



A TOWN CALLED HOPE

JOLEEN WARREN

The Warren Family Book Two

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Prelude

The train was about three miles outside of town. From a distance, Hope seemed like a large train depot. The large train yard obscured the town. It seems like all her life Joleen was told about this town and how the railroad was its lifeblood. From here it seemed the blood took over the body. Joleen watched as the town grew in her view. She knew her life was about to speed up. This would be an adventure. Her mother had an adventure on a trip. She met someone she fell in love with and left with a better understanding of life. But that was then, and this is her adventure. She wants to live her life her way. Her father was the sheriff of this town and died to protect it. She wants to live to serve it and justice. This is her story.

Chapter One

Joleen got off the train around 7 pm. She made her way to a hotel. As she walked down the sidewalk, she caught the eye of every person she passed. It was still unusual to see a woman in slacks and very unusual to see one with a gun. On her side, she had her father's Colt single action. Her namesake. The myth she would have to live up to. People smiled and tipped their hats to her. Their smiles ended when they saw into her eyes. She had the face of a girl and the eyes of a killer. Pale and cold without a hint of remorse. She had a bag on her back and a saddle bag over her shoulder. The rest of her luggage wouldn't arrive for a few days. She planned it this way so she could have a place for it before it arrived. All she really needed was some clothes to change into, her guns and a picture of Jacob. Her dead brother and why she went into the law. He was murdered in front of her on a street in San Francisco. Ran down by a drunk on a carriage. Jacob was only 9-years-old.

Along the way she saw a statue standing in what looked like the town square, her mother told her about. It was a man in a day rider hat with a gun on his hip. He also had a star on his chest. On a plaque below the statue, it said, "*Sheriff Edward Warren Husband, Father, and Hero of Hope.*" This was the place where

her father died trying to stop a train from killing everyone. He saved everyone on the train by disconnecting the cars and everyone in town by evacuating it. She said to herself, “*he died for nothing.*” She walked a little further to where the graves of a man named Apple and his wife Kaia should have been. Or at least the markers with the actual graves on the Hopi land. In its place was a marble obelisk with the name Ilyas Teller on it. She could also see the outline of a larger statue of someone or something. She would find out later.

Joleen made it to the hotel. The clerk watched her walk in with the gun at her hip and the bag on her back. He asked, “*may I help you miss?*” She said, “*yes Joleen Warren. I should have a room waiting for me?*” He eyed her then backed away a little when he stared into her eyes. She knew she had that effect on people. She counted on it. She wouldn’t have any advantage in size, but she could still intimidate with her glare. The clerk showed her to her room. He said, “*at the end of the hall is the restroom. If the sign is turned, then it is occupied. Just remember to turn the sign when you go in or expect a little-unwanted company.*” He smiled then quickly stopped when he saw she didn’t return the smile. Joleen asked, “*when does your restaurant open?*” The clerk said, “*the restaurant is always open just go in, and someone will help you.*” She was tired

and wanted to sleep. But first a bath. She didn't expect something so civilized.

She grabbed her robe, the lavender pumice soap she likes and a towel from the room. The restroom was empty. She turned the sign and went inside. As she did someone watched her go in. The stranger followed her. He went into an adjoining walk-in closet. He knew about a hole that made it possible to watch or spy in on the room. He watched her take her vest off then the slacks. Her boots were back in the room. With the vest off her womanly form was more pronounced. She unbuttoned the shirt. In this state, she seemed vulnerable and feminine. Joleen turned the water on. She seemed surprised to find hot water. The stranger took in a breath as Joleen unclasped her bra and then slid her panties off. Although seemingly petite, she was beautiful and curvy. She clearly dressed to hide her femininity. She wanted them to see her as an authority figure and not just as a woman. He watched her step into the bath. He left her there thinking he may regret having done this. He will be working with her tomorrow.

In the morning Joleen dressed. The job doesn't have a uniform, but there is a prescribed dress code. Dark brown slacks, cream or tan colored shirt and a

brown preferably leather vest. The style of hat was optional but still required. She stared into the mirror and wondered, “*why they all dressed like her mother?*” With the leather vest, she was dressed just like her mother did back in San Francisco. Unlike her mother’s vest which was made to accentuate her breasts, Joleen’s hid hers. Before reporting in, she unpacked her new holster and unwrapped her new gun from the protective oilcloth. It was a Colt 1892. A double action revolver. It used the 38-long colt and not the standard 45, so she would have to supply her own ammunition. She also had a Colt peacemaker packed away just in case she has a hard time getting ammo. Before leaving she grabbed the rosewood box with her father’s gun and the oilcloth containing the peacemaker and went to the lobby. The lobby had a safe and with a surcharge they stored the weapons away.

Joleen stopped in the restaurant and bought a muffin. She didn’t want anything more with this being such an important day. She ate the cornbread muffin along the way. As she walked a woman passed her. She looked like she was of African descent but maybe a little more. Her skin glowed like she had a radiant light from within. Behind her were three children. Joleen thought the oldest was maybe ten with the youngest at four. They were all a lighter shade than the woman she thought was their mother. The anti-ethnic

movement was going strong back in San Francisco. The Chinses were being murdered in the streets. Joleen wondered what people back home would have thought about this woman and her children.

Time has been kind to David Wednesday. He has been sheriff for about twenty years. He has 12 children with one of them as a deputy and one back east going to college. When he married his wife, the joke that would follow them was never that funny. Her name was Tuesday Grant. She became Tuesday Wednesday when they married. Together they had 12 children. Tuesday was from a large family being number 14 of 19 children. She was born in Knuckle Smash and has lived her whole life there. She was the first white child born in the former city of Knuckle Smash. David didn't know just how old he was. He was an orphan and grew up on the streets moving from town to town. His name was something he picked on the spot. He needed a name, and a calendar was on a wall. People already called him David, so he took the name of the day in the middle of the week. He also likes the fact that many people have trouble spelling it. He was on the way to an early death when fate and a man named Edward Warren intervened.

