes," the Mexican train robber, cattle rustler and some said murderer replied with a confident smile. After which he put his finger in his mouth, emitting a shrilling whistle. No less than twenty riflemen in the overlying hills, this time representing all hues of

human skin, made their presence and marksmanship known, firing shots in a circle around McDonald and his posse. A few of the latter pissed in their pants. McDonald kept his composure, but not his temper. Most particularly when Pancho passed by Delfina and me, dropping off a knapsack held together with elegant bows and ribbon. “A wedding gift, Doctors, for you,” he said to us. “And reading material for the rest of you,” he boldly proclaimed to the congregation..

Fernandez then rode back up into the hills, which seemed now to be more home to him than the house, job and occupation he once held in Utopia as Sheriff. I leaned on Delfina’s small framed and surprising not shaking shoulder to note the copy of the book inside the napsack. As did Hanna, the justice of the peace who had just officially married us. “The Communist Manifesto” Hanna noted. “Which says that...”

“---Each should give according to their abilities and take according to their needs, in universal and equal compassion for all,” I interjected, using some of the words in the book and some of my own, somehow feeling taken in to becoming a subject in my own experiment, or as some would say in politics, reaching that point of buying into your own bullshit. “Universal and equal compassion for all, especially guests at our wedding that’s supposed to celebrate life,” I continued, turning my righteous ‘Mayor’ grimace into as playful a smile as I could muster, bringing Delfina into my arms in a comradry hug. “And who pledge to charge lower prices than anyone else in Wyoming for our medical services.”

“Or nothing at all, for those who can’t afford it. Equal and medical care for all. Irrespective of how much money you have, the color of your skin or whether you pee sitting down or standing up. Paid for by taxing those who can so easily afford to be generous, and thus insuring their entry into heaven as, it’s easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to get through the Pearly Gates right Mister, Doctor, Professor Mayor?” Delfina added, to mad applause of the have not men, most of the women, and everyone not bearing white skin. And the unspoken anger of most of the have’s, and a tinge of guilt on the rest of that portion of Utopian’s new humanity.

In that magical moment where we were both more together than any other, we shared the loud applause, hushed boos, and fear tinged optimism in sociopolitical game which was now winner take all rather than academic speculation. It was capped off by a dance, to Beethoven’s Ode to Joy, the rousing praise of brotherhood and sisterhood given voice in its original German by none other than tone deaf but infinitely expressive Schoolmarm Hanna with subsequent musical accompaniment to the simple melody on fiddle, harmonica, banjo, spoons and, in the spirit of honoring the humor Ludwig put into his later compositions, farts and belches from the happily inebriated.

After the open invitation wedding which Pastor Johnson did not attend, and cursed as ‘a marriage of a Papist Hispanic demoness and atheistic heretic’, Delfina and I hitched the horse she had ridden during the bet that started off the gender experiment to a wagon that took both of use, with no shortage of creative persuading of said equine driver, to the

small ranch her father had carved out of the wilderness which, in a very short period of time, was located on the outskirts of a town which had expanded into a city.

As for our division of labors outside of child rearing, Delfina took over most of my job as the town Doctor, which was made far easier after the arrival of her diploma from Medical School in Spain, a forged document with elegantly falsified verification of such that I paid good money for which I insisted she keep on the wall. Though Doctor Defina balked at the prospect of revealing that aspect of her past to her old friends, and to newcomers to Utopia, I reminded her on more than one occasion that most patients need to be tricked into accepting the medicine they need, and that most people would prefer a confidence-building lie to the raw and often scary truth.

As Mayor, I tended to the maladies encountered by a small town which was rapidly on its way to becoming a big city, in part due to the influx of single, marryable women from the Eastern US, California, and more than a few adventurous and love-scorned ladies from Europe. And several booming, not yet conflicting, 'industries', as they were now being called. Cattle multiplied to such numbers that they rivaled the once-plentiful herds of buffalo, which were being massacred for big money for their hides, and of course to 'encourage' the bison-dependent Indians to give up their old way of life and become 'civilized Christians', or dead heathens. Railroad tracks were being laid faster than a prospector who had just struck pay-dirt and decided to share the wealth with every lady in sight. Coal was coming out of the hills as fast as grass was growing on the flats, many of those flatlands spewing out large deposits of oil when shot then drilled into. Gold was discovered in the riverbanks around Utopia, providing instant wealth for those who could find it, and even more wealth for merchants in town selling prospecting gear, garb and garbanzo beans to those who thought they could find it. The number of saloons, hotels and distilleries tripled. Two theaters emerged from the dust of what had been little more than a trapper's general store and trading post 10 years earlier, featuring concerts, plays and operas as good as any in Boston, not only because of their refinement, but a new fresh brand of intensity. Two newspapers were established, the Utopian Chronical, a fledgling endeavor which pledged to be telling the truth, and The Western Voice, a more picture than print publication, that made more money manufacturing believable lies. Instead of buying everything one needed at a general store on the only street in town, wares were distributed into a plethora of establishments lining a network of streets. The quickly built and often filled shops specialized in clothing, feed for horses, food for people, saddles and tack, kitchen utensils, building supplies as well as, thankfully for Hanna's students, books to teach people how to read as well as a variety of volumes to satiate the appetite for learning what one's elders and betters didn't pass down, or didn't know.

One event which revealed the mixed blessing which Utopia had become was in the form of a motorized cart. Between operating the telegraph office and maintaining every piece of machinery within town and county limits, Jakov Lazinski finally built his horse-less carriage, blessing it with a Hebraic prayer after inserting the last belt on its engine and giving it the name 'Solomon'. True, Solomon lost the race around town with its four legged equine competitor, Black Thunder, along with a plethora of investors who would



fund the industrius Jewish inventor's other ideas. But there were still a handful of men with rich pockets and at least two women of ill repute with still not found fortunes of their own who believed Solomon to be the transportation of the future.

Unlike her fellow pleasure-providing dance hall sisters Kitty, naturally found her way to sabotaging herself financially with bad luck at the poker table and poor judgements with legitimate business risk taking. As such, she was stuck in the occupation she hated so much which she was so good at. The overly seasoned but still 'hot and spicy' when she had to be courtesan extended the right of women to vote to the right of all working women, no matter what their profession, to organize, with her at the helm of the movement.

When called to tend to a 'womanly' medical problem that Kitty (who still never revealed her real last name to me) insisted I was more qualified to deal with than Delfina, she asked me if I, as a male Mayor, could work with her as a female 'Mayoress'. To ensure that her fellow pleasure providing sisters could enjoy their jobs as long as they could, and endure them as long as necessary, with protection from harm from problem clients, and from getting underpaid by their bosses. It was one of many conversations I had with her, in private, to protect my reputation, and her safety. With the help of some lies I had to convert into believable truths about some of Utopia's most powerful male citizens, and the facts Kitty and selected fellow pleasure-providers were able to find out about clients when they were under their carnal spells, we were able to establish, and implement, a Union of sorts which most of the pleasure-providers did join. The ones who mattered anyway.

Kitty's still job-loving pleasure-providing courtesan Lilly had amassed a fortune in tip money from customers. She funneled a substantial portion of it to Lazinski to develop an improved engine fueled by oil extracted from the ground with a pole rather than coal that had to be carved out of the mountains by men with black lungs and, if the mountain decided it didn't like caves blasted into them, crushed bodies. As well as to devices to use in the bedroom which would make her job more comfortable, and her clients' experience of it more exciting. Devices that Jakov had tested himself with her as his hand poked assistant on more than one occasion, to assess their 'safety'. Because of his indispensability as an inventor or fixer of all things mechanical, still very-Jewish (in appearance and speech) Jakov Lazinski was allowed all the legal rights and semi-legal benefits afforded, by law, to 'honest Christian men and women.' Not so for his Jewish Slavic wife, Tasha, who despite her advanced intelligence, failed every literacy and test required to vote, run for public office, serve on a jury or to operate a business of her own within now CITY limits. Tests that I myself would fail. Perhaps such was because of Lilly's intervention or the other elements of exclusion which allowed some liberated women more freedom than others.

Wealth, favor, elevation in social station and respect, but unfortunately not love, came to Hanna Steiner, but not so to her red-skinned friend, and in some ways smarter assistant, Lydia Thundercloud. The half-Indian and half-White 'sidekick' who made no effort to mask her First Nations background in appearance or voice, found herself, 'for public

'hygiene' reasons banned from the voting booth, the jury box and many merchant's establishment, which tragically very much included both book stores, even though she bathed more than any white woman in town, even Hanna, for whom a new schoolhouse was built with new books, offered to her if she promised to be less 'political' and more 'pleasing to the public morality and welfare'.

Kitty and Lilly had no shortage of upscale male (and clandestinely-adventurous female) clients in profession as pleasure-providers in said clients' hotel rooms. Black as coal Alicia could only entertain men, or adventurous women, in her 'assigned place' back room behind the Wildcat Saloon, in an abandoned barn outside of town, or a rentable tent in a new all yellow region of Utopia known as 'Chinaville'.

Catherine Mary Brady, having been married to still Sheriff, by election, Sean McDonald, had served on several juries involving unruly drunk cowboys and caught red handed rustler, being thanked by even the visiting male judges for her service with respect, and her Sheriff husband later at home with affection. Until she, along with fellow 'Mick' (and perhaps love interest, by the way they looked at each other during the trial) Liam Casey, was part of jury convicted a railroad boss (under millionaire big boss Walton's command) for murdering one of the many Chinese laborers under Wang Lee's protection, and guidance. The railroad boss somehow escaped Sean McDonald's Wyoming jail, then re-surfaced in Colorado, where he became rich working for another boss at the Union Pacific. From that day onward, Catherine was seldom seen in town, and when she was, it was with her slender arm folded under Sheriff Sean's elbow, her head bowed, saying little or nothing when spoken to. "Fine," she would answer to any sincerely asked "how are you doing" be it from a man or a woman. Particularly regarding the bruises on her face, her worsening limp and on the day her bonnet fell off, revealing a hastily chopped off head of straggly hair. And even more so when asked about plans she had for the land she inherited from her dead ex-husband, which now belonged to 'the happily married couple'. When asked by Hanna, and me, about the whereabouts of her children, who had stopped attending both church and school, Catherine's bowed her head, her hidden mouth remaining. The reply provided by Sheriff McDonald was "special tutors and tailor-made religious instruction in preparation for a quality international and prestigious education," delivered with a cordial smile and the kind of gleam in the eye that only came out of a gambler who was holding a royal flush, waiting for the right time to show his hand. What McDonald was holding onto that was so valuable, I didn't know. But sure as shooting, if anyone found out, they would get a whole lot more than a bruised eye or mangled leg. Indeed, on two of my emergency house calls in his region of the county, I did find human flesh and bone between the pits of quicksand on the outskirts of the property. Which disappeared upon my return from saving the living. But, as Delfina told me many times regarding Sheriff Sean, it was he who stopped former Mayor and ex-Colonel Joseph Adams from beating his wife Sally Ann to death while trying to find his stolen purpose, dignity and manhood at the bottom of a bottle of rockgut, then made him sleep it off in a private, unobserved jail cell. Then negotiated a truce between Sally Ann and 'Colonel Joe' that they maintained, for the sake of their children. But, sometimes self-sabotaging women like Catherine, the good

Sheriff's wife, actually do fall on their faced and injure their legs milking cows the wrong way, truth be told.

As Mayor, I of course tried to legislate laws that would secure basic morality, and honor, with some degree of success. Along with my own statues to trick people into doing what, to me anyway, was the right thing. As part of my social experiment of course. But as the years went by, I became increasingly argued with at the council table, then outvoted, but still kept in office. Perhaps as torture for my manipulative offenses, or perhaps because I was being manipulated by someone.

Yes, Utopia was becoming a real, populated, prosperous and, as I silently indulged myself in enjoying, more interesting community on its way to Statehood, and more. A community of dysfunctional yet cooperative rugged individualists which initially scoffed at the arrival of lawyers and bankers, yet who found themselves somehow needing them, and in many cases, becoming them. But, civilization is built on laws, and funded by money. And outlaws, particularly Pancho Fernandez, who robbed from the rich, vicious and undeserving, and gave to the poor, were wanted more than ever. Wanted by the Law in posters, with increasing rewards on their head that were never collected, thankfully. Perhaps if I was an effective mayor, or became governor, I could pardon this Hispanic Robin Hood, or at least put into law a permit allowing him to do the right thing for the those who had nothing. Those who were paid increasingly less money by those who got increasingly more, who had become expendable labor, be they yellow, brown, red or white.

But the most eventful event of my six years as, for the most part, an unopposed, respected and sometimes even liked mayor was my daughter, Isabel, the most intelligent child I had ever known and, as a result of such, the most relatable to, at least for me. By four months of age she was speaking words. Five months later those words were linked into coherent and learned sentences. By the age of one and a half, they were linked into questions about how the world works that seemed to contain answers to what I was thinking. By the age of three and a half, she was outmaneuvering me at chess as a mistress of deception, and in Socratic arguments involving logic and reason. Soon after learning to read my dark haired, blue eyed, more white than olive-skinned daughter had devoured every book in my library, then asked to see the ones I was writing, which I did share with her and no one else, even her mother. A day after her fifth birthday, Isabelle was sent to 'Aunt Hanna's' schoolhouse for her further education, due to Delfina's mounting medical responsibilities (so she told me anyway) and my Mayoral duties in Utopia, as well as representative functions in Cheyenne. She did arithmetic problems in her head faster than Hanna, or math whiz Lydia Thundercloud, could do on the new chalkboard. Brand new chalkboards from private investors along with primers and writing materials, and the rest of their expanded building, which Hanna and Thundercloud could keep if they educated children in how to integrate into the New West instead of constantly revolutionizing it, of course.

During private sessions as well as when surrounded by fellow students in the now three room school house, my daughter 'Queen Isabel' would initiate unsolicited debates with Hanna as soon as the German born Democratic Revolutionary related anything other than strict, verifiable, historical fact. My prize, and (thankfully for her mother) only daughter not only identified why her fellow students of lesser mental abilities weren't learning, but suggested to their teacher how to correct those problems.

"It's a shame that Isabel can't out-think and manipulate mother nature so she can become a better doctor than her father, or mother," Hanna revealed to me on an exceptionally mild day in April, year of someone else's Lord 1877, after dismissing the class early so they could get home to utilize the warm weather on their parent's farms, ranches and homesteads, and giving herself a break from being examined, torn apart, and put back together again by the 7 year old 'Wyoming Mozart' who had become so good at playing all the adults around her like they were her own personal violin, including me, except for her mother of course, who still overvalued wisdom and underestimated the effectiveness of being clever. "Is there any way that Isabel's intellect can be diverted into medical science so that she can heal people's bodies and not disrupt their minds?" Hanna asked me regarding Utopia's most fascinating under-aged politician and social reformer.