Joleen walked into the sheriff's office. The room was bigger than what her mother described. There was a front desk just like the police offices back home. A young man behind the desk saw her but didn't say a word. He pointed to a room in the back with a half glass door. On it was painted, Sheriff. She found the sheriff inside sitting at a desk reading a newspaper. He almost did a double take at Joleen. She looked so much like her mother it felt like somebody turned the clock back. He put the newspaper down and sat up in his seat. He saw the gun on her side. He pointed it at and asked, "*may I?*" she replied, "*when I'm a deputy then yes you may.*" They both laughed. Although they never actually met Sheriff Wednesday and Joleen sent letters back and forth until it was like they knew each other for years. She pulled the gun and emptied the cylinder. He felt like this was already going well. He had to tell his own son many times, "*never hand someone a loaded gun to someone unless it is an emergency.*"

The gun was a little heavier than he expected but the idea that you didn't need to cock the hammer to fire was interesting. The sheriff handed the gun back and said, "*I can't deputize you it has to be the mayor. He is waiting for us.*" Joleen went to leave, but the sheriff didn't move. She turned to him. Joleen was worried this might happen. She comes all this way to

find the job isn't hers. The sheriff opened a drawer and pulled out a bowie knife. He said, *"I need a sign of commitment from you that you will do this job first and foremost. Nothing comes before the job."* At first, she didn't understand then it came to her. She would be a deputy first and a woman second. She took her hat off and grabbed her braid. Her hair was long but tied into a long braid in the back. She took the knife and cut the braid off. The sheriff said, *"well ok that is one way to go. I was just giving you the knife. They come in handy in the field."* He stood up and was clearly a foot taller than her. He asked, *"do you still have the town charter I sent as well as the rules and regulations book?"* Instead of answering him she pulled a dogeared well-worn copy of the charter and deputy regulations from a secret pocket in the back of her vest. David smiled and thought, *"yes this really is Candice's daughter."*

On the way to townhall they spoke. The sheriff asked, *"are you any good with that gun?"* She replied, *"I am getting better."* The sheriff said her mother was the most natural shooter he had ever seen. She said, *"that's not the way she tells it. She said it took practice and patience."* The sheriff replied, *"A person can practice aim and drawling all they want if you don't have the nerve then training don't mean shit."* He then said, *"most of my deputies have never used their weapon on the job. The last time I had to use my gun*

was on a dying horse. The west isn't as violent as it is portrayed." The sheriff tipped his hat to people that passed by. As they passed, they all stared at Joleen. She eventually asked the sheriff, *"what's with all the stares?"* The sheriff said, *"I don't think you realize just how severe a cut you just did to your hair. When we are done, you might want to see the town barber. I think he can cut women's hair."*

Inside the town hall, Joleen saw her reflection in a mirror. The cut left her hair a little long in the front reaching down to her jawline and sloping up to the back where it was very short. Her bangs also were now in her eyes. It was certainly a look. She wanted to leave an impression on her new employer but not one that said she was crazy. A man in what could only be described as a plum-colored suit came into the lobby. He was handsome for someone in his 40's. She thought, *"ok he was just handsome."* Mayor Gerard Drake was tall and good looking. Joleen remembered how her mother described him as being chiseled out of sandstone. Now with a little gray, he looked distinguished. He saw Joleen and cocked his head to the right. The sheriff went over and whispered into his ear. The mayor's face lit up. He came over to Joleen and said, *"it's nice to see you again. The last time you were only one or two-years-old."* She nodded acknowledging he was there and that they had some

sort of past even though she doesn't remember it. They did the oath, and she was given her badge. It felt heavy.

On the way back, the sheriff told Joleen she would start tomorrow but starting now she worked for the town, and she was always on the job. He said, *“wear the badge at all times. Always have a gun. If you see something, you are obligated to stop it. Never try and deal with a problem by yourself unless there is no other choice.”* She wanted to say this was all in the handbook, but she knew better. He gave her a metal whistle. He also wore one. Soon she would find out they all wore a whistle. The Sheriff said, *“if you hear a whistle come a running. If you need backup blow the whistle.”* Joleen wanted to change the subject. She asked about her house. Her mother paid the town to keep the family home in one piece. It was the one her mother and father lived in and where she was born. The sheriff said, *“it caught fire and burned to the ground three years ago.”* He went on to say the town was rebuilding the house and it will be finished by the end of the week. He said, *“this new house will have indoor plumbing. It will also have a similar setup for hot water.”* Joleen didn't have any real connections to the old house, and the new one sounded better. For now, she had her room at the hotel.

Joleen left the sheriff and made her way to the local barber. He had a woman working inside with a sign saying ladies welcome. A woman walked up to her and asked, “*may I help you, sir.*” Joleen cocked her head a little to the left. The woman looked down at her badge when she saw her chest. She said, “*oh ok how may I help you miss.*” Joleen said, “*I did something a little drastic, and I need some help with my hair.*” She took her hat off, and her hair fell into her face. The woman gasped. She eventually had to complete the drastic cut. Joleen would have a short haircut for now. She was able to curl the top giving her what could still be considered a feminine cut. However, with the hat on, she looked boyish. Joleen realized this wasn’t the end of the world. Also, her mother predicted she would do something like this.

Joleen made her way back to the office. She walked in, and all talk ended. She took off her hat and shrugged her shoulders. Everyone started to laugh and just like that she felt at home. David was impressed with her fortitude and willingness to own her mistakes. Although, he was worried about a possible impulsiveness streak that led to the hair chop. He gave her a desk and a block on a chain. The word Women was on the block. David said, “*just put that on the*

restroom door.” Joleen said, “*a lock will do.*” David replied, “*if there were a lock then it would do, but the town won’t let us put a lock on the door.*” Ten years ago, an inebriated man from the drunk tank found his way into the restroom. He locked the door, broke a mirror and slit his own wrists. She took the block despite how wrong it felt to her. This was maybe the first step in treating her different from everyone else.

She sat down at her desk. Another deputy to the left of her said, “*in the desk, you will find a set of instructions on how to write and file reports. Follow it, or you will find yourself on every shit detail for a month.*” He started to put out his left hand then stopped and put his right one out. He said, “*Trip.*” She replied, “*fall.*” He said, “*no Trip is my name. Trip Davis.*” She figured. Trip was a nickname. His real name must be close to Trip, or he wouldn’t introduce himself by the nickname. He is left-handed. The awkward handshake, the gun on the left in his hanging holster. The tip of his finger is stained with from him using his non-dominate hand. She asked him, “*is trip short for Travis?*” He said, “*yes, it is.*” She asked him what brought him this far north from Huston. He just stared at him. she said, “*the slightly hidden accent, the name is a popular one in Texas and Huston was just a guess.*” She didn’t bring up his attempts to hide being left handed. She

remembers reading that in some places they actively train children to use their right as the dominant hand.

Her step-father is considered one of the best reporters of his age. Over the years she has watched him and listened to how he works. He taught her how to ask questions, how to find the truth, how to push for the truth and most of all when not to push. If asked she would say her quiet demeanor was from him. He would tell her to observe everything. He said, *“Learn as much as you can from your environment and the body movement of the people.”* She learned on her own that she shouldn’t show too much intelligence all at once. With a man it’s ok, but an as she once was told, *“uppity women have no place here.”* Intelligence and knowledge were also weapons. She thought about what she saw. Trip had a wedding ring. It was old. Maybe too old for it to be just his so maybe a family heirloom or he is just rough with his hands. His color and fingernails say he may have a vitamin deficiency. It not that uncommon out here to see people needing vitamins. His shirt was clean and well mended, so it was also old. He spent his money of either his family or a vice. He didn’t smell like smoke or booze. There is a smell of a drunk even when they aren’t drinking. There is no legal gambling here. Joleen put these thoughts aside. She would apologize to him tomorrow for being so forward.

Joleen spent the rest of the day walking the town. She walked the same streets her father walked twenty years ago. She never met him. He died not even knowing he would be a father. She tried to imagine what it must have been like to walk the town without a gun but still being able to keep order. Her father wrote that he saw himself as a peacekeeper and not a law enforcer. She thought about how he did his job and should have jumped from the engine. He would have lived, and she would have had a father. Allen was a good father to her, and she thought how she would be a different person if things had gone a different way. She made her way back to the hotel. At the hotel, she planned to store her luggage just in case they came before the house was ready. She hates putting things off or half measures. Allen was fond of saying, “*do it right, right away and finish what you start.*” Joleen can’t help but think she disappointed him by not finishing law school.

Chapter Two

Morning came around, and she was on her first day as a deputy. She dressed in her pseudo uniform and made her way to the office. The boy hired to sweep was there again. He wouldn't make eye contact with her. Something was off with him, but that was a question for another time. On her desk was a simply drawn map of the town. A note on the map said, "*walk area marked on the map. Answer any question asked. Ask about anything questionable. Be helpful and courteous. Try and talk to every shop owner in your area. Be a visible presence on the street.*" She realized just like that she had an assignment. Every deputy has their own area he or now she walks. The handbook said that this was a way to let the people of your area know they can trust you and come to you with a problem. It said, "*deputies are problem solvers.*" This practice went back to her father who would take long walks around town greeting people and dealing with problems. Joleen knows this goes back the Chief Apenimon who would also walk around like an ambassador to the town for his people. Her area includes some sketchy parts of town as well as her mother's old newspaper and print shop. The newspaper is still in print but by a new owner. The print shop is still owned by her mother's old partners. She would make that her last stop, so they would have time to talk.

She passed a woman in her 30s as she started her walk. The woman first looked happy to see her then slumped back down. As Joleen passed by the woman said, *“isn’t nice to fool a girl all dressed like a dude like that.”* Joleen said, *“there are a lot of things that aren’t nice. A deputy walking by could think you were a prostitute. If he or she did, he or she would have to either arrest or ask you to keep on going.”* As she said this, she made sure the woman could see her badge. The woman said to her, *“bitch I go where I want and do what I want.”* Joleen replied, *“that’s deputy bitch to you and the next words out of your mouth better are, have a nice day just before you leave, or I will take you in.”* She said it a flat and authoritative tone like she was taught back in law school when addressing a jury. The woman said nothing. She just got up and walked away.