"Isn't disruption of the mind as it is the path to Revolution that will liberate all Souls?" I replied. I turned my gaze away from the 'youngins' playing outside the school house, then to Isabel. She was watching her contemporary and older classmates studiously with old and seemingly wise eyes, writing feverishly about what she saw in yet another notebook. "The world needs more brilliant minds, Hanna, as we both know."

"Yes, but we need brave and open hearts as well," the intensely thinking, always fighting, daughter of famed 1848 German Freethinker Fredrick Steiner shot back at me, delivering the same message and subtext that Isabel's mother and, I think, my beloved, wife did so many times.

I gave intense thought, and soulful consideration, to Hanna's suggestion and mandate. It was perhaps reached on her own, or perhaps realized as a result of her still legally allowed, if I had anything to say about it anyway, relationship with her 'wife' Thundercloud. Yet, I held true to my own experience and conviction that the ultimate result of advanced intelligence is EFFECTIVE compassion. Something that any doctor, even the heart before head Delfina, knew is a requirement to be a life-saving physician rather than a comforting nurse. However, that discourse between demons and angels, principles and practicalities in my head was short lived, when one and a half legged Noah Winters struggled to hold on to galloping his horse to me, screeching the sweat-soaked steed in a hard halt. "Gotta come quick, Doc. A problem with Kitty. A big one," he said through a mouth that was out of breath.

"A womanly problem?" I asked, thinking that the Mother Hen was having Labor Union problems with her girls, clients or bosses yet again that only a manipulative, not-above-blackmail Mayor could fix.

“The kind of problem that even Doc Delfina can’t fix, and has to be deal with now!” he said, with more sternness than terror.

“What kind of problem?” my seven year old daughter asked, in the voice and demeanor of an adult, abruptly halting the cryptic writing (that only she could read) which she was doing about her fellow classmates, her fellow Utopians or perhaps her fellow genius’ in places of REAL power and influence. Places that I still was not ready to return to until all of my books were written, and my Wyoming experiment was completed. “So, what kind of problem is going on in town that Daddy has to rush off to?” Isabel demanded to know of Noah.

“Not the kind you have to know about yet, child,” Noah Winters, replied the only adult in Utopia who had the sand or insight to realize that my 7 year old daughter was still a child. “Or want to know about, little Izzy.”

“Little Izzy” took in a deep breath, slammed closed her journal. She stormed to the my now-emptied horse-drawn very unofficial ‘book , wood and extra-desk’ delivery cart. “I AM going with you gentlemen” the child who preferred to be debated with than hugged asserted as she pulled plunked herself on the seat, folding her arms defiantly, in the same manner her mother did when she would not take no for an answer.

“I’ll take responsibility for whatever she does, or says,” I offered Noah before he could blast out a ‘no way will I allow this on my watch’ through lips that had not broken into his trademark smile in three years, at least to me.

“Indeed you will, Mister Mayor,” Noah grumbled back. He averted his eyes, and rode alongside the wagon as I pulled myself up on the wagon and headed into town as a brisk trot.

Upon arriving at the Wildcat I was quickly escorted to her room by Noah, and looked at accusingly by every dance hall girl in the establishment, including Alicia. Lilly tried to keep Isabel from following me, and, surprisingly, my daughter decided to listen to her. She was seated a table, served a glass of Sarsaparilla, a steak, and two boiled potatoes. For a brief moment I reflected on how, if any of these pleasure-providers were to give birth to rather than remove the ‘accidents’ that happened all too often in their womb, they could be better mothers, and perhaps women, than the ‘respectable’ ladies in Utopia. But dwelling in that speculation, and others was short lived, particularly when my eye beheld Kitty, or what was left of her upon being invited to enter her room as the door opened from the inside.

“She was raped,” Sheriff McDonald stated, coldly and angrily.

“And bald, this time not by her own hand, some of the cuts below the skin,” disgruntled-owner Lord Gunderson blasted into me pulling up Kitty’s lifeless, and blood soaked head from her pillow.

“Stabbed in the heart,” newly married Union Pacific railroad tycoon Walton added, adjusting the buttons on his semen and vaginal secretion smelling suit jacket.

“A brave heart, that stood up to any man who would not respect her labor, or any boss who would not respect any man’s labor,” labor Union leader Liam Casey offered, throwing an accusing stare at Walton. Then at me.

“Yes,” Wang Lee added, stepping up to the rest of what seemed to be MY accusers. “Victim of another ‘medical accident’,” he added, holding up her left arm, showing me a fresh needle mark.

“An experiment lab rat who was considered expendable, so someone could test the efficiency of this experiment,” Jakov Lazinski, the finally appearing member of the duly elected now Utopia CITY Council said as he emerged behind me, presenting to me an emptied vial of medicine with my hand writing on the label, with words I didn’t recognize in a language I didn’t know.

“As part of a larger ‘social experiment in attaining a sustainable, global model of excellence in matters of collective body, mind, and to those who needed to believe in such, spirit,’,” ex-Mayor and former Colonel Joseph Adams proclaimed, reading the quote from my latest very private manuscript, which he threw into my face.

The rest of the men in the room quoted the sometimes inflammatory, sometimes painfully accurate and sometimes praising remarks I had written about them, or said to others without their knowledge, intended for their ultimate benefit. How they were now sharing this with me, I didn’t know, as I was more obsessed with the ‘why’ of such.

Noah Winters no doubt blamed me, and Delfina, for not being able to save his un-savable left hindlimb, but there was no convincing the now crippled cowboy that a life on one and a half legs was better than none at all.

Lord Gunderson didn’t take too kindly to me helping pleasure-providing ladies in the Wildcat, and other establishments he secretly shared ownership of, unionized but the truth of the matter was that if I didn’t intervene, the undertaker would be burying many bodies of prostitutes slain by clients or by their own hand, as well as owners of brothels who would wake up in a pine box, their spirits on their way to a place of severe retribution in the afterlife.

Railroad and Coal tycoon Walton would lose his position and life if confidential information his terrified, abused and underpaid laborers offered me while I patched up their injured limbs and tried to save their charred lungs reached the public back East.

Liam Casey wanted me to give Wang Lee an overdose of his mind-altering medicine and pain-relieving opium so that his fellow Irish, and White, Americans wouldn’t lose their jobs and positions up the ladder to the Yellow Horde.

Wang Lee saw me as a well meaning man who would be dishonest when I had to be, but one who was doomed to get caught in his own web, a web which he had to extract himself from as soon as possible as Utopian politics became more 'interesting', and high stakes. And, besides, as the Chinaman who had recently cut off his traditional cue and in other ways wanted, and needed, to integrate into the White world knew, to advance up the American ladder required stepping on and breaking the back of your once most trusted friends.

Jakov Lazinski, a religious Jew who had, in my pre-Mayoral years, never worked on the Sabbath and always wore a something on his head as he was always 'in the presence of his Heavenly Master', was now seen around town seven days a week, hatless, collecting large sums of money for his technical services as a machinist, and inventor for now only selective and rich clients. My, and Delfina's, vision of a new brand of hospital featuring the most advanced medical equipment inventable which was accessible to all, on the basis of need rather than social status or economic holdings, was in direct competition with the prospect of a health spa for the elite, and other enterprises serving the wealthy which he now championed.

Sheriff McDonald, who was my biggest supporter, enforcer and friend in the early years of my terms a Mayor, increasingly became hostile to me, then secretive. Maybe it was because he thought I knew too much about what was going on with his wife, Catherine, or his ultimate plans for the still-poorly producing plot of arid land he still called home, or was doing there.

One, or all, of my fellow Utopians, who I served as a life saving or life preserving doctor, seemed to want to be my executioner. As for the mechanism of such, McDonald spoke first, as I gasped with continuing disbelief at the slain courtesan whose last name I still was not entitled to, or had to, know.

"We know about your private meetings with Kitty," Sheriff reminded me, after each of my friends were finished quoting what I wrote, said, clandestinely did, and the social 'experiment' I really thought was going well, for all of us. "And how much she valued your company."

"For talking, venting and, after finishing such, discoursing, and nothing else!" I blasted back at my right hand man, and now elected accuser. "Me and Kitty, we had an understanding of the mind."

"Like you used to have with your wife, Delfina?" Lazinski added, as a friend, and not inaccurately

"Until your daughter decided ta crawl out of her womb, and Delfina decided ta hide in the overworked cave where she hung a 'do not enter sign' above the archway every time you got around to visit it when ya had time in your busy schedule as an innovator?" Casey 'suggested', correctly I have to admit. "Which I do understand can happen to man

who decides that to take care of his family, he's gotta take care of the world first," the Labor Union leader who had all but abandoned his own family at home offered.

"We do understand how when love gets hot, it can become violent," Walton suggested. "Especially for men of breeding, and intellect such as ourselves."

I looked to Wang Lee so see what Confucius or Lao Tse proverb he would offer. He raised his outer lips up slightly, put his fingers through his regulation White Man's haircut and shrugged his, now non-laboring, shoulders, saying with as little passion as possible. "Shit happens, especially when extra-martial relations go into the crapper."

"Extra-marital relationships that you didn't pay for!" Lord Gunderson barked at me as a cockney commoner. He pulled out a piece of paper from his pocket, glancing at the figures. "For the time you spent with her, and for killing my best girl, you owe me---"

"---Nothing!" I blasted back, feeling chills going through me, about to faint. "I didn't do anything with Kitty, here or at my office in town, other than...talk. And I didn't kill her! And..." yes I did fall into the most common trap laid for the innocent. "Do you have any witnesses?"

"That's for a jury to decide," Sheriff McDonald informed me as he grabbed hold of my wrists, pulled them behind me, then shackled them together.

"Well respected and protected ones," Walton replied, in one of his half lies, or half truths.

"And hard proof?" I pressed, knowing that the witnesses were be imaginary, or paid off.

"Written by your own hand," conscience-less Lord Gunderson added, doing a very convincing act of sympathy, which, maybe to him anyway was real. "Love letters to my most beloved employee, and---"

"---I'm innocent. Of doing this anyway. And anything else that, as far as I know, is an arrestable offense," I stated clearly, accurately and honestly

"Besides, there are no witnesses to any of this?" I found myself saying as I was being dragged into the hallway, then down the stairs. "Where are you taking me?"

"To jail, for now," McDonald informed me, in the tone that he used on every man he arrested who swung from a rope after the circuit judge arrived, or sooner. "Jail!" he barked out.

"The place where you find out who you really are?" I heard from a voice painfully familiar. "Isn't that what jail and war are? Places where you find out who you are and see how successful an experiment you are?" Isabel continued, in an angelic academic voice that seemed as if it was being channeled from the depths of hell. In the exact words



that I gave to her questions about two conditions which are the most common prelude to facing the last breath. And which, perhaps, I recalled, writing down in the manuscript I had written that no doubt new Mayor Adams removed from his pocket and placed into an envelope marked 'evidence'.

"I want and demand to see my wife, Delfina!" I demanded. "She needs to know where I am!"

"That's assumin' that she still cares," Casey blasted back at me, appended by a punch in the belly, bending me into the most painful 'bow' to ill-fate I had ever experienced.

"Which, she don't, Doc," Noah Winters informed me, as he helped me back to a standing position with more understanding that I thought was in him, or which maybe I deserved.

When the door behind me at the single occupancy jail cell, the sound drove shivers up and down my spine. I had never been confined in one room, not by anyone else anyway. But it wasn't so much the claustrophobia, the grub which could hardly be called food, the waste bucket that still smelled of excretions from a plethora of previous 'guests', or the lingering blood stains on the one inch thick 'mattress' afforded to me that caused me to worry the health of everything below my choked neck or the sanity between my ringing ears. It was what was NOT in the cell with a small slit window so highly placed that one could not discern between moonlight or sunlight. No books written by others to read. No paper to write my own books that perhaps would be read by others one day. And, ironically as a result of a law I put on the books that ended suicides while in custody, no sharp or sharpenable objects with which to cut my finger and begin a career as a painter using the grey walls as canvas. And, no at the sheriff's large desk and his deputies smaller ones who would talk to me. And after I used every trick in the book to try to get them to talk to me, including complimenting them on anything they did, were or thought they were, the door to their observation posts was shut closed.

Indeed, the observation I quoted from others and passed on to Isabel regarding jail as a place where you got to know yourself became apparent very intensely when time, as measured by taking my own pulse, went by slower than it ever had been. The walls kept out all but a whisper of the activity outside in town during the day, and nothing at night. By the third day, as measured by the meals I was served, which I assume were regular, I was hearing voices, not able to recognize my own anymore. I saw within the walls and in the fog coming out of my mouth during the coldest of times, beings that were half human, with appendages that looked more real than my own felt.

Finally, the door allowing me a view of the Sheriff's desk was opened. A small framed figure clad in black with an aura twice as dark approached the cell. The light from the observation room and office finally lit up his pale, ghostlike face. "So," Pastor Horatio Johnson said, offering me a Bible to read. "Are you ready to face the Lord."

“Indeed yes!” I said, grabbing for the black book with printed stories I never was able to believe, but still printed stories that would keep me sane while reading it. “Yes, I’m ready to be---“

“---Not until you confess your sins and transgressions, to me,” the closed minded young clergyman trying to pass himself off as an all knowing old prophet interjected, pulling the book out of my reach. “And tell me if you enjoyed or didn’t enjoy killing Kitty Clarkson.”

Why and how the pleasure-avoiding young Preacher who considered dancing with anyone other than your wife a sin worthy of a lifetime in hell found out Kitty’s last name, which she told me in strictest confidence, so that her estranged daughter and sister could know about her final demise, I don’t know. Perhaps he was eaves dropping from the door outside, or the next room, on the night where thanks to a bottle of bourbon, some special medications I formulated, and my very open ears, Kitty shared with me her personal family history, and, at my insistence, nothing under the sheets. But I did know that I wasn’t going to fall for the ‘tell me if you’ve stopped raping your wife, yes or no!’ question which so many lawyers asked at trial, and so many judges demanded be answered. But not in my town.

“Alright then, so I’ll do the talking to the Lord for you,” Pastor Johnson said, as he bowed on his knees on the other side of the bars. “Please, Lord, hear my prayer and forgive your prodigal son on this night before he faces you, whose existence he has denied, and whose commandments he has ignored.”