The rest of her meet and greet went along a similar line. Most people were either dismissive or distant. None of them seemed to like the idea of a woman deputy. She didn’t go into the newspaper, and the offices of the print shop were closed. The men working the presses wouldn’t unlock their door. As she left she overheard one of them saying, *“I guess we will be robbed or something.”* The other countered, *“they*

sent a girl to do a man's job." Towards the end of her walk, she saw the woman from earlier. A man was dragging her into an alley. Then the sounds of a struggle. Joleen unhooked her gun and put her hand on the new club she wore on her left hip. She came around to find the woman being forcefully taken from behind. The man saw her and said, *"fuck off this isn't any of your business."* The woman saw her and said, *"help."* Joleen struck. She pulled her baton and struck the man on the back of his knee with a downward motion. He fell backward enough to expose his genitals. With an upward motion, she struck him in the genitals. He buckled forward onto the woman who pushed him off her. He hit the ground cupping his balls. The woman pulled her ripped undergarments up as she went behind Joleen. The man rolled over and said, *"you fucking bitch."* The woman behind Joleen countered, *"that's deputy Bitch asshole."*

Locked in a cell, the man suddenly became a victim. He said, *"I paid this whore for a little something, but this bitch interrupted us. I want my piece or some compensation."* The sheriff asked, *"did you pay her or ask if she was working. She said, you grabbed her and went to pumping without a word."* He countered, *"a whore will say anything. They are all only good for one thing."* The sheriff said, *"bad news. The woman isn't a whore she is a recruiter for the*

local revival. You tried to rape a woman of God.” Joleen overheard this and played her interaction back. She was dressed well but not overly dressed. She was looking for young men. Converting them young before they had time to see how much fun sin is. Joleen realized she also basically called this woman a whore. In her first interaction with the public, she called an evangelist a prostitute. She thought, *“that’s not good.”*

The woman came over to Joleen. She put her hand out and said, *“let’s try this again. Hello, my name is Angela Goodwin.”* Joleen fought the urge to kiss her hand instead of shaking it. She said, *“my name is Deputy Bitch.”* As soon as the words came out, she winced. Then she stammered trying to say her name. Angela said, *“it’s Joleen Warren, well Deputy Warren we all have heard of you and of course your parents.”* Angela asked her why she struck him in the leg and as she put it *“man parts.”* Joleen explained how she was taught to go for the weakest parts. They laughed. Joleen also said, *“if I had hit him on the bigger head I would have to drag him back to the office.”* Joleen filled out the complaint paperwork than the after-action report. Working on it she realized her life will be filled with paper.

From her desk, Joleen heard something from the back near the cells. She came around to find the man she arrested holding the boy they pay to clean by the neck up against the bars. He had his other arm around and down the boy's pants. He saw Joleen. He said, "*I don't know how I got here but you better let me go, or the kid loses something.*" As he said this, he squeezed the boy by the neck and genitals. The boy let out a raspy cry and pissed his pants. The man said, "*oh I like it, wet boy. Maybe I'll keep it when I rip it off.*" Joleen drew her gun and as overt as possible cocked it. she said, "*go ahead he doesn't need it to sweep.*" He went to counter when he met her eyes. The man lets go, and the boy hit the ground into a pool of his own urine. The man put his hands up and backed away. He had a stain on the front of his pants. She hoped it was urine, but she didn't know how long he had the boy by the neck. Instead of running the boy took off his shirt and used it to clean up the urine. The boy had large crisscrossed scars on his back. He also had a corresponding stain on his lower back about where the man had his stain. She told the boy not to come back here alone again. From the back of his cell, the man grinned and chuckled. Her first day was over.

Joleen left the office and went back to her area. She wanted to find a room she could rent in the area so she could be a part of it rather than an outsider walking

the street. As she walked, she realized the same people who were dismissive of her earlier were now cordial. She thought just maybe her standing up to that drunk helped her more than a grip and grin door to door meeting could. A place with a for rent sign was in the middle of the block. The owner showed her a room on the second floor. He said, “*we don’t have the fancy hot water like the hotel but if you give me and the misses a few hours’ notices or set a day and we can have a tub and hot water for you.*” The room looked out onto the street and had a balcony she could go out on. It would be at least two months maybe longer before the house was ready. She wasn’t even sure she wanted it. The house was her mother’s this room was hers.

The next day she went to the office. She found everyone in the back. The man in the cell was a bloody ruin. One of the other deputies said he committed suicide. Judging by the blood spray, the contact points on his face and the defensive wounds he was more than likely beaten to death. He touched the boy. He was some sort of mascot or ward of the office. That night the man met a sort of justice Joleen once felt was appropriate. After all, she watched as her mother and stepfather did almost the same thing to the man who killed her brother. She had little sympathy for the man who they would find out was named James College. He was wanted for the rape and murder of over 20

women in the territory. What she was worried about was what this meant for justice here in Hope. Her laughing coworkers broke the law in dole out justice. She didn't want to call him the boy anymore. So, Joleen went to the sheriff to ask about the boy and what was his story.

His name is Sam. Just Sam, no last name. He was sometimes called silent Sam or Dumb Sam because he is nearly Deaf and completely mute. The sheriff said he hadn't spoken a word in the entire time they knew him. Sam was maybe 13-years-old and an orphan. As a young boy, he watched as a warrior party from an unknown tribe butchered his parents and left him for dead. He lived among the bodies for about a month when Trip found him and brought him to Hope. The sheriff said, "*he works here and at the hotel. He lives in the back room at the hotel.*" Someone had tried to take care of Sam, but Sam wouldn't stay with anyone for long. They would find him in a barn or hide in an alley. He eventually found a way of communicating and the hotel found him a place he would feel comfortable. The sheriff said, "*he has a bad habit of following women around, and we think he may even have a way to spy on the bathrooms at the hotel.*" Joleen's face went flush. She realized that it may be why he won't look her in the eye.

Joleen went off her usual walk and went to the hotel. After asking permission, she went to see the bathrooms. After a quick search, she found the hole that went to the bath. She searched the walk-in closet and found the corresponding hole. As she stood there, she heard the bathroom door close. She peered inside. It was a man she didn't know. He was maybe 19 or 20 in dark brown slacks and a tan shirt. She looked away then back to the hole. The man started the water. He said, "*damn hot water.*" She watched as he took off his shirt. He was well built and rugged. She never understood her mother's obsession with men's butts, but this one had an ass she liked. He turned the water off and climbed into the tub. As he did, she saw the length of the man. She felt dirty watching him. Yet she continued. Eventually, she left. She meant to talk to the hotel owner about the holes, but she decided to keep Sam's secret.

Joleen went back to her walk. As she did, she thought about the man. She replayed the part where he slipped his shirt off. His pants falling. Him slipping into the hot water. In her time, she has met plenty of men. From the mystical Chinese to the dapper overdone men of her college. She only dated a few men and only ever slept with one. Her college

boyfriend and almost fiancé James Carnet. But James was in the past. A past she would like to put past her. Men were a distraction from her purpose. She saw her life goal or reason for living to try and bring justice to the world. That day all those years ago her brother pushed her back just before the coach ran him down. She lived he died. She owed it to him to make her life mean something. She expected to find the stereotypical rough and uncultured man of the west, but the town felt more like a smaller San Francisco rather than the mythical old west town. She spent her entire shift walking her area.

Joleen went back to the office to find the mystery man there. As she took stock of the man in his clothes, she realized he was in the pseudo uniform of a deputy. The man she spent the day fantasizing about wasn't going away anytime soon. From this angle, he looked taller. She liked them tall. As she thought about it, she tried to push the non-professional thoughts out of her head. The sheriff spoke up. He said to the room, "*this is John Wolf. He will be joining us in our happy little family.*" Joleen realized she had been staring at his ass the entire time she had walked in. When the sheriff spoke, he woke her up, and she changed her attention just as John turned to her. The two came into eye contact. She saw his deep blue eyes and smiled. She wanted to be anywhere else than there right there

and then. She thought her colleagues would have noticed her awkward glare at him and his ass. But no one did.

That night he came to her room. She led him to her bed. He sat down, and she climbed into his lap. They kissed. She stripped off her vest then his. Then she quickly stripped off her shirt and bra. He took her breasts into his hands. The feel of his rough hands was intense. She pulled off his shirt popping buttons as she went. Joleen got up and pulled off his boots. Then kicked off hers. She slid out of her slacks and undergarments. He stood up, and Joleen pulled his pants down and off. She pushed him down and got on top. He nodded his head as she slid him into her. The feel was intense and sensual to the extreme. Like the last time with James. When it meant something. She began to sway and grind on him. Then she woke up alone in her bed. It was all a dream. She went back to sleep and back to the dream wondering how she would look John in the eye tomorrow.

The next morning, she found John at his new desk working on the paperwork that came with the job. John said, *“I had no idea this would be the job.”* With just a little bit of hesitation, Joleen said, *“they like to collect the information so they can find patterns in*

crime and assign people to the areas as needed. It's there to help you and protect the citizen." John nodded and smiled a little. His nod reminded her of his nod in her dream. She blushed. Joleen saw Trip staring at them both. He had a confused look. Trip then said, *"I have been here for a while now, and I didn't know that."* Joleen pointed to the map. She told them both about the pins on the map and the different colors. Each color corresponded to a type of crime. She said, *"using this we can track the bad parts of town and the times when more deputies would be better."* She left Trip staring at the map. As she opened the door, she heard Trip say, *"there are a lot of flashers in my area."*

Joleen did her usual walk. As she did, she felt something strike her in the back. The pain was immediate and hot. She spun around just as a man threw another knife at her. The blade sailed past her head. She drew her gun and pointed it at him. He pulled back ready to throw another knife. He smiled and said, *"you have to cock that little girl."* Joleen pulled the trigger. The round went off and shattered the man's teeth as it hit him in the mouth. Joleen unbuttoned the vest. As it came off the blade stuck in her back slipped away. She came up to the man. He lay there with blood filling his mouth. She said to him, *"you don't have to cock this gun asshole."* He stopped twitching. Joleen fell to her side. She knew the wound

from the blade must be worse than she thought. She grabbed her whistle and blew it. That was all she would remember.

The combination of the leather, handbook, and charter saved her life. The first knife was mostly blocked by the secret pocket in her duty vest. In a way, her mother saved her life. The knife did some damage. She lost a lot of blood and had a nasty wound from pulling the blade out herself. Trip found her first. He went over to the dead man and emptied his gun into him just in case. John came over and saw the wound. He ripped a strip of his shirt off and plugged the wound. He said to Trip, “*go to the saloon and get a bottle of the strongest stuff they have.*” He saw the knife sticking out of her fallen vest. From what he could tell the blade went about two inches into her back. John ripped another strip off and soaked it in the alcohol. He then jammed it into the wound. Joleen bucked but didn’t wake up.

Chapter Three

Joleen woke up in her bed. She was dressed in a nightgown she didn't recognize. In a chair across the room, she could see an outline of a man. It was John. At first, she thought it was just another sex dream until she moved and the pain shot up her back. John said, *"try and not to move. The wound was deep the stitches are delicate."* He came out of the shadow. John was dressed in street clothes. He said, *"the doctor said he would be back today to check the wound and someone should be here just in case you woke up."* He told her about the knife and the books. How the blade was dipped in poison and nearly killed her. John said, *"the sheriff knows you will be out for a few days, but he said you shouldn't get comfortable. You are expected back just as soon as you can."* John sat down on the edge of the bed. She felt aroused and uncomfortable all at once. He said, *"whoever these guys named John and James are you should tell them how you feel because you never know."* As he said this, he held up the vest and showed her the place where the knife punctured it and her.