“Amen,” I heard from Sheriff McDonald and his two new Deputies, one of the latter brandishing a bullwhip while looking at me.

“Amen,” I said, trying to appease those who were guarding me from, so they said anyway, the lynch mob outside, so I would get a fair trial.

“And, Lord,” continued the preacher who forfeited his youth, heart as well as intelligence to religious doctrines which, over the last several years, had indeed been justifying the rich keeping the poor in their proper station, with the superior White race, and male gender, on top of this Natural Order. “Please forgive this Doctor and man of the flesh whose mouth has been the channel for so many of the devil’s, lies.”

The star-bearing chorus blasted out another round of “Amens’ to which I added my own, in a voice that I do admit was sincerely delivered to an Entity I wanted to re-establish an dialog with.

“And, Lord, please forgive this man, driven by desires of the flesh,” Johnson said with closed eyes and raised voice. “For marrying a Papist Catholic heretic from a savage race of Mexicans spawned from Conquistadors who butchered so many un-suspecting red-skinned savages in your name!”

“Delfina, the witch who cures whoever she wants to, and who, with half breed Thundercloud, put that appaloosa under her spell,” McDonald to the two head scratching larger framed and lesser brained deputies around him. “Amen!” McDonald and at least one of his ‘specially picked’ assistants belted out. As did I afterwards, realizing that while the very pale, very American preacher hated Mexicans, he did have a soft spot in his cold and seldom used heart for Indians.

“And, please forgive this man for marrying this woman, and giving birth to a child,” Pastor Johnson continued, opening his eyes up to the sky, his hands openly extended, his high pitched meek voice echoing such a loud shrill that I could feel the walls around me shaking. “A precocious demon seed who dared to challenge your love, power and very Existence in your house of worship!”

“Amen” abounded from McDonald and his deputized Neanderthals, recalling the many times when Isabel initiated an unsolicited debates with Pastor Johnson regarding the existence, nature and intentions of God, which by its very definition, is beyond human understanding or description.

“Amen,” I said, proudly addressing Spirit, big S, which I hoped existed, and which I knew was deeper, more intelligent, more powerful and more loving than so many Christians, or Jews, envisioned with their fearful souls, emotionally-driven minds, and non-thinking brains. Indeed, Isabel had made many believers assess their beliefs and change them so that they had more faith, and believe, but tempered by reason and strengthened by awakened intelligence. “Amen,” I said again, thanking ‘He’, ‘It’ or perhaps even “She” for an intelligent daughter and, for a time anyway, loving wife.

“And Lord, as you forgive this converted sinner, who has defiled his soul and manhood by putting on female garb and encouraging us to become weakened by the daughters of Eve who had Adam taste of forbidden fruit, who is about to meet you and be welcomed back in your arms,” Johnson, whose experience with publically hating and secretly liking putting on female garb was most interesting to me, continued with a forced baritone voice, apprehended by another chorus of Amens from the peanut gallery, with head bowed in reverence, and some shame.

“We beseech you to burn out the tongue of this once good Doctor’s demon seed daughter!” young Johnson blasted out in a musical poetic fortissimo finale, conducting the well armed angel above with his outstretched arms to join him. “Rip out Demoness Isabel’s heretical, demonic brain and replace it with a pure angelic heart. And tear open her throat so that you could---“

Before Pastor Johnson, or whatever Devil masquerading as God could vicariously tear open or apart anything in Isabel, I grabbed hold of the young preacher’s neck, with both hands. “You leave my daughter, and my family alone!” I screamed at him. “You vicious, horrible, defective, deluded, self-absorbed, secretly wanting to be a woman ‘man’ who---“

Before I could vent out my anger, or finish my well-thought out descriptors, I felt the barrel of McDonald's gun imprinted into my belly. As I bent over, then fell to the ground, I could envision each of my organs below the rib cage torn apart. Experiencing the kind of pain I, yes, during surgical and other procedures no doubt inflicted on many of my patients when there was insufficient chloroform, opium, ether, whiskey or 'special formula' concocted with Wang Lee, and Delfina's help.

"So, that outburst is prove enough that you, Mayor Professor Doctor, are capable of the killing Kitty Clarkson, as we all have witnessed," McDonald said, as I could see him transfer a fistful of money from his own breast pocket into that of Pastor Johnson's freshly urinated into trousers. "For your services, and as a contribution to building the new Church," he said by way of explanation for the large amount of pocket change. Far more than was affordable for a Sheriff earning the salary the town was officially paying him.

"You will burn in hell for this, and more!" Pastor Johnson yelled at me as he slithered out, placing his coat and Bible over his urine soaked crotch.

But there was a deeper pain that I felt now, far beyond what McDonald's Winchester delivered to my abdominal organs, and the branding irons and whips perhaps awaiting me in the underworld after the undertaker would put the final nail into my communally-spit on coffin. The kind of wound that would not heal. One that I created and would not be able to treat. Yes, I had taught Isabel to be manipulative and smart, at the expense of being honest and wise. And perhaps, compassionate. That emotion which, maybe advanced intelligence didn't always lead you into championing, or experiencing. But there were a few things I did know. That I didn't kill Kitty. And that even if it took coming back from the dead, I would find out who did, and extract justice on the perpetrator of that vile, senseless and destructive act.

It took me an hour for my internal organs to connect to each other, then, by my internal calculations anyway, another two for my lungs to easily ventilate the un-usually humid late night air into and out of them. By that time Sheriff McDonald had dismissed his deputies for the night, the door between his desk and my hotel room wide open. He busied himself with paper work, moving it in and out of a locked drawer on his oversized desk, then helped himself to a read of the manuscripts I had written about the Utopian experiment and the theories of human psychology I proposed on the basis of them. How he had stolen, somehow, from my privately locked desk, I did not know of course. His stone cold, neatly bearded face showed a variety of reactions, ranging from frowns of confusion, to growls of anger, to ridiculing eye-rolls. Some pages he tore out, using them to roll cigarettes or wipe his ass, followed of course with a smug smile directed at me. One of my last wishes was to know whether the pages he extracted to be converted into ashes were the ones containing data about him, or those that promoted ideologies which threatened his current jurisdictional station. But he did do some speaking to me, finally. "By this time tomorrow night, laddie," he said with a Scottish burr, after which he moved his finger across his throat giving me a sadistic grin.

One of the most common observation of patients during the War and afterwards who were several breaths away from dying was that they smelled 'bread'. For me, it was blueberry pie. Its bearer was clad in black from head to toe, with a ghostlike pale face whose wrinkles and joules were accentuated by red bruises. "Something I baked, ta thank ya fer all ya done for me," I heard Catherine Mary say, her head bowed.

"Thank you," I replied to my last meal, or rather dessert, as I grabbed the tin plate and spoon from the post of my cot that I was using as a table. "Blueberry is my favorite."

"Which is why all of it's for me husband, a real man with real values, who I owe everything ta," Catherine said with a subservient voice and even more humbling bow as she put the blueberry pie on the her husband's desk. "And not you!" she blasted at me, with a new set of eyes, mind and soul. "You degenerate liar. Godless Anarchist who thinks the lazy, undeserving and always complaining 'poor' should be entitled to take an unfair share from what those that made themselves rich by their own efforts and God's divine law earned! A White man who disgraces his own race and responsibility ta be a steward of the lesser races by forming friendships, alliances and marriages with yella, red, brown and black skinned inferiors. A 'man' who prefers wearin' dresses ta trousers who wants to make women equal to men, which is against the law of God, the ways of Nature and the real desire of most women."

As she went on, insulting me for being decent to the oppressed, including her in the past, her husband Sheriff McDonald's curious smirk turned into a shit eating grin. Upon finishing her rant of accusations, most of which were true, she spit into my face, delivering into my disbelieving ears a Gaelic expression, that made part Irish McDonald break into an even bigger smile, which no doubt, was the basest of curses exportable from the Emerald Isle. Following that, she unbuttoned her blouse, pulled a fork out of the depths of her cleavage, and dug out a generous bite from the pie.

"Please, accept my apologies for havin' been so much trouble by enjoyin' this," Catherine begged her husband.

"Had a big supper," Sherriff Sean said, slapping his juggle like jelly overfed bubba gut. "I'll have it later," he continued, getting back to continuing his unsolicited review of my manuscript.

"Or maybe ya'd like ta have this now?" the old and homely before-her-time Catherine said, transforming herself somehow into a young, alluring pleasure-provider, to my bleary eyes, but most importantly, to Sean McDonald's. With that, she ripped open the rest of her blouse, lay on the desk, and smashed the pie into her naked and, I must admit, magnificently sculpted chest. She placed the fork in her husband's hand. He took three bites, finding the plate and dish of flesh upon which it was served very much to his liking. Upon the third smacking of his lips, Catherine grabbed hold of the fork, caressed his neck, and gently pulled his drooling mouth onto her breasts.

I observed fresh whip marks on Cathrine's back, as she showed off her skills as a seductress. Then as an anesthesiologist, when Sheriff Sean fell into a deep sleep. She reached for a buffalo knife hanging on the wall, then abruptly cut her husband's belt, causing his key ring to fall to the floor and his trousers to the floor. After spitting on his exposed family jewels, she grabbed hold of the key ring, unlocked the drawer containing documents, then threw it to me. Along with her now slumbering husband's gunbelt with a very loaded pistol inserted into it.

"We don't have much time," Catherine informed me as she rummaged through the documents, finding the one she was looking for. While forging her husband's signature, she signed her own. "So, my land belongs to ME now, official, you goddamn, cock-suckin', mother fuckin' piece of shit," the only woman in Utopia who I never heard curse, even when enduring pain I inflicted on her in the line of medical duty, blasted at her husband's slumbering, slobbering face.

Meanwhile, I unlocked the cell and strapped the gun-belt on my waist. Not knowing what to do next. Catherine, thankfully, provided the next step in the plan that was emerging.

"There's a Paint in the alley, a map showing the probably whereabouts of General Pancho Fernandez' latest camp," she said. "He'll give you your instructions when you get there," she informed me.

"Instructions to do what?" I asked, finding myself caught between a hangman's noose here or joining now 'General' Fernandez' revolutionary forces as sometime more than just an unofficial, blindfolded, visiting doctor.

"The gold that's on what's now MY presumably useless plot of land, that used to be his," Catherine continued as she signed duplicate deeds. "Ninety percent of it belongs to the people's Revolution now. And all of the black gold under the ground, if ya can find a way to drill it out better than the underpaid idiots and assholes he hired to get it out."

"Who wound up dead when they tried to leave without his permission?" I asked, regarding the remains of human flesh and bone I had seen on the perimeter of the 'McDonald' homestead as I passed by the 'No Trespassing', 'Danger Quicksand', 'Coyote Warning' and 'Beware of Injuns' signs that frequented the perimeter of that location. "But in the meantime, what will you do?" I asked Catherine.

"Get me arsch ta Denver," she related. "Find me children in the exclusive boarding school, or locked reformatory, he put 'em in so's I'd keep me mouth shut here. Tell 'em what an' who their candy-givin' father really is, and what he is," she said while preparing a campfire in the middle of the room with whatever was burnable.

Before Catherine could extract a match from her pocket, I retrieved the cigarettes McDonald had rolled with my manuscript along with those covered with his fecal material, hoping that the print on the paper was not bullshit. Meanwhile, McDonald

woke up. “What the hell are you doing!” he grumbled through a wad of blueberry soaked saliva. “You whore!” he said, as he swiftly grabbed hold of a revolver on the wall, stumbled towards Catherine, grabbed her by the hair and rammed it into her mouth.

I cannot say why or how, but I self observed myself pulling out the Colt 45 in my holster, and letting go with three blasts. One hit McDonald’s shooting arm, causing him to roll back onto his back. The second hit him smack into brain that enabled him to trick everyone into thinking he was protector of morality as well as the law. The third landed into his cold, un-used and evil possessed heart.

“I..didn’t know ya had it in ya,” Catherine said as a statement of shock, gratitude and compliment. “Thank you,” she added, as she gave me a hug. One that saw me as her new protector and perhaps lover.

I do confess, and relate, that the prospect of the latter did appeal to me, as did the ease by which I was able, for the first time, to intentionally take a life rather than try desperately to save it. A new necessity which I noted that...I enjoyed.

But there was something else more frightening that was enjoyed. Catherine’s hug of friendship, Phillos, to the Greeks, turned into Eros, love for and of the flesh. She kissed me on both cheeks, then the lips, remaining there. Until something even more ominous and horrible happened.

“So, it is true about you and your lover Kitty, and Catherine, and God knows who else!” Delfina blasted into me, after which she blasted out to door, taking with her the food basket which she was going to give me. The lingering aroma of chili will stay with me forever as a misunderstanding that created more problems than I ever envisioned possible, for me, Delfina and Utopia.

## CHAPTER 13

### 1921

The still nameless and perhaps universal soul known only to Melanie, and perhaps everyone else in Utopia, as ‘Doc’ fell into a deep sleep with a thunderous snore after narrating the events that happened to him, or in his advanced age, imaged happened. It gave Melanie Hamilton, presumably ‘Grandpa Doc’, time to rummage through his somehow still standing home, laboratory and self-built prison cell to find Maria’s diary. The, as Melanie intuited it anyway, the most important account of what had happened here, written by the old, drugged, imprisoned yet still defiant old woman who was once Delfina, according to Grandpa Doc’s inferences of course.

Melanie wondered what this structure that, for reasons she did not understand, the snow, wind, rain nor onset of termites had not demolished into dust like the rest of what had once been the town of Utopia. As for internal clues, the picture-less walls separating what once had been different rooms were mostly torn down. In what used to be every ‘room’ there were desks, cabinets and chests. Most didn’t have locks on them. Some did. Thanks to Melanie’s ability to pick a lock, or pry open the chewed up wood around it, she was able to get into what logic said was the secret vault containing could be Maria’s diary.

The first ‘opened on their own as I was leaning on them’ drawer contained mouse terds and remnants of a jar labeled ‘peaches’, under which there was a skeleton of a rodent that perhaps died of too many sweets, or perhaps of a poison put into the can that, by intent, or accident, had done in several hungry Utopian humans. The second contained sharp blood-stained bolts, plates, nails, pins and screws, making cuts into Doctor Melanie’s impulsively driven fingers. A third contained faded yet still readable primers for learning how to read English, Spanish and Cree, along with a mathematics textbook that would have brought the 19<sup>th</sup> century schoolchild, or aspiring adult, on the journey from adding and subtracting to geometry, algebra and fundamental calculus. A fourth, newspaper clippings relating the facts about the proceedings in Cheyenne regarding women’s suffrage, Ester Morris being made the first Justice of the peace, and several non-political, and non-historically notable events in Utopia, all of which confirmed Grandpa Doc’s story about what had happened. The fifth ‘unintentionally’ opened drawer, which took more effort to cajole open than the others, spoke to Melanie in pictures.