She wasn't sure why she was going to tell him any of this. She wasn't sure what she would say about John because he was John. The idea of telling someone about the last two years felt so good that the story just

came to her. She said, “*John was someone I knew way back in the day. James was my college boyfriend or almost fiancé.*” John asked, “*almost?*” Joleen said, “*we all make mistakes. We all have hopes and dreams and ambitions. I wanted to bring Justice to the people who need it the most. I wanted to make a difference.*” John replied, “*you aren’t dead yet, and I don’t think of you as someone who just gives up easily.*”

She was dressed in a white dress with multicolored silk ribbons on the dress and in her hair. At the age of 9 her step-father Allen or Daddy Allen as she called him liked to have her dress like a lady no matter where she went. Her mother Candice would rather she dress like her in slacks and a vest. Everywhere they went people said Joleen and Jacob dressed like angels. Jacob was four-years younger than her. This morning they were on their way to the park when two older boys stopped them, and one of them pushed Jacob down. The other one grabbed Joleen by the arms. He asked, “*you want a real man.*” He forced a kiss. She replied with a kick to the groin with her shoes. They had a metal toe for just such an occasion. Joleen knew even then life wasn’t fair.

By 13 the boys knew not to mess with her or her brother. Some would cross the street when they

saw her coming. That morning she was wearing a white dress with little flowers stitched into the material. They came to the corner. Jacob had been a little distant from her. He said that morning he didn't need his sister to protect him. It hurt Joleen's heart when he said it. He was being picked on by the other boys because of her. They feared her and mocked him. She walked up to the street corner. Jacob pushed her back just as an out of control coach struck the curb right where she was. The coach struck Jacob across the head, and he was pulled into the spokes in the wheels. The wheel dragged him for a bit until his arm was ripped off. Joleen looked down at the dress and saw his blood. It would be the last dress she would wear.

The man was eventually caught. He was arrested and put on trial. He was drunk at the time, but that wasn't admitted as evidence. Eventually, he was found not guilty. They laid the blame on her brother. The man's lawyer painted a picture that placed her brother in the street rather than on the sidewalk. No one believed her account. The man said something about seeing her parents and the city for malicious prosecution. From the day of the incident, Allen never let Joleen leave his sight. She would eventually come with him to work and see how an investigative reporter works. It was an education she would have never had in a public school.

About a year later a runner came into Allen's office. They found the man. Allen looked at Joleen. He wondered if she should see this or should he protect her from what was about to happen. He eventually came to think that she shouldn't be protected from the hard truths of the world. Somethings should see to understand. They were just outside of town. The man was a bloody ruin. Teeth missing eyes almost swollen shut and a cough that was dreadful. He said, "*I am innocent. The boy ran into the street. I had no choice.*" He saw Joleen. He said, "*you lying little bitch. Tell them the truth, or I'll kill you.*" Her mother tossed him a gun. Without thinking, he pointed the gun at Joleen and pulled the trigger. The gun went off with a bang but no bullet. He tried again and nothing the gun had only one round without a projectile. Candice walked over to the man. She pulled a gun and fired the gun up against his head. with the gunpowder on his hands and the wound to his head it was ruled suicide. His friends said he lost a fight and just couldn't live with that he had done. Her parents paid a lot of money to get them to say that.

By 18 Joleen wanted something more. She didn't want to be a reporter. She would be in the shadow of her Step-father, or worse people would say

she had to buy her job. She wanted to be a prosecutor. She felt justice should be a societies job and not the individual. After some searching, they found a college that would take her, or as she found out later, they would take her money. After a year she was at the top of her class. The school issued a new rating separating men and women or woman because she was the only one. It diminished her role by rating her separate from the men. On paper, she was the head of the class, but in the reality of the school, another was. A male student. She met James one day after class. He was on his way out of school with failing grades. They got to talking. He thought the way they treated her was awful. Soon they were dating. She even wore a dress for him. She also tutored him. By the end of the year, he went from a D student to the dean's list. In between lessons they would make out.

A day before a big test she came over with some notes. They went into his room to study. Joleen said, *"I have a new idea on how to practice for the test. For every question, you get right I take something off. For everyone wrong, I put it back on."* James asked, *"what if I get them all right?"* Joleen said, *"well we will see."* She was ready for the test, but James needed the confidence boost. Three questions in and she was without shoes and socks. On the fifth question, she removed her skirt. The school required her to dress like

a lady as they said it. He eyed her bare legs. She dreamed of being with him even if she didn't understand what that really meant. The next question she removed her blouse. She stopped asking questions and slid into his lap. She kissed him and said, "*get the next two, and you can have me.*" The next two came and went. He answered them all right and was ready for the test.

He got up and finished undressing her. He was careful not to tear her undergarments. He was the first boy to see her naked. She sat down on the bed. He quickly undressed. She had never seen a man naked this close before. He gently pushed her back into the bed. As he did he slowly climbed on top of her. It suddenly felt real to her. She felt him against her thigh. He was hard and ready for what he wanted. He plunged into her. It hurt, but soon it felt different. By the time it wasn't that bad he was finished. That day they started a sexual relationship. They would make love and talk about their futures. Joleen was ready to give up her plans and open a law firm with James. They talked about their wedding plans even though he hadn't asked her yet.

Their last year was going well. Then one-day Joleen was given a letter from the Dean. She was being

expelled. A group of students sent a letter to the dean saying they wanted her out. Her grades were threatening their ability to find jobs. It said no one would take them seriously if they had grades lower than a woman. It also implied she was paying for the grades with money and sex. The school said they would let her drop out or they would expel her for cheating. They basically said thanks for the money but now get out. Joleen wanted to fight. That night in James's bed she talked about her plans. He told her she was wrong and was hurting the chances for the others to be real lawyers. He had signed the letter. He said, "*I owe you a little for the fun times, but now I have to think about myself and stop helping you. I need to find a real girlfriend not just an easy girl.*" She grabbed him by the genitals and squeezed. She wanted to rip them off. She eventually let go and left. She also left deep cuts in his genitals.

About the first year of law school, she started a correspondence with sheriff David Wednesday in the town of Hope. It was at first a way for him to keep track of Candice but soon he became a window into real law enforcement. He was proud of her and her accomplishments. He suggested more than once that Hope could use a good lawyer or even judge. When the scandal hit, she was out of school. Instead of going back home David suggested she join his department.

He said she would always have a place in Hope. She weighed her options. Her mother taught her how to shoot. Her step-father hired someone to teach her how to fight smart. She had the eye of a reporter and the drive of her mother. It seemed the choice was obvious.

John listened quietly. He liked to hear her speak. Joleen wasn't his typical girl. She was overtly smart where the others would have hidden any intelligence. She didn't work at being pretty. No makeup or fancy dress. She had something the others just didn't have. Her eyes were at first off-putting. A pale blue and void of pity. But the more he listened to her more he understood. She was a watcher. She watched with detached continence that made people feel uneasy but was an asset to a job that required someone who can catch details. It's like she was born to do this job. She was a colleague and at least 2 years older than him. His story was simple. His dad wanted him in the army, so he ran away from home before he was forced in by his father, the General. Now at eighteen, he was free to do whatever he wanted.

Joleen woke up to find Trip there. He said that everyone had been around to check on her. Her entire district. He said, "*even with just two days on the job you made an impression on the town.*" Joleen replied,

“no it’s because of my dad.” From the back of the room sheriff Wednesday said, *“no, most of these people don’t know who you are or about Sheriff Warren.”* Trip said, *“you mean the statue?”* The Sheriff said, *“yes, that was her father and my best friend. Maybe the best man I have ever known.”* Joleen said, *“if he was so good how come he couldn’t get off that train.”* David said, *“he had his reasons, and they would have been good ones because nothing but a real threat would have kept him away from your mother.”*

The sheriff showed Joleen the knife. He said, *“we don’t know this man’s name, but we can tell he is a part of this unnamed gang terrorizing the territory. James College was a part of that gang.”* He went on to say he thinks the rest of the gang may be on their way. He said, *“you will be in bed for another couple of days. I will leave it up to you on coming back, but if I know you, I will see you back soon.”* She replied, *“I’ll be in tomorrow.”* The sheriff said, *“I can’t stop you, but I can ban you from working your area. It would be stupid to go back to work before you are ready.”* They came to an understanding that she would help in the office talking to people who come in and working the desk. After a week on this desk duty, she would go back to her post. Joleen said, *“I will never let somebody push me aside again.”*

Chapter Four

The vest was made of a similar leather with the hidden pocket but sown between the liner, and the leather was a series of small metal plates. They made the vest flexible, but when struck the plating came together where they overlapped each other. The sheriff said, “*Trip’s wife had this idea after hearing about your vest and reading her kids the stories about King Arthur.*” Joleen wondered what kind of woman would marry Trip then she thought about the woman she saw when she first arrived. Or more importantly, she thought about the children. All of them had a red tinge to their hair and his green eyes. She wanted to know more about them. How did they meet? What did she see in him? Do they have any problems with people asking inappropriate questions? Joleen realized her curiosity would have to wait. It’s better to keep friends than answer questions. She tried the vest on and immediately realized a problem. It was tailored to fit her as a woman. Instead of deemphasizing her breasts it seems to draw attention to them. She looked like her mother.

The gun saved her life, but it also proved to be a burden. The trigger pull was heavy to the point of being harsh. Joleen had thought that adrenaline would

help diminish the pull, but it was her training that kept the gun on target. The design made it difficult to use as a single action revolver. She decided to go to the Colt Peacemaker. She has a two-shot derringer she will carry as a backup gun. She also didn't like the attention the gun drew. It was the first of its kind in town, and too many people wanted to see and hold it. She was more than a little tired telling people they can't disarm her. It had been about two weeks since she was stabbed in the back. Her injury was healed to the point where she could take up her real job again. She hated being desk-bound although it gave her the opportunity to read past reports as well as meet with people outside of her beat. She wasn't sure when the areas or posts became beats, but after Trip read some book about New York City, everyone started saying beat.

Dressed in her new pseudo uniform including the new vest she walked her street and said hello to the people as they passed by. Life returned to normal. She noticed that many of the people on her beat were a little friendlier than before. She wouldn't find out until about a month later that some of them had a bet on whether she would return or not. A store owner who witnessed her shootout won the bet. He had said that the person who made that shot with a knife in the back would never stop until they were dead. And maybe not even then. The vest felt heavy and tight. She wondered

if this was just an overreaction to something that was a one in a million hit. She tried to think of anything other than tonight. She was going on a date. This was a bad idea.

It would be their official first date even though they had been unofficially dating since that first day when John brought her something for lunch and then joined in. Soon they were eating lunch every day together. They tried to keep it professional. No alcohol, basic lunch staples and not minding when Trip would join in. The alcohol part was easy since neither of them drinks. When the lunches turned from friendly talk to staring into each other's eyes, they realized it would have to end. The lunches, not the staring. There wasn't anything in the handbook about dating. With Joleen being the first woman on the job she figured the subject just didn't come up. She figured that much like her stepfather any men dating would be kept secret. Most of her life her stepfather Allen had a second marriage. One not legal or recognized. With a man named James. He lived with her mother and Allen, and they all got along. Soon her thoughts went back to the date.