The group photo of a heavily bearded, well armed and, to be honest, very well-fed Mexican Robin Hood with his multi-racial entourage of fellow, thinner, rifle-bearing Merry Men, and Women against the backdrop of a mountain with a sign in front of them reading ‘Wanted, for Doing the Right Thing’ in English and Spanish. Each one of them spoke with their eyes their most important message to the photographer, and whoever would see the picture in the present, and future. Having heard Grandpa Doc’s description of once sherriff, then bandit, then General in the Cause of Liberation of the poor and oppressed, Melanie recognized Francisco ‘Pancho’ Fernandez instantly, feeling drawn into his dedicated eyes, confidently assuring smile and cause. Pushing herself to plow



into the task at hand, she searched the still framed photograph to find young, or perhaps younger, Doc, finally reaching a hatless man holding a medical bag in his left hand, a Winchester rifle and belt of shells strapped around his chest, and his right arm around a small woman. A brown skinned Latino woman with round, heart-shaped jaw, eyes three sized too big for her face, long dark hair flowing down to her waist and a volcanic blast of unbridled determination blasting out of her ocular portholes.

Melanie moved the picture closer to her own ocular portholes, edging her way to the window to get a better view of this woman who, she projected, no doubt could have been and probably was now Maria. That young face spoke to her in echoes that Melanie's now activate soul somehow was able to understand. But just as the 'words' were about to find translation in Doctor Melanie's association cerebral cortex, she felt a hand pull back her bobbed hair, nearly snapping her head off her neck.

"I thought you said Delfina was never photographed in and around Utopia," she said to Doc as he grabbed the picture from Melanie's somehow steady hand.

"She wasn't," Grandpa Doc replied, helping himself to another round of self-punishment by looking at the photograph. "And whatever was going on between me and her sister, Anna, was between the ears and NOT between the legs!" he asserted. "And you're going to hear my story before you hear anyone else!" he ranted on, after which he released Melanie from the death hold he had on her. "Please," he continued, using his right fist to pound himself in the left arm, five times, as hard as he could, revealing to Doctor Melanie a forelimb covered with cuts, bruises and burns.

"Pictures don't lie," Melanie offered. "And besides, no one would blame you for..."

"---Making an alliance with Delfina's sister? And the others?" Grandpa Doc interjected after indulging himself in self-abuse, turning his back on Melanie, yet again. Then staring out the window at what seemed to be a graveyard, the bones of the some of the buried reaching out of the ground, perhaps by intention of the dead in this haunted place, or neglect by the cemetery grounds keeper. "Who were oppressed, starved, stolen from, tortured by and killed by us," he continued, through a voice that grew more raspy, his shaking legs about to give way to perhaps final fall to the hard ground. "Oppressed by and under-cared for by money and status seeking Americans of the 'superior' race and gender. Who used the law as their most powerful weapon."

"Who you stopped becoming," Melanie said, approaching him slowly. Just as the words came out of her mouth, she noted in a cracked mirror that the about to be extinct dinosaur took into a deep breath, becoming a blood-thirsty bear. "Or," she said, pulling back. "Someone you never were."

"Someone I didn't intend to be, but had to be," the dinosaur-bear said while turning around, becoming 'academic' again. "Working outside of the law, while Delfina..." The words got caught inside the 'Professor's' throat, as a tear ran down his cheek.

“---worked inside the law?” Melanie interjected, hoping that sincerity would lead to accuracy.

“And working for its minions,” Grandpa Doc replied. “God help and curse us all.”

The only source to Melanie finding out the truth about her past, and present, got lost behind a blank stare as he seemed to be recalling a ‘second Civil War’ in Utopia which made the War Between the States seem like friendly disagreement over who gets to dig into the mashed potatoes first at a Quaker Sunday Church picnic.

“So, another round of potato pancakes, Grandpa?” Melanie suggested, addressing the Doc for the first time by familial terms.

“This time without the special ingredient in them that made me go to sleep!” ‘Gramps’ blasted back.

“Promise,” Melanie said. “Cross my heart and hope to die,” she added as a pledge, holding up her hand. She then led him to the kitchen.

“Which you will, if you don’t get all of the facts right, and don’t use them when you get back home to stop all of this,” Grandpa Doc warned as he followed his granddaughter back to the three and a half-legged ‘talking’ table again, letting out a death rattle en route which Melanie knew was not in her imagination, this time.

## CHAPTER

On the community notice board on Main Street in now multi-streeted Utopia, there was an ad requesting a new schoolteacher ‘of sound knowledge and solid Christian fiber’, noting that “Miss Hanna” and her Blackfoot assistant had ‘better offers elsewhere’. Next to that, a wanted poster for me, for robbery, murder, and insurrection against the US government. Next to that call for the Community Notice Board in Utopia, railroad supervisor and, as a result of semi-legal deals coal mining tycoon Oliver William Walton, put out the call for more workers in the mines and laying down more track. Such was good news for hard working men who now had families or the desire to acquire them, but bad news as the wages were lowered by half.

“It’s honest work. And reliable work!” the even more bubba bellied, fancily dressed and, as he kept trying to hide with better wigs, even more balding fat cat announced to the crowd of Chinese, Black and White laborers gathered around, the ‘No Mexicans or Indians allowed’ rule attached to his employee guidebook now very legal, now that Colonel Adams was currently sitting as Mayor, with an unofficial salary obtained from tax dollars and corporate contributions far beyond that one I ever got. “And if you think that you can make a fortune on your own by prospecting for gold, know that it’s not there. And that the penalty for panning on another man’s claim is now hanging. But we’re all hitting hard times here. Including us. And if we want statehood, which will

bring prosperity to all of us, we all have to tighten our belts, and work harder for less wages, for the common good.”

With that, the railroad boss who saw himself as the real power behind the governor’s seat once he bought it for his ‘good friend’ Adams waddled away, heading into the Wildcat for a drink, Gunderson, Lazinski, Adams. Sitting next to them were two more lecherous excuses for men I didn’t recognize from underneath the bonnet and petticoats I was wearing to hide my identity as part of my assigned job of casing out the new bank so that Comrade General Fernandez could rob it with minimal loss of life on either side of the line. And so that, which Fernandez and Anna knew, I could see how Delfina, who moved my clinic back into town, was doing. And so she could believe the truth in my eyes rather than the written accounts in Wyoming Herald of what I had done to my fellow Utopians while as a doctor, and the horrific violent acts I was committing now as an outlaw, most of which were not true. A presumably privately owned newspaper whose owners no doubt bowed to its funders, given the lies it was spreading around about ‘savage’ Indians, malicious Hispanics, barbaric Negroes (excluding of course ‘good darkie’ Noah Winter) and clever Chinks here and elsewhere in America.

I heard at the General Store from fairly reliable sources that Delfina was on call that day, servicing a family of Squarehead homesteaders from Sweden who had a contagious disease that needed to be treated, or confined. As such, I had to wait around town longer than I thought. It gave me time to case out the bank, and to observe the show which materialized in front of the call for more laborers.

“No! We ain’t doin’ it, lads!” Liam Casey proclaimed to his fellow thin, aching and limping Micks, and White Americans, as he pulled three of them away from the table behind which sat a frail, bookish clerk wearing spectacle surrounded by two behemoth thugs with loaded Winchesters and five rented soldiers from Fort Laramie. The Union Organizer who had somehow self-cured himself of being brought into the system that was about to catapult him up the socio-economic ladder s leaped upon a coffin atop wagon about to head up the now very filled cemetery, “Breakin’ our backs for 4 dollars a day buys us nothin’ but early graves and empty bellies. Or dead bodies, due ta accidents which were the fault of the bosses, or the nightsticks from the Coppers, they own. ‘Unfortunate risks of the job’ which were not caused by the hand of God, because we interrupted Mother Nature at the wrong time of the month. Time for all of us to go on strike!” he said to the crowd. He then directed his attention to the coffin under his feet, and the two next to him. “Right, Shamus. Leroy. And Chang!”

From the crowd, an uproar of ‘rights’ with clenched fists. But, mostly white fists, and a few black ones. All of their bearers looked at Wang Lee, and the Chinese laborers behind him. “We need the jobs,” Wang Lee said regarding the mostly English non-speaking men behind him. “They pay far more than what we were getting in China.”

“But not enough for us ta live on here. Us White folks anyway, whose got wives and children ta take care of at home and not just ourselves,” Casey pointed out to the herbalist

who had been an esteemed physician and political leader in China till he fell out of favor with the Emperor. According to his account of it anyway.

“Sometimes, men who are cursed with misfortune, are blessed with the opportunity to live more simply, and one must pick one’s battles carefully if one is to win the war, or the peace afterwards,” the middle aged man who carried himself off as a Sage, replied with respectful bow. He then turned around and said something in Chinese to the men under his command, and protection. Whatever it was, it was accepted by his fellow Asians as sound and necessary reason. With that, Wang Lee led them, begrudgingly to the Enlistment table.

Without a word from Casey, their progress was halted by three Irishmen and two Coloreds who were at least a head taller than any of the Chinese laborers.

“Let ‘em through, lads,” the Sergeant in charge of the ‘just passing through’ detachment of Cavalry soldiers said to his fellow Micks in an Irish accent three times thicker than Casey’s. With an aggressive agenda sugar coated with a reasonable voice, the burly, muscular and well armed NCO advised Casey in Gaelic something intended to appeal to his sense of reason. Or perhaps something from Casey’s past that would be brought to the foreground if he didn’t tow the line, like every other smart Mick who wanted to move up the American ladder.

After considering the options, very carefully, Casey put his fist up in the air. “Strike!” he proclaimed. “Strike!” the rest of the white congregation said. “Yes, we strike,” the Chinese seemed to be saying to each other, in agreement. Upon which a strike of lightning occurred. A shot, delivered between the eyes of one of Casey’s men, another round into the chest of one of the few Negroid workers who somehow found and commonality with his white working class Comrades. From where I saw it, the shot came from a sniper wearing a sheriff’s badge hiding behind the window in the new clothing and jewelry shop across the street. From the perspective of the White laborers, and Casey, it came from one of the ‘chinks’ in the back of the crowd of yellow faces that all looked alike to them.

The White workers lost no time pulling out knives, club and fists, charging into ‘Yellow Horde, determining to extract vengeance. Casey joined them. Wang put himself in harm’s way, pointing to the deputy across the street as the culprit. No one believed him, most tragically Casey, who threw a knife into the heart of his once best friend, who he had once claimed eternal gratitude. A battle between White and Yellow burst open, leaving streams then rivers of red blood.

Watching from a clear view inside the Wildcat Saloon, through windows cleaned by solemn, overworked and by her now plain wardrobe demoted Negress pleasure provider Alecia (insert name), were the new movers and shakers in Utopia. Lord Gunderson, Mister Walton and Mayor Adams smiled with delight at the festival which, eventually, was halted by the soldiers, five deputies, and an small army of Company ‘Security Staff’, some of whom planted small revolvers in the hands of slain Chinese just ahead of the

newspaper photographer's arrival. Jakov Lazinski, sitting at the council table inside the Wildcat in a new suit far above his usual station, watched the slaughter expressionless, unable but I hope wanting to help. Coming at Gunderson's request to take his mind off his unanticipated 'outburst of morality' was none other than Lilly, more seductive than ever White American born pleasure provider, who was always able to take Jakov's mind of the troubles of the world, until now.

There was no shortage of respectable citizens on the street outside watching the slaughter between fellow workers which had been orchestrated for the profit and entertainment of their bosses. Their number included Sally Ann, Adam's wife clad in a tailored cotton and silk ensemble and Tasha Lazinski, proudly wearing her ill-fitting wool blouse and flax skirt. All were informed by the Sheriff to keep away from the mob with the rest of the women, for their own safety and, 'so that the new generation of Wyomingers would not grow up motherless.'

Delfina, by chance, arrived after the 'debate' between White and Yellow labor had ended, galloping in atop a wagon filled containing two new patients her payment purse filled with eggs, beef jerky and three chickens. She instantly hopped off the wagon, tending to the wounded as best as she could. Assisted by the new Sheriff, whose face looked meaner and whose eyes were colder than any outlaw I ever treated, and his seven deputies. One of the latter looking my way, seeming to recognize me.

"She...looks familiar," I could faintly hear from the goon who had been my 'host' when I was incarcerated in his greybeard hotel said to his boss.

"They all do," the sheriff assured the all brawn and little brained deputy with the sloped Neanderthal forehead.

The deputy tended to assisting Delfina, grabbing what she needed, and saying 'yes, Ma'am' rather than 'yes, Doctor' to each of her requests as she tended to the wounded. She did so, with much argument, on the basis of the severity of injury rather than the color of their skin, or if they had badges on their chest or black, diseased lungs within them. At least I knew that Delfina was not corrupted by the plague of ignorance and cruelty that had turned Utopia into the worse kind hell imaginable.

Walking in to help Delfina from the bookstore, with an intense sense of calm, was none other than my, and I'd like to think OUR daughter, Isabel. A passion driven Delfina gave out heartfelt medical instructions to Isabel, which she carried out with alacrity and a professional detachment from human suffering that even I never had as an overly seasoned physician and surgeon. And gut-wrenching commentary regarding the events that happened which our daughter replied to with thought evoking theoretical discourse rather than panic. Brown-skinned Delfina of course spoke to Isabel in Spanish, but more white than brown 'Izzy's responses all being in English. Not anything unusual, for the disconnect which was their mother-daughter relationship. Isabel seemed to be more embarrassed than usual in front of her Anglo class-mates, and apologetic on her mother's behalf to their rich, White parents when Delfina started to rant about the evils of

Imperialist Capitalism, going back to the days of the War for Texan Independence from Mexico, which was supposed to include Hispanic Tejanos as well. But, then again, Isabel was a lot smarter than her mother in many ways, knowing all too well that if Delfina was too proud of her Latino heritage and too giving to the colored races or the poor, she would be 'encouraged' to leave town just like Hanna and Thundercloud, no matter how good a doctor she was to the upwardly mobile Anglos.

I so much wanted to help Defina and my daughter, or join them. But as the now dead Wang Les had said to the crowd, and conveyed to me through his now dead eyes, 'one must choose one's battles carefully if you are to win the war, or the peace afterwards.' With that, I slithered out of town, having gathered enough knowledge about the new bank so that I could help rob it. And perhaps other tasks where it would become necessary to treat the disease Utopia had become by killing the cancer spreading through it. Most specifically, human cancers that I had to kill, along with not killing my own soul, sanity and humanity in the process, if possible. And, if possible, the devil incarnate, who now I believed in, who had manipulated so many hard working, benignly corrupt, men into becoming his Minions.

## CHAPTER 14

“Life forced me to give up my belief in angels, and God, but compelled me to not give up underestimating the power of the devil, Gramps,” Melanie found herself relating to the old man who had snatched her from her old world and catapulted her into a new one. “Was it that way with you too, Doctor----”

“---Jonathan,” the old man finally conceded. “Jonathan Robert Victor...Smith,” he finally admitted. “Yes, in this current time, John Smith, which makes it hard to sign a hotel register or introduce yourself at conferences and be taken seriously he said with a playful, yet experienced smile. “But,” he continued as he reached under an elevated board which was still, precariously, the top of a wooden box, retrieving a sombrero, an ammunition belt containing live shells and a rifle from which to let them express their destructive yet visually magnificent thunder. “Sometimes you have to use the devil’s fire in the service of God. Since as we know,” he continued, his whimsical tone turning dead serious, and deadly to anyone who opposed him. “Heaven watches and earth works.”

As a doctor who pleaded all too often and futilely for the Almighty to save her patients, and who had seen the kind of suffering biology inflict upon the Creator’s presumably most loved creation, the Promethian proposition John Smith had presented was already fact in Doc Melanie’s life rulebook. Still, she wanted and needed to believe in the power of goodness, and a universe that favored that expression of duality over cruelty.

“We continue this conversation while shooting off some rounds?” Doctor and now bandito Smith asked.

“Depends on we shoot at,” her reply. “Or who?” she advanced.

“Ghosts, if they have the sand to present themselves,” Smith said. “And not ourselves again, not this time anyway.”

With that, the old fart with the common name but very uncommon presence pushed open the door to the back ‘yard’ of his ‘estate’, inviting his guest to enter the large field in back. One which, to Melanie’s Eastern conditioned eyes, seemed as big as the entire state of New Jersey, and twice as polluted, this time with toxins her inner soul could feel but nose could not identify.

## CHAPTER

When I was a medical student at Harvard, I measured time by the number of courses I had passed having tricked the examiners I had mastered. When in medical practice, it was how many patients saved from dying, or convinced that I had saved from such. Now as an outlaw, the ticking of the clock was measured in how much gold we stole from the Capitalist’s mines, how many banks we robbed, how many rich estates we sacked, how many ‘troublesome’ freethinkers we rescued from carts taking them to Sundance Penitentiary for internment and how few of our Comrades had to become my

patients after we were done. I'd like to say that time, and progress, were made according to how many poor, oppressed and destitute people we pulled out of poverty by redistributing the wealth. But, though that process did go on, I was too busy tending to the wounded, mostly from our side, and going on more raids. And how many hostile Indian tribes we could enlist in our fight against our own kind, promising them that if we win, we'd share the land with them.

"Share land that was ours in the first place, and always will and should be?" Lydia Thundercloud said to me and General Fernandez as we rode our horses into a Blackfoot camp in Northern Wyoming to parle with the chief of the tribe of which her mother was still a part, even after having died of small pox a year earlier. "Like you Revolutionary Whites and Mexicans will share what's left of the buffalo herds after your Capitalist Compadres issued the order to shoot them all and sell their hides to coat manufacturers back East?" she continued with more bitterness in her voice than I had ever heard, and less meat on her bones ever seen. "Tell that to my chief and he'll laugh in your face."

"Then tear out your tongue," growled out 'Cooks badly but teaches well', formerly Miss Hanna Steiner, while distributing books and writing material to kids of all ages in her now open aired schoolhouse. "This is the last revolution we can screw up," she warned me. "Or be corrupted," she blasted into General Fernandez' face.

The General didn't take kindly to a woman, particularly an Anglo, telling him what to do. But when in Blackfoot land, do as the Blackfeet do. As such, we got off our horses, sat around the chief council's campfire cross-legged, and presented a knapsack-sized bag of tobacco to the chief.

"Big pack of tobacco for very big man," General Fernandez said to Thundercloud, asking her to translate.

"You mean A large sac of tobacco for A very influential regional leader," the Chief, every inch visually a Blackfoot, with not a trace of White clothing on him, replied. "We have learned to use articles now, and even that new magic invention of yours, the wheel."

"And a lot more," Hanna said, showing a copy of the books she had distributed to the children of the tribe, and several of their very interested parents. "Das Capital" she proudly announced, showing Fernandez and (because I had roots in more populated regions of the continent) me the title of the primer she was using to teach English with. "Which says," she continued, after which she motioned for her human orchestra to commence the first notes of a badly needed world symphony.

"Each gives according to their ability and takes according to their needs," the 'redskinned savages' chanted in German accented English.

"An old concept we have been practicing many more moons ago than you formulated it," the Chief said. "Or put marks on paper about it."



“Which we are doing now!” Hanna proclaimed proudly through her now braided blonde hair, complimented by fringed leggings, moccasins and a man’s shirt. She turned around, saying something in Blackfoot to her students which they could barely understand.

Thundercloud corrected her grammar and diction, with more respect than I had ever seen between any men bonded in the same cause. Maybe because the love between Hanna and Thundercloud embraced respect as part of the package that bound them together, in a combination of Philos, Eros and Agape that any mortal or god of Ancient Greece would give a boatload of cheese and olives to experience, if even for a single magical night.

The students took up their pencils, opened their primers, and started writing what seemed to be their own stories, holding their writing implements in as many creative ways as what they seemed to be putting on the page. As I glanced at those soon to be highly literate buckskin clad, mocassined and long haired ‘savages’ I allowed myself to image a classroom at Harvard that would allow such scholars to sit in the lecture hall, or at the lectern. Perhaps, if they were smart, or wise, enough, they would enforce a dress code on us palefaces requiring us to sport braids instead of closely cropped hair, fringed leather pants rather than trousers, and moccasins on our feet instead of wooden soled Oxfords so that we can feel the vibrations of the earth underneath us. Indeed, maybe, as I speculated in a short story that no publisher would touch, it was Indians who discovered Europe in the middle ages, and that they turned back to go home, reporting that there was no intelligent life worth doing business or passion with over the Eastern horizon across the large pond.

But Comrade General Pancho and I were here to do business, not to continue our philosophical discourses, which I enjoyed and he seemed to tolerate. For him, it was to give the Indians guns so they could better hunt whatever wild game was left on the once bison rich plains as they needed to, and to kill capitalist imperialists as we wanted them to. For me, it was to tend to the sick, and wounded, of which there was no shortage amongst the Native people. With some medical supplies stealable from town, and others obtained from the earth, which I learned to extract and utilize from my, thus far, friend General Pancho.

Unlike my patients in Utopia, these original Northern Wyoming homesteader were grateful for any help they could get. Even if it was an honest ‘there is nothing I can do and it is time to prepare for passage beyond the veil’. It sickened me to be thanked by so many for being the first to inform them to prepare for death. Then again, for any doctor, even one of those patients is too many. Indeed, as I folded up my medical bag on that fateful day as the scent of burning sweet-grass penetrated into my dried up nostrils to tend to the next hopefully savable patient, I wondered what my death song would sound like, and if I would have to courage and insight to able to embrace it.

But before the time of my own dying, which the odds said were very soon, given the number of bullets that missed my flesh and tore holes in my coat and hat, there were three things I needed to do. One was to reach an agreement with Delfina, and convince her

that the stories going around about me and her sister Anna becoming lover were as false as the ones being told about how I butchered Kitty after having an illicit affair with her. The second agenda on my must do list was to extract vengeance on the men who hammered together the frame on me for her murder, and who now had ruined the town I had so faithfully served and, to be fair and accurate, cleverly manipulated into being a model community for a model future age. The third task, which only I seemed to believe was necessary, was to find whoever had become 'me' in Utopia. Master manipulator who had perverted and diverted so many good people into becoming both cruel and ignorant, and by combining those all too easily potentials for humanity, dangerous to everyone in this generation, and those to come.

My prayers to God, or deals offered to the devil, were answered on the way back from the Blackfoot camp, when 'People's Liberation Comrade General' Fernandez, who seemed to be acquiring more titles, more expensive clothing to suit his position and more fat in belly every day, had a talk with me, man to whatever I was becoming, while riding from the ever moving Blackfoot camp to our constantly moving headquarters.

"There are many things we know, and some things we are not supposed to know, is that not correct?" 'Professor' Fernandez proposed in the manner of Socrates of old, at least the way Plato portrayed the old fart in print after the wise and no doubt misunderstood (and always unpaid) philosopher's death.

"I suppose so," I replied, dipping one foot but certainly not all of my appendages into the head game my friend Pancho wanted to pull me into, no doubt as a prelude to woe me into 'going beyond my self-made limitations' with regard to what I would do for the Revolution, and for him.

He gazed at the vast treeless, grass covered plains to the West, bordered by towering snow capped mountains that shot up to the big, blue sky, all of which to my eye seemed smaller than usual, somehow. "What we do know is that Wyoming is, so far anyway, rich in grass for cattle, farmland for crops, coal for railroad cars, oil for lamps and whatever is going to replace horses and railroad cars one day, along with gold and silver."

"Along with assholes and idiots who will waste or abuse them?" I added as a student who saw the need to give his teacher some continuing education, in the way Isabel taught me, or perhaps I taught her. "Maybe even well meaning assholes and idiots like us?"

"Perhaps," Professor Pancho conceded, his lips breaking into a self-examining grimace. "But are we not here, required to do what we have to, required to make decisions, even wrong ones, which, as we both know, are better than making no decisions at all, to be at the mercy of other people's decisions, or worse, the decisions of the once Almighty who is still on a long siesta break or has been tricked into the devil into being a sadist, is that not so?"

“Yes, that is so,” I replied to the constellation of claims the once semi-literate Sheriff and now well read Philosopher Revolutionary, and presumably atheist, had proposed. “But is it not so that it is more pleasing to the sensibilities to hypothesize about various modes of mentation and cerebral options than to flat out say what you want me to do, so we don’t get hung, or wind up in a shoot-out with each other which, since I’ve become better at shooting a pistol than some say wielding a scalpel, I could probably win?”

Pancho brought his horse to an abrupt halt, looked down to the ground, and laughed. A mad laughter of finality, which I was not sure reflected his own end, or mine. Finally, after he had exhausted himself with laughter, he broke into a cough. A rattle which emitted thick phlegm generously seasoned with fresh blood. “I don’t have much time left, but, Doctor Comrade Writer Revolutionary Inspirer Smith, you, I sense, unfortunately you do,” he said to me, as if he was echoing a prophesy from the Oracle of the Rockies. “What do you not see in front of us, that used to be there in abundance, which we, as idiots and assholes, are making more scarce each day?” continued as he stroked his beard, which appeared more white than black, or grey, with tinges of unwashed blood in it. With an outstretched trembling right arm he wacked into staying steady with a left fist, he pointed my attention to the vast grasslands to the South that stretched all the way to the very distant mountains.

“Buffalo, that’s what I don’t see there anymore?” I replied, recalling the smell of small game cooking on the spits at the Blackfoot camp for underfed and malnourished brown skinned diners. While kicking myself in the ass for not being more attentive to Pancho’s medical needs when I could do something about it. Then again, he was always an evasive patient, directing then insisting that I take care of everyone else after a raid rather than himself. Maybe because he really didn’t trust me as a doctor, or knew that whatever he had was beyond the help of any worldly physician. “Yes. buffalo is what I don’t see there anymore,” I repeated this time as an assertive statement of fact rather than a hypothesis asked as a question to my friend whose, as he now let me see, enlarged lymph nodes, raspy lungs, rotating pupils, and trembling of his legs all said ‘cancer’.

“Yes,” Professor Pancho said in the same voice I had heard from Y. Manfred Wilkins, Ph.D., my favorite professor and perhaps only real friend at Harvard during the last private ‘life’ tutorial he gave me before he disappeared from his post, and, so I read on the notice posted on his closed, but previously always open office door, the land of the living. “Wise and brave beasts who when confronted with a storm, plow straight into it until in a short time, they reach sunny skies at the other side,” he said as a self portrait of himself, or perhaps the way he wanted to think of himself, or the way he wanted me to write about him, as his Plato, after he was gone. “Whereas cattle, as you know---”

“---turn their backs on a rainstorm, walking away from it, getting their asses wet all day, or longer, so much so that they don’t know that a plethora of bullshit comes out of their asses,” I interjected, reading Pancho’s mind, or trying to anyway, so I could convince him that I was worthy of speaking for it posthumously. “And mouths, like the new breed of two legged cattle who came out here. Passive cattle, or sheep,” I went on, hoping I wasn’t describing myself.

“And, what do you see criss-crossing these big, wide open plains, with your ‘future’ eyes?” Pancho pressed, sheer determination somehow making his body obey his mind once again. “Tell me so I know that you know!” he blasted out.

“Railroad tracks,” I replied. “Bringing more gutless buffalo hunters out here,” I said, while reaching into my medical bag for something to relieve Pancho’s multi-organ affliction.

“Hunters whose turn it is to be hunted, and eliminated,” Pancho replied, pulling a newspaper clipping out of his pocket, handing it to me with as steady a hand as he could manage. “Oliver Walton is hosting a buffalo hunt, from his luxury train. For some very influential Eastern and International investors. Hunters whose time has come to be hunted.”

Upon reading the list of attendees, I recognized most of the names. But most notably, there was that of Walton, the railroad boss who had been instrumental in framing me for murder, and who had murdered countless of his overworked, and sometimes executed, employees in the coal mines and while building the rail lines leading to them. All done legally, in the service of America for Americans Capitalism, of course.

“Yes, sometimes agendas of the Global Revolution do coincide with personal needs of Revolutionaries,” Pancho noted.

“But,” I asked. “How do they know they will have any buffalo to hunt?” I inquired. “I’ve heard it said that you can only train a buffalo to do what it wants to do. From wise Whites and Indians.”

“Clever Whites, and now a few corrupted Indians, know how to trick even buffalo to be herded into well built corals, then herded with motorized cars to the slaughter site” he said. “And to help you do what has to be done, take whoever you want from our gang. But be sure they look like an army. An army of ghosts, I would suggest. And do it fast.”

Pancho tipped his hat to me, the once Catholic, turned agnostic turned atheist bidding me a ‘via con Dias’, galloping off in the opposite direction as to where I was now assigned, required and desired to go.

CHAPTER 15  
1922

Melanie found herself being not so good at shooting or ‘thinking’ bullets into rusted peach and bean cans, even with the rifles that had the least amount of recoil. With his tremor fist and ever wandering eye, after several misfires that nearly left him without a foot, or head, Grandpa John wasn’t much better. “Maybe we’re not motivated enough,” Melanie said after having finished off what she hoped was the last of the live rounds in the ammo chest she had asked to use on the targets so that her Grandpa wouldn’t use them on himself, the ghosts he seemed to see lingering around him, or, as he really was more crazy than sane, her. “But, maybe it’s time to go back inside so I can show off my real skill for taking life, cooking, according to the cook at my parent’s estate, and every man-friend or, yes, girlfriend, I tried to make breakfast for after a night of---”

“---Let’s try shooting at this,” John Smith said, as Grandpa this time, as he taped photographs on the shattered wall of wood that had once been an intact fence. “One of the most interesting, and last, photographs of the Utopian Gentlemen’s Benevolent Association. The Colonel, the Lord and the Money minion,” he said of the pictures of Adams, Gunderson, and Walton, wearing the most gaudy buffalo hunter outfits imaginable, even by 19<sup>th</sup> century standards. Each with overflowing fringes on over-beaded leather, over-sized bandanas, oversized gloves, oversized hats over overly long wigs, proudly holding onto rifles over-covered with satin script tied into pretty bows. Indeed no self respecting Indian, or white buffalo hunter, would allow themselves to be seen alive, or dead in these ‘manly’ outfits that made them seem feminine.

“Someone must have put them up to this display of their inner femininity,” Melanie said. “Or...a mature well before her time girl, maybe told them it made them look more like men?” she advanced.

“Not this time,” Grandpa said as he hobbled back to the shooting line. “Your mother was doing...other things at the time,” he replied averting his eyes, and, yet again, the truth. “But,” the 19<sup>th</sup> century man said to the 20<sup>th</sup> century young doctor as he came back into her century. “These three ‘thesbians’, who enjoyed playing God more than even me, did attract a large audience.”

“At a production which was winner take all, no doubt,” Melanie surmised.

“Yes, indeed,” Grandpa Doc said with gentle voice, deep in reflection. But before Melanie could find out what he saw in the depths he had once again dived into, he emerged with a Colt revolver, shooting holes into the heads and testicular tissue of each of the gentlemen on the photograph. “But,” he said as the gun smoke cleared, the odor penetrating into Melanie’s nostrils as well as the olfactory cortex behind it. “Reality is very different than our most noble and soul-sustaining fantasies.”

## CHAPTER 16

The special train bringing special people to the special buffalo hunt was one of the grandest affairs Utopia ever had, rivaling any Wild West Show to happen in my future life then, and yours now. A twenty piece band played national anthems to honor each of the guests, melodic compositions designed to stir up even the most dedicated free thinking pacifist into taking up arms and joining his, or her, The guests hosted by Colonel Adams and Railroad Tycoon Walton, but surprisingly not Gunderson, included the Senator from the Great State of New York, Duke Farnsworth from the Great City of London, Count Petrovich from the Great Empire of Russia, and most importantly Lawrence Samuel Chambers, representing the even Greater and Richer Bank of Pennsylvania. Each of them were clad of course with authentic Wyoming buffalo hunting ensembles, fashion tailored at home, with boots that had never seen a horse except for the ones they had ridden on parade grounds of course. Proudly holding onto their custom made rifles, they sat with arched backs and expressionless faces in the celebrity car of the open aired train, like statues, waiting to be gawked at, worshipped and adorned with flowers by the commoners in the adjoining cars and the crowds lining the tracks as it came to a stop near the pen that housed the 'wild bison'. Once wild, independent beasts who had been tranquilized into passivity by putting drugs into the artificially made ponds they had imbibed from, which I recognized as being from my own private stock by smell and taste of said water prior to the train arriving, and a sniff of the droppings from these now glassy eyed beasts in the well constructed pen.

Keeping the animals where they were supposed to be were cowboys, not atop horses but two and four wheeled steeds fueled by petroleum products which made enough noise to scare any four or two legged creature into submission. Watching from atop the largest and noisiest of them was Jakov Lazinski. Behind him, deputies with guns which, with a whisper of a movement, could put a hole in his back or anyone else. Or one into my head, and my Comrades in the hills above, if their binoculars were to spot us.

Those fellow Utopians, now Comrades, included Hanna Steiner, Lydia Thundercloud, whose tribe I excluded so as not to evoke another Indian war which they would lose, and of course Anna Valdez, Delfina's sister who, I confess and relate, I pretended was Delfina, to clarify my own thinking and ease my, yes, still hurting heart. Paradoxically, all these sub-commanders under me happened to be members of the weaker and 'less smarter' gender. Taking after what effective leaders do, most notably the now absent from us and probably life Pancho Fernandez, I listened to what these three women had to say, as well as what the five men under them had to suggest, then made the final decision.

To be honest, and accurate, even I didn't know what Fernandez has in mind with regard to raiding the buffalo hunting party as the most important Mission in our War to serve the poor and liberate the oppressed. Maybe, as Thundercloud suggested, it was because the bull who was responsible for the bison herd that had been tricked into drinking drugged water, then dragged into pens so they could be slaughtered by fat cats sitting on trains, was Fernandez' spirit helper. Or because this train was carrying newly designed firearms which could be used against revolutionaries, explosives that would built create

more unstable tunnels into coal mines, and medicines which could be turned into sedating agents to put into free lunches given to rebellious and/or independent thinking workers, all of which the Revolution, whatever that was, could use against the Anglo Capitalists, according to 'shoot first and ask questions after the funeral' Anna. Or Hanna, because there was an abundance of gold and owners of such on the train, which could be stolen and held for ransom, providing enough funds to buy more books for more people and therefore, educate the ignorance and cruelty out of the general population, everywhere, as Hanna suggested.

In any case, our goal was simple. Steal whatever was on the train, keep as many buffalo alive as we could, and destroy the reputation that future governor Adams and soon to be Western head of the Union Pacific Railroad Walton were building up with the political and economic gatekeepers they were hosting, bringing those two bastards into poverty, jail, or a coffin, whichever was easier. But, after most of Fernandez' army decided to go home or form their own armies after I reported his demise, we were a band of 9 nine, against twenty times that number of guns. Who were on a train that could leave as quickly as they came. "So, who and what do we become?" I asked myself, then the trio of women who, perhaps with my help or perhaps despite it, were now empowered, then the biggest perhaps wisest of the bison. The biggest anyway, who limped around his now awakened herd with a watchful glance over those who were stomping their hoofs, yet still unable to use them effectively to charge at the cars, motorcycles, flame throwers and mounted horses keeping them in their 'place', until it was time to meet their Maker. "So, what and who MUST I become?" I asked the seemingly only thinking and sane member of the soon to be 'hunted' buffalo herd.

"Someone bigger than who you are," the old bison said to me with eyes that seemed old, wise but still determined. "Or we all will become ghosts, very soon."

There was something familiar about the voice inside of me that this bison had awakened, perhaps by Fernandez renting part of his soul. And inhabiting some of mine as an idea occurred to me. "Use the devil's fire against him, and you will be acquitted from an afterlife sentence in hell," I remembered General Fernandez saying to me as Comrade Pancho, facilitated by seeing Major Adams in the celebrity car in his Confederate uniform, telling stories to awestruck European and Eastern listeners.

"He's probably telling them how he won seven battles, without firing a shot at the enemy, against Union Armies five times his number by blowing up dust behind his horses, so it looks like he had twenty times more men than the 'blue bellied devils' have," Hanna commented. "He's probably onto us."

"Then, we'll have to convince them that we're ghosts, not real men, or women," Thundercloud added.

"Ghosts who WILL have to fire at the enemy. Shooting to kill as well as to scare," Anna asserted as she visualized bullets from her Winchester going into the hearts, brains and testicles of the Anglos and other White men in the celebrity car. "Remember the

Massacre at the Nueces,” she said reminding still Pacifist Hanna about the location where her Pacifist Free Thinker father was massacred by Confederate Home Guard troops for the unforgivable, treasonous act of deciding to not join their Army, and convincing so many others to think about enlisting in any army before doing so. Anna then went on with more ‘remembers’ referring to battles after the Alamo where Americans had slaughtered Mexicans, and Indians, conflicts which schoolteacher Hanna had full knowledge of, the way they actually happened.

Hanna grabbed hold of the revolver she had used only used in her schoolhouse as a deterrent, squeezing her now-firm fist on the handle, eyeing with the most assertive of determination the first targets for its bullets. Such scared me, as well as the five men who still, by some miracle, had not deserted this Mission. I requested of them as a Comrade, the ordered them, as a General, to cut off branches and tie them to the tails of our horses, assuring them that the horses would not spook. Yes it was a another hypothesis rather than fact, but another fact was that one of the guards on the train spotted us.

A clean-face Army private of no more than 20 years with elephant ears and an eagle eye. The only blue belly or deputy who was was not drunk, stomping his foot to the music, or winking at the scantily clad female entertainment headed up by brought the still young, and very alluring Lilly, Adam’s official date for occasion who never left his side. Something that Sally Ann, located in the cooking car, did not take kindly to. Yet, the negotiator who reasoned her arrogant husband into wearing a dress, as well as prevented many a dishonored woman from poisoning his tea, reeked of... helplessness as she supervised an equally subservient Tasha Lazinski and other women of lower stations, in the preparation of the vegetables to accompany the soon to be slain buffalo.

But for the moment, my concern had to be with this young, and scared, Army private who took his job seriously, and was well on his way to convincing complacent stubble faced superiors that there was danger afoot. Retreating further into the brush wasn’t an option for us, as on the other side, five wagonloads of soldiers, deputies and citizens who had donned badges for the festive occasion. It was one of those moments when quick intuition had to super-cede over logical reasoning. Of course, I outlined a plan A to my compadres, which I hoped everyone would follow, and which had to work, as there was no plan B, a fact which of course the three women also knew but the men under my command, and protection, didn’t.

With branches securely put on the tails of all of the horses, and only two of them bucking off their riders because of such, I raised my hand up to the sky. “On my count,” I said, feeling more empowered than I ever had, for better or worse. “And...” I continued, looking to the old bison for him to nod.”

“And now!” I yelled out my mouth wide open, my ears having heard enough the Silence which was about to be rudely interrupted.



We circled the halted railroad cars, yelling like banshees, kicking up dust behind us. Shooting our guns towards and into the celebrity car, then the guards who gathered around it. The bison woke up from their sedated state, feeling wild, empowered and defiant, perhaps because of the gunfire, or perhaps because of the Blackfoot yelps Thundercloud blasted out of her mouth as a ghost. A shrilling phrase which was more frightening to the enemy and empowering to the emitter than anything I have ever heard, even the famed Rebel yell, the last and most effective weapon Johnny Reb had against Billy Yank. We all became Indian ghosts, scaring the shit out of everyone below, even Adams, who claimed that he had fought as many vicious redskins as freedom stealing Yankees. I could smell the Capitalist fucks, and their cowardly guards, them shitting in their pants, see them ducking for cover, hearing them scream in terror as they fired shot after shot at us which, missed. Then saw them open their eyes in absolute terror, and divine retribution, when the head bison snorted at the celebrity car, bowed his head down, and charged the gate to the heavily reinforced coral. A gate which was opened by none other than Jakov Lazinski, who stood his ground, crossed himself, then closed his eyes, as he moved aside, then stood up, proudly, accepting whatever the Good Lord, rifle armed Indian ghosts or pissed off buffalo had in store for him.

Being in the middle of a battle, you never know what goes on around you, even though you initiated it, or was a channel for whoever initiated it. For everyone, it was an immediate and personal experience. But one thing impacted everyone's experience. Each man, and woman's fate, was determined, mostly, by the buffalo stampede that overtook the car of buffalo hunters, then the rest of the train. The uniformed and star bearing guards, due to being underpaid or underappreciated by the bosses, were the first to flee. The band left their instruments behind, joining in a chorus of prayers to the almighty as the instruments they had used to rouse peace loving people into joining patriotic wars were trampled into the ground. The scantily clad pleasure ladies were relieved of most of the rest of their clothing, patches of their beautiful skin and full use of their appendages as they fled for whatever protection they could get. No men came to their rescue, most particularly the ones who winked at them while they were still in their biological prime.

Oliver Walton's dismembered body lay dead on the rail road tracks, his heart, which he did have, open for the birds of prey that would dine on, and hopefully not be poisoned, by it. A few of the visiting buffalo hunters had somehow escaped being trampled, and had somehow made it onto the only wagon that escaped damage with the other survivors. The Russian Baron swore that it was a sign from God saying that the ghosts of slain Indians haunted the West, making it an unwise for foreign immigration of investment. The President of the bank of Philadelphia, well known for his business smarts and dismissal of anything that can't be bought, spent or touched, agreed. Adams lay on the ground, calling out for his mother. Then his wife. Sally Ann pulled herself out from a pile of dead bodies, and hobbled over to her husband. "I can't move my legs, or arms," he said to her with tears of fear coming down his cheek. "Or...feel what's between my legs," came out of his mouth. "A joke, Sally Ann, my love," he said of the penile projection which had found pleasure in no less than 20 other women, according to the

best information at my medical disposal, and which exacted control over his wife, or as three of those 20 pleasure women said, ‘my politically required breeder.’”

By the way Sally Ann didn’t laugh at the joke, she most probably knew about her husband’s extra marital ‘explorations’, or worse things he did when he wasn’t at home. After exhausting himself with laughter, contrition somehow overtook him. “Stop!” he yelled out with strained voice, and labored breathing. “Please do me two last favors, even though I probably don’t deserve it,” I heard from a distance after I, out of pity, instinct, virtue or habit, dismounted from my horse, flunk away my rifle, and ran towards the Colonel to tend to him medically. An examination of what was left of legs and arms said that they would never be functional again. After telling him so, he asked, then begged, me to kill him. “Tell me if you forgive me,” he said, to Sally, rather than me.

“I do,” Sally replied. “Doc does too,” she added, taking the liberty to speak for me.

“Then, please, kill me, end my suffering,” he pleaded, to Sally. “A shot between my closed eyes into my wrong thinking head.”

“Sure,” Sally Ann answered, with the most extreme emotional detachment, after which she pulled the revolver out of her husband’s pocket and shot him. In the groin. “Did ya feel that?” she asked.

“Feel what?” the Colonel asked, bewildered. An emotion I had not seen in him since he found out that he was voted out of office after the women of Wyoming got the vote.

“You will feel this,” Sally Ann said, as she stroked his lips, then leaned her body seductively towards them. “Close those beautiful blue eyes and pucker up.”

A smile came to the Colonel’s face as he closed his eyelids. Then was the proud recipient of a bullet from his gun, straight into the mouth, blowing his brains into a spray that spread into a blanket of gop three feet wide. A breath of reflection later, Sally Ann knelt down in that carpet of bloody grey and white matter, weeping a flood of tears into his lifeless chest.

I kept my distance, as Sally Ann needed to figure some things out by herself, and besides, I had no gestures or magic words that would make things any better for her, or the thankfully now departed husband she was now liberated from.

I then made the rounds, tending to whatever wounded were worth saving. Ironic, I thought, that I was trying to save those who would have intentionally killed or maimed me, and my gang of Revolutionary Comrades, barely 10 minutes ago. But, wars are about such ironies. But I did my best to diagnose and, with the help of my still alive eight fellow Revolutionaries, patch up whoever was able to travel. Until someone who I wanted to treat woke up from his slumber, then stumbled onto his feet. Tasha Lazinski, whose only injuries were tears into a wool dress and flax blouse that was little more than patched together rags to begin with, ran to prevent her husband from hitting the ground

yet again. As he had done a solid for the bison, and us, by opening the gate to the coral, I rushed to his aid, even though others needed my medical care more.

“I’m alright!” Jakov Lazinski, whose American bought 50 dollar suit now looked like the mismatched one dollar peasant working class ‘ensemble he had come to America in, said as he discovered that he still had one good foot, and more importantly, a good wife to help him ambulate with the other. “We’ll be alright too,” he said to me, while looking at Tasha. “Yes?”

“Yes,” Tasha said to her husband.

“No, you aren’t,” I said to Jakov. “You need and more importantly deserve medical attention on that leg,” I informed him after examining the mesh of torn bone, muscle and tendons after I tore open the rest of his trouser leg. “I don’t want another one and a half legged Noah Winters on my hands. I AM going to help you.”

“There are others in town who need your help now, as a doctor, and more,” he insisted. “Someone very special.”

That word ‘special’ registered deep, causing me to cease my medical duties long enough to picture Delfina or Isabel in medical trouble, or worse.

“We’ll take care of Jakov,” I heard Hanna say behind my back, her steady hand on my shaking shoulder.

“And everyone else,” Thundercloud added, offering me the reins to her own horse, the fastest stead in our detachment.

“And take care of everyone else, who will not make trouble for anyone else, ever again,” Anna sneared as she helped one of the wounded, an Anglo Lieutenant Bluecoat, onto the wagon, behind sure that he felt the pain in each of his limbs to the maximal extent en route. Then tying his hands to the bar keeping every the other culprits who no doubt were preparing the ‘just following orders’ or ‘I didn’t know where we going’ or ‘I really needed this job to feed my family’ defense for the circuit judge in a location which WE would choose this time. And not in Utopia of course.

As I got on Thundercloud’s horse, I looked back at Anna, wondered how many Anglos the still very Mexican Anna would have to sent to jail, heaven or hell to quench the volcanic rage she had for American White males, of which I know I was as well. But that calculation was halted by Hanna giving the horse a swift wack on the ass, catapulting me into a flat out gallop towards Utopia.

Upon arrival in Utopia, I found the town...empty, as if a plague had hit it and all of the dead had been buried and those fearing they would be dead had fled. The windblown streets were quiet, as if a holiday was declared by every one of the merchants. The only center of activity was the Wildcat Saloon. A rattling of chains I heard from inside the

boarded up establishment. The kind I heard on chain gangs in Northern jails outside of Boston, and on transport details in the South during the 'glory days' of Dixie when slavery was legal. And, as I ran into after the war on the way West, caravans of young presumably mentally disturbed orphan White girls 'adopted' by White Papa's who made a fortune selling them to other White Papa's. Scattered around the locked doors of the Wildcat were fragments of womens clothing, torn, blood stained, and reeking of semen. Ignoring the wanted posters for me promising \$4,000 dead or alive still plastered on every establishment in town, smelling armed gunmen inside who would no doubt want to put me in those chains for transport to Sundance Penitentiary, I whipped out two revolvers. Then crashed through the door of the Wildcat, preparing to liberate whoever was in chains, most particularly myself, or perhaps end this 'experiment' called life with a glorious and virtuous ending.

"Let those girls go!" I asserted and declared, as a one man army, determined to free whoever was in chains, and to personally treat those who were too conditioned or scared to free themselves from such shackles. "You're all free to go! You too!" I said to one of the slaves, her back turned to me, a scrub brush in her barely moving hand, which didn't budge, even after I freed her.

"Not this one," I heard from a woman's voice behind me. As I looked around me and saw blood-soaked shackles with no slave in them. "This one is going to get a healthy dose of his own medicine," Alicia continued, her ankles and wrists bruised as she stumbled her way towards the sister in chains, kicking her right side up. "Master gettin' to feel what it be like to be on the other side of the whip," she said in 'Nigereze'. Gunderson's lips were ruby red, his back covered with no less than 20 lashes of a whip. "One for every girl he special ordered to be his new employees."

"Girls who are where now?" I asked the pleasure woman who was top of the heap at the Wildcat because of her 'exotic' Creole-Black-Seminole genetics, who because of that racial situation, was not allowed by White men, and all too many Caucasian women, to be part of the new wave of liberated women after suffrage was passed 6 long years ago. "Bought and sold girls and women who came in many colors who this White piece of shit ain't gonna to enslave anymore!" the once-nicest whore in the Wildcat continued with the most evil look her face, after which she pulled out the bullwhip and lay yet another mark into his back, exposing not only bone but bulging out lung tissue underneath.

"Girls and women who are where?" I inquired, grabbing hold of the business end of the whip.

"Somewhere far away from here," Alicia shot back at me, in anger, and a renewed sense of pride. "Free from bondage."

"Not all of them," I said, spotting three girls. One was barely 18, had yellow skin and a round face which ominously resembled that of Wang Lee had he decided to reincarnate as a woman, or married a half White woman who saw his full potential as a man rather than a Wise and powerful Chinaman. Another was a Blackfoot Indian, of prime marrying

and childbearing age, who I thought I recognized from my trips North, and know I fanaticized about around the campfire when slumbering at night. The other was white, resembling, beneath the bruises on her face inflicted by others and the slashes her wrist no doubt inserted herself, Isabel, had I married into the Wentworth dynasty in Boston, as was my father's order and my mother's wish. Like unwillingly cast characters in a ghost-heavy Shakespeare play, they shuffled out from the shadows behind me walking slowly towards the shackles. They somehow wrapped the broken metal rings back around their wrists and ankles, then knelt in front of me. "My new master," the Asian woman said. "I your squaw," the Indian girl seemed to have once been a princess added. "Command me, Daddy, please," pleased the White girl as she grabbed hold of my feet, who with bath, some real meat on her bones, and a wardrobe made of clothing rather than rags could have been an older Isabel, or younger Delfina.

"No more slaves!" Alicia blasted out at the girls, struggling to lift them up.

"Whatever you say, Mistress," they replied, in unison, heads bowed, refusing to get off their knees.

"What's going on?" Alicia asked me, obviously inexperienced in recognizing learned helplessness that had been taught to all too many unliberatable victims who were caught in too all manner's of slavery. "Besides me probably going to prison for seasonin' Massar Gunderson's mornin' biscuits with ma specialty spices," she continued in Nigereze.

"Spices you burrowed from my Delfina's medical clinic," I said, sniffing a portion of the crumbs lingering in his barely breathing mouth.

"No one's clinic now," Alicia said. "She must have decided ta leave. Didn't give any notice to anybody. But in the meantime, what do we do about 'Lord Gunderson'?"

"Finish him off," I heard from a deep, baritone voice, behind me. "It's the Christian thing to do. He's suffering," Noah Winters reminded Alicia, and me, as he hobbled in on his one and a half legs. "Doc, will you do the honors?" he said, handing me his revolver.

"No!" I found myself saying, upon gazing at my patient, then at the girls who would require extensive medical therapy if indeed they would ever be able to recognize, and reclaim, the names and lives they had before becoming slaves. "He's going to do it himself," I proclaimed as I put the revolver into Gunderson's hand.

"I ccccan't," he said through a mouth that was still breathing.

"Then you'll die slowly, and painfully," I reminded him. "Like Kitty did. The woman you framed me for killing. Turning Delfina against me. And everyone else who I---.. "

"---I wwwas..."

“Following orders, working with inaccurate information, doing what you thought was right at the time?” I offered. “Or all of the above.”

“Doc, you gotta help me,” Gunderson pushed out of a body that was still breathing, and capable of supporting ‘life’, such as that agonizing process was for him now, indefinitely. “Please, end it.”

“No,” I said sitting down on the elevated chair he sat on like a throne, lighting up a cigar. Then leaning forward, blowing the smoke into his eyes. “Not until you tell me who else framed me,” I whispered into his ear. “Just between you, me and the creator,” I said, considering that Noah Winters has as much motive to do me in as Gunderson.

Lord Gunderson considered his options in this world and the next, then finally whispered to me, “It waaaaas...”

His voice was silenced by a bullet shot into his head, delivered by the Indian slave. “Bad White Daddy,” she yelled at Gunderson, from behind a smoking gun held with a now shaking hand. “And bad ugly squaw,” she continued, pointing the gun at her own head. Thankfully, perhaps, Noah Winters grabbed hold of the revolver just in time so that the second round went into a picture of George Armstrong Custer hanging on the wall. Alicia restrained the young Native woman as she grabbed hold of Winter’s buffalo knife, saving her from a self-induced scalping.

The other two ‘Prodigal Slaves’ went catatonic. I was determined to do what I could for them, approaching them in a doctorly manner. “You’re free now,” I informed them as reached down to remove their shackles, that statement driving terror into their hearts. “I’ll take care of you now,” I added, as their provisional new ‘master’, as the first step towards their becoming free of the addiction of being owned.

“No, we will,” Noah Winters said to me. “Me and my new wife,” he said, looking at Alicia, bending down on his good knee.

“I’m damaged goods,” Alicia replied.

“We’re all damaged goods,” he answered, pointing to his missing leg. “Which is why we have to fix each other.”

After careful consideration, Alicia nodded ‘yes’ to the proposition. I proceeded to the bar, followed by my two female ‘servants’ who were dependent on me to teach them how to liberate themselves. I poured a round of drinks, requesting that they serve the newly engaged couple. I lifted my own glass up, allowed myself the luxury of a smile, and had it wiped off my face by Noah’s next remark.

“Doc, you and Delfina did what you could for me, and I was severely unappreciative for your medical advice regarding my leg. A hind wing that was disfigured by a belligerent

horse, and made worse by my own neglect, and ignorance,” he related and confessed with the demeanor of a future professor, teaching rather than merely instructing others of his race, and mine, about things beyond horseflesh and cattle. “But, like all too many of people who transform themselves into victimized patients, I blamed you for my maladies and held you responsible for fixing what you didn’t break. Therefore, as a gift, I ask, and beg you to go home and tend to your own business, while we take care of our kids,” he said of the emancipated, in body anyway, sex slaves. “And you take care of yours.” Yes, it was time for me to see Isabel. The only connection to Delfina I had. A connection that had bonds to it that, well, had evolved into something I never expected, or deserved.

But as wanted man in a corrupt town that had been disrupted and embarrassed rather than re-captured, I had to tend to family business, and fast. Upon entering the clinic that had been my Purpose, home and refuge before life decided that I should marry Delfina, my olfactory senses picked up where I left off. The mixed aroma of medications that soothed the mind, aroused the senses and destroyed the un-seeable creatures that were responsible for so many human diseases permeated the air. Every surgical instrument was in its place, arranged in lines and rows which made them accessible and, somehow, artistic. The quiet felt loud, clean and, though this was a location where so many lives had been saved, lifeless.

The walls were vacant now, void of Delfina’s the forged medical diplomas which didn’t match up to her true medical abilities, the paintings which she did in her spare time to make patients feel like people as well as the flowers and other plants she insisted on putting into the treatment area that she insisted had physiological as well as psychological benefits on our patients, and us. But there was one piece of furniture that was most ominously...familiar.

My desk was exactly as I left it, even though for the last two years Delfina was its sole occupant and operator. On the ‘to deal with today’ blotter in front of the chair lay a single piece of paper, a glass of my favorite drink, soft cider, beside it to the left, Delphia’s trademark Tex-Mex honey-spiced jerky to the right. The wind coming in from the partially open window blew the aroma of such to me, beckoning me to take my place. Honoring the ghosts, or housekeeper, or bounty hunter, who arranged all of this, I walked to the desk, pulled out my chair, took a sip of the cider, a bite of the jerky and commenced whatever document I was supposed to read. My jaw dropped in horror and disbelief after reading the first line, forcing me to avert my stare from it.

“And the rest of it says?” Isabel said as she walked in through the door, wearing Delfina’s medical coat, my absent wife’s oversized stethoscope on my still under-grown but very mature 8 year old daughter’s neck. “Go on, please,” she said as she sat down on the chair in front of me.

“How did you get this? This letter I didn’t write!” I asked the daughter I had not seen for two years as an outlaw, yet dreamed about being re-united with every night.

“The letter you wrote to the pleasure-providing Anarchist Union organizer Kitty, saying that you were through being her lover, and that her services as an experimental and disposable, and ugly, rat in your social experiment were no longer required, or desired. And that she’d be doing everyone a favor if she killed herself,” Isabel replied, as an adult, in the same detached, professional academic manner I had adopted when I was three years older than she was now. “I can show you previous drafts of the letter I wrote, and I’d really value your opinion regarding if they’re any better in style and penmanship than this one,” she said as she opened my locked drawer with a Bobbi pin pulled out of her hair, faster than I was able to open it with a key. “Please, tell me what you think!” she asked, as a student seeking, and still needing, approval as well as praise from her teacher.

“So, were you the witness to the crime I didn’t commit, too?” I said to the daughter who had instantly gone from being my most beloved protégé and friend to my most feared, and deadly enemy. “The one who was ‘believed and well protected’?” I asked, recalling railroad, bank and mining boss Oliver Walton words when I asked if anyone had seen me kill Kitty.

“The witness you hit every night, in places where you don’t make any bruises,” Isabel replied. She picked up a blood stained spiked cane, pulled up her sleeve, and wacked herself on the arm. “And sometimes places where the bruises do show, to those who need to see them. Puppets and sometimes likable lab rats, in an experiment that, well, seemed interesting at the time, and which become ideologically necessary,” she boasted, pulling out a book with a cover resembling my own Magnum Opus which would I hoped would make me the father of a new brand of social psychology, and the apple of my father’s eye again in Boston once it was published and recognized. “I recorded all of the lies I told one person about another so that I could intuit and document the truth about their psychological profile and potential for aberrant human behaviors, for good and bad,” she explained as I perused the book she apparently had written to make herself famous. “I burrowed some material from you, and as for the rest---“

“---A worthy student excels her teacher, God help us both,” I said, realizing that my daughter had become me. The ‘me’ I used to be until she had manipulated everyone in Utopia to believe I was a malicious, manipulate, uncaring and dangerous asshole. “But, about my wife. Your mother, to the best of my and her knowledge, anyway,” I said, putting the book down. “Where is she!” I screamed into my daughter’s cold, calm and evil-possessed angelic face.

“She...went into a deep depression,” Isabel said as she got up, pacing around the room with hands behind her back in a ‘queen detective’ stroll to the beat of a song in her head I had never heard, and was too blind and deaf to have detected before. “After finding out you were seeing other women,” she said catching a butterfly that had inadvertently found its way into the clinic, pulling its wings apart.

“After you planted evidence that convinced her I was seeing other women,” I shot back, slapping the butterfly out of her hand before she could add it to the apparently long list of lives she destroyed, or took. “Where is your mother!” I demanded, grabbing hold of her



by the throat, feeling my fingernails digging into her neck, leaving marks that would definitely get me hung if she reported it, which she would. Withdrawing from the demoness possessing my daughter, I decided to reason with it. "It might be interesting to you to see the reaction to finding out where my wife and your mother is," I suggested.

"Yes indeed, it would be," Isabel replied, scratching her small, tender rounded chin, skin which was nearly as white as mine, which, according to what I saw and smelt, she was now making whiter with a 'whitening lotion' I used for wound healing. As did her darker skinned doctor-Mom. "What do you feel, and how would you react, if I told you that after being told that you gave up on being romantic with her because you were romantic with others, Delfina, subject turned her depression into anger? Anger that caused her to do reversible and sometimes irreversible harm to others. Such as certain patients who didn't agree with her Mexican Communist Revolutionary views. And--"

"Lord William Samuel Gunderson, who I know was poisoned by...." I stopped myself. "...Someone else."

"Maybe or maybe not," she conceded. "But it's what people believe that's true."

"Like the bruises that can't be seen and those that can be that Delfina put on you?" I said of the Mexican whose very justifiable volcanic rage going all the way back to childhood had forced her fist into nothing except herself. "So you say, and write!" I continued, picking up the diary which no doubt she conveniently 'lost' or had open around important people whose curiosity in others or necessity to know about the competition got the better of them. Something I did myself with my book of half-lies and half-truths, I admit, when I had gone into an adjoining room at the clinic, or excused myself to go to the privy during a talk about the weather in an eatery, or a friendly card game in a saloon. "Where is Delfina, aka subject 129B?" I demanded.

"Some place where she won't kill herself, or others," the reply from Doctor Izzy as she strided her way to the medicine cabinet. "A comfortable place, where she'll get lots of this," she said of my most soothing and mind numbing potions. The one that, I admit, I used on the wild horse at the Utopia rodeo to calm the stallion down sufficiently to be rideable by Delfina where the bet between men and women made, as a result of my intervention, turned out in favor of a more enlightened outcome that is would have been otherwise. A potion which, as I looked in my half-finished glass of apple cider, I may have ingested as part of Isabel's plan to sedate me into passively telling her all of my secrets, which I had done to others, in my distant past. But for a cause which I believed then, and believe now, was for Global Enlightenment. What Isabel's motives were now, didn't know. So, I said to her the words that every rightly-growing up child would over-say to their parents, and every other adult who had more knowledge than they did.

"Why?" demanded of Isabel, regarding everything that had transpired, or rather than she had made to transpire. From turning the (all things considered) Democratic 'give according to your ability and take according to your needs' sharing and caring Socialist Paradise, for both genders and all races, I had created in Utopia into a stab and grab

Capitalist, Imperialist shark fest where the strongest not only survived, but got fat eating the very flesh of the weak, starting with their defeated and broken hearts. “Why?” I asked, pulling back to allow her and the demon inside of her (or perhaps the demon she always was) to answer in whatever context suited her.

Without missing a beat the once love of my life and biggest hope for future generations replied, without an ounce of regret or remorse, “To be a credit to our White Race and Class, who must dominate and regulate the lower races and classes, of course. A Race and Class that you, my paternal parental unit, have become a disgrace and danger to. Who I have emancipated myself from.” She went to the window and opened it.

I heard footsteps approach the back door to the clinic. I quickly retrieved my revolvers, aiming it at the intruders as they pushed against opened the door. For reasons I still didn’t understand, I pulled my daughter behind me so that I would receive the first bullets from the bounty hunters behind it. “He’s hurting me again!” she screamed out, after which she bit both guns out of both my shooting hands, then her own. “He’s hurting me.”

“Which he won’t do anymore,” a clean shaven tall, austere preacher in a plain but expensive black suit with a gold embroidered vest said as he entered, aiming his gun at me. His companion, a small framed white woman in her early forties in a black bonnet and very upscale dress followed, rushing to ‘so hurt and helpless’ Isabel’s aid.

“Are you alright child?” the woman asked in a maternal manner.

“She will be, with God’s help, and ours, Mother,” the Man of God said to his wife. “And who is this man who has been harming you?”

I braced myself for Isabel to make the betrayal complete. For her to tell this armed, very White and apparently very rich preacher that I was wanted by the law for being not only a Bandit but a Revolutionary Anarchist. And that he could both get richer by turning me in, and climb up the political social ladder even faster by claiming that he rescued the most intelligent girl West of Saint Louis from the most vicious and sadistic of fathers.

“Yes, who is this horrible, terrible man! Who we, as your new, legally adopting parents, will see that he gets everything that is coming to him,” Isabel’s new mother said.

Isabel looked into my eyes, revealing nothing regarding what was in hers.

“Well, child,” the Preacher asked Isabel, while putting the business end of his gun squarely into the skin on my forehead. “Who is he? Your father?”

“A nobody, who is a disgrace to his race, and gender.” Isabel replied to the strangers in town who, thankfully for me, had not seen the wanted poster of me still on every bulletin board in town. And blowing in the wind. “My father is dead,” she said to her new father. “This man is just a deluded old drunk, who is best punished for breaking in here by letting him go back out on the streets.”

“Without his guns,” Isabel’s new mother said, taking away my revolvers, placing them in the ‘getting away from here’ suitcase I recall giving Isabel on her fifth birthday for her future travels around the world.

“And without his arrogance,” my daughter’s new father added. He grabbed me by the collar with one hand, opened the window with the other, and tossed me onto the street, into a bin of trash and detritus. “Garbage to garbage,” he declared.

As I slowly emerged from the pile of dung and debris, I asked myself why Isabel would just let me go. After sifting off the fourth layer of grunge from my white skin, which as a result of being thrown into the pile of crap did appear more brown, the only logical reason hit me. Keeping me alive would be more interesting to her, in whatever other social experiments she was conducting in the service of being a credit to her race, and class. Until of course, young Isabel would...

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1921

“...Experiment with her new parents, and dismiss them from their lives?” Melanie asked her host, as he sat on the stump of a tree as old as the story he was telling, watching the sun heading towards the Western horizon with a sense of finality in his lost gaze. “Then marry up to experiment with a richer, asshole and idiot upwardly mobile husband, who she took to the cleaners so effectively that he didn’t know he had been washed,” the NYU-trained doctor and self-appointed social reformer continued staring back at her own life as a valued member of the privileged caste in a country that theoretically was supposed to be ‘by and for ALL the people’. “Then finally experimenting with...”

“---You, Melanie,” Grandpa Doc replied, turning his aching neck towards Melanie, letting his gaze rest upon her with a proud smile. One that Melanie obtained from her professors when she earned it, but never got from her mother or father when she deserved, or needed, it.

“And Delfina, my grandmother, you did try to find her, I hope,” Melanie asked. “I trust.”

“Indeed yes,” replied the old man whose face seemed to age a year for every minute the golden rays from the setting sun shone upon him. “By spreading around as much cash as I could get, which always works,” he noted after which he broke into mad laughter. Having felt the pain in the depths of his lungs too intensely, he buried that expression of dark humor back into its proper slot. “Unless the people keeping me from finding her have more money, which they did,” he continued, as a statement and warning. “And realized that Delfina knew too much about something really big, or about big people who would stop being big if she was allowed back into the world. Some things I really didn’t know about. And, besides, me being a wanted man in Wyoming---”

“—who could have left Wyoming, and started with a clean slate, legally, as even murder was escapable then if you crossed state lines.” Melanie pointed out. “The Sundance Kid was let out of jail after promising the governor he wouldn’t kill anyone else, not in Wyoming anyway.”

“True enough, but though he stimulated many outlaw wannabes to indulge in colorful mischief, Butch and Sundance were not ‘revolutionary anarchists’ as we were called then. The favorite target for the Pinkertons, who were hired by private industry, who had no problem crossing state lines, and taking justice into their own money hungry hands.”

With shaking hands, Grandpa Doc reached into his coat pocket, retrieved a small bottle, and emptied its contents into his belly. After a sigh of relief, he threw the bottle up in the air and with a sure and steady hand that was the envy of very surgeon as well as gunfighter, drew out his revolver and blasted the glass container into fragments of dust that scattered, then were picked up by an incoming wind from the East. “I’m coming!” he said to the wind. “I just have to finish this dialog with our grandchild, Del,” he

continued, after which he sat down and appeared young again, a bright golden halo around his head. “Doctor Mel here, who acquired your skill as a healer and mine as a literary truth teller, or perhaps story bullshitter when she has to be, is going to write a book about all of this, and make what we did and tried to do known. Maybe famous. And in the process maybe she’ll be famous. About...a town we renamed...”

Doc pulled a wooden board up from its embedded place in the ground, proudly displaying the most elegant 16<sup>th</sup> century calligraphy she had seen in recent memory.

“Camelot?” Melanie noted.

“Indeed, yes,” Grandpa John answered while placing his firm hand on Melanie’s shoulder. Doc was every inch a King Arthur now, so regal that he had no need for a crown. As he described Utopia after the buffalo herd had gotten rid of the human dung who had corrupted it as “...a community where every man was a king and every woman a queen, but no one wore a crown. Where everyone gave according to their abilities and took according to their needs. Where Liam Casey not only organized working men, but insured as their new boss at the mines and on the rails that they got the same wages as he did, and the same respect, for the Chinese, Black and White Comrades working with him, from his very open office on this very spot where we are speaking.” King John rose to his feet, displaying with pride to another portion of the charred lumber and windblown debris. “Where over there, was City Hall, where Mayoress Tasha Lazinski kept a library that was always over-attended, with ‘The Inventor’s Emporium’ next to it operated by husband, Jakov, who showed everyone how to build a motorized carriage so they could give their horses time off, and take those four wheeled beasts places the railroad never went,” he continued as Melanie’s imagination build a hologram of the kingdom being described that she could hear, see and smell. “And over there,” King John continued regarding a collection of what seemed to be old apple carts. “A Courthouse presided over by Justice Alicia Winters, and a jail which housed only the guilty, who were educated rather than punished, managed by her husband, Sheriff Noah Winters.” He then turned to the most prized pile of lumber of all. “And there, an eight room schoolhouse for all ages, and races, where teachers and students learned from each other, with a ninth room where Head Mastresses Hanna and Thundercloud lived as a happily married couple without once having to put down to shades to hide what they were doing, and who they were.”

Doc went on, describing the ‘everyone gives according to their needs, takes according to their abilities, and understands that everyone’s creative process has to be different’ Old West Paradise. “But,” he finally said after describing every pile of debris as it once was. “Our experiment was outvoted.”

“By the fucking Capitalists?” Melanie advanced.

“Not this time,” Doc replied, after which he took in a deep breath and looked to the mountains on the Southern and Eastern horizon, their rock faces raw, and empty. “Mother Nature had enough of us, and we took too much from her. The gold ran out,

then the silver, then the oil, then the coal, then the grass, when the river and underground steams decided to go elsewhere, then our ability to convince anyone that we had anything of economic worth here, then..." The old doctor, writer, social reformer and outlaw gazed over the once great city that had been blown by and into the far winds. He exhaled heavily then took in a deep, invigorating and somehow hopeful breath. "But there is one thing, after the final 'accidental' fire that we, I, remained rich in."

"History," Melanie replied, reading the old man's mind and heart. "And...ghosts?" she continued, hearing and feeling something in the wind yet again as it kept switching direction, finally seeing a human form within the branches of the pine trees around the perimeter of Camelot West.

"Yes, that's her," Doc said, fondly as he described what Melanie was finally seeing. "With her small, rounded face, unapologetically dark olive skin, brown eyes you could get lost and found in, and long black hair that falls over her small unbreakable shoulders that so many people leaned on more than they thought they ever did."

"Your diary!" she yelled out to the smiling image of the ghost who had now become real. "Tell this 'man' next to me to give it to me! So I can tell your side of this story to the world."

"He already has given it to you," Melanie heard from Delfina, as clearly and loudly as any trolley car on Broadway, or yelling of a Hospital Administrator in San Francisco, or put down from the film producers and book publishers who told her that because of her gender she should write books that are written for women gossiping around a coffee table rather than common people who want to transform themselves and the world. "You've heard his story, and feel mine. Now, it's time to write. To add an H.B.A.R.P. to your qualifications."

"What's that?" Melanie asked Doc. "An H.B.A.R.P.?"

"Human being, aspiring Renaissance Person," the old man said with the hopeful vitality, and blind optimism of a young one.

With that, the old man transformed into a young one as he walked towards the illusion that Melanie now saw and felt as more real than anything verifiable in the 'real' world. Doc took Delfina's extended hand, and walked, then strolled then dances with her into the brush, disappearing into them.

From behind Melanie, a knicker of a horse, already saddled. "So," she said to the steed, who resembled the wild horse Delfina had 'mastered' with the help of Doc's special herb, Thundercloud's Native horse training advice and her own intellectually-based courage. "I'll assume that you're not a ghost," Melanie said, climbing atop the Appaloosa Arab, plopping her ass onto the saddle. "Time for us to go...somewhere else," she said, looking at the debris that used to be a town. "And become something...better than we are, or are allowed to be."