As Joleen walked, she stopped at a dress shop. In the window was a white dress with little flower

appliques. It was an adult version of the last dress she wore. The one covered in her brother's blood. She had concluded that any man would have to take her as she was. She wouldn't change for anyone. She liked slacks and the feel of a gun on her hip. She had no plans for children or the typical family life. It was all too early for all this talk. As she walked, she thought about him. The hole that let her see him naked. His back and ass. The length of him. Back in her old home, she knew some girls would go all weak at the knees for almost every man they saw. She had her crushes, but none of them went past the basic smile and hello. It wasn't until college and James. She did something with him that a proper young lady wouldn't, but she wasn't proper.

After searching all her belongings, she found a skirt and a blouse that went together. She put them on and stared in the mirror. It wasn't her it was James's girl. The one he used then pushed aside. She hoped his balls still ached. Even after nearly three weeks, her hair was still drastically short. In the skirt and looking straight on she looked like a teenage girl. Her profile gave away her build and age. Outside of the uniform, she looked like a woman. There was a knock at the door. She opened it, and John came in. He saw her for the first time in a skirt. He didn't know if he should say she looks nice or say he preferred her the other way.

He also thought her skirt would look nice pooled on the floor. During his time watching over her, he was there when they would change the bandages. Like a gentleman, he turned his back. Like a man, he realized he could see what was happening in the full-length mirror. He felt bad in seeing her naked backside. Not bad enough not to have done it again.

They went to the restaurant in the hotel. It was the nicest one in town. As they sat there waiting for their food they heard a sound from behind. It was Trip and his wife. Joleen realized she was right. The woman from the street was indeed Trip's wife. Trip grabbed a couple of seats, and soon their date doubled. Hope introduced herself to the two. In the process, she noticed Joleen didn't fit the description Trip gave. She was wearing makeup and a skirt. She realized they were not joining two colleagues but interrupting a date. Hope whispered this idea into Trip's ear. He looked at them then looked back at his wife. Hope nodded to the table. Trip being Trip ducked his head below the table. He came back up a little red-faced. Trip said to Joleen, *"I didn't know you owned girl clothes?"* Hope shook her head then said to both John and Joleen, *"sorry about this. Maybe we can talk another time about a get-together. Something informal like a barbeque."*

The next morning something was up. Sheriff Wednesday had a meeting at the start of the shift. He said, “*for now and until things change do not use the whistles.*” That evening a deputy name Randall Hollis was shot down in the street. He was left hurt but not dead. Then he blew his whistle. Two more deputies named Garrett Tanner and Robert Grace came running and were shot down from a distance. Whoever this was he was targeting the deputies. With the escalation in violence, the Mayor requested help from the territorial government in the form of Marshals. They would arrive in two days and hunt down this gang. Joleen knew that their charter was only valid in the town limits and outside of them they were just like any other citizen. But it still felt wrong to turn over their jobs to someone who isn’t vested in the outcome. The dead in the street was from Hope and Hope should take care of their own business. She also worried that the incoming Marshals wouldn’t work with a woman.

That day she walked her beat. The town seemed a little too quiet. She figured that people were staying inside. Growing up all she heard was how the people stood together, but after reading the accounts of that night, she knew that like now people back then looked out for their own interests. Blaming them was hard. Many had families that depended on them for survival. Joleen decided on that street that the public

would never see her worry or be afraid. She would strengthen her courage and hold in her fear for nighttime when she is alone. Thinking about the nights made her think about John and the hole in the wall. For a second she thought about revisiting that hole and just may be joining him in the bath. It wouldn't be ladylike, but she didn't think of herself as a lady. Her daydream saw her in a white dressing gown and John is nothing but a smile. Then in the corner of her left eye, she saw a reflection of the sun.

She ducked into an alley as a shot rang out and ricocheted off the spot where she was standing. She drew her gun and grabbed her whistle. Then remembering the meeting, she let go of the whistle. She was on her own. She thought, "*the reflection was on her left and high, so the shooter was on a roof. He or she has one of the new scopes, but given the location of the reflection he or she was nearby.*"

Knowing the block from her walks, Joleen went to the tallest building and went inside. She went up to the roof of the newest hotel. The roof was empty. She went to the side of the building adjacent to the street. She saw a man with a rifle on a lower roof. She quickly realized the reflection of light was from the high gloss of the man's rifle. This guy was no professional. She watched him go from side to side looking for her. With the light at her back, she watched

from a corner off the roof so her reflection wouldn't give her away. On another roof down the street, she saw another gunman.

Just below her, she heard a door slam. The two gunmen took up aim. She had to act fast. It would be a hell of a shot with the Colt, but just maybe she could hit one of them. With no time to take a better position, she fired at the closest gunmen. He almost seemed to lean into the shot. The bullet struck him just behind the ear nearly taking the back of his head off. The other gunmen opened fire on Joleen's roof, but he had no angle on her. Seemingly out of nowhere Sam showed up with a lever action 45-70. He gave the gun to Joleen and mimicked her stabbing them. Joleen would later find out Sam also worked at this hotel. She didn't like the angle of the second shooter. She realized he would cut her down long before she got a shot off, so she decided to change the game. She went down one floor to a room facing the gunmen. She kicked the door in to find a couple in the middle of having sex. They saw her and her gun and froze in place. Joleen went to the window and waited for the gunmen to show himself. He still acted like she was on the roof. So, he fired into the roof line. When he stood up, she fired striking him in the neck all but decapitating him. On the way out, she said to the couple, "*sorry about that but sometimes you have to do what you have to do.*"

Joleen told Sam to find the Sheriff and let him know what just happened. She would be on the roof of the hotel looking for any trouble. She stood on the top of the roof watching every street every rooftop for any more gunmen and potential problems. She stood there with her rifle barrel up and stock on her hip. With the sun at her back, she was a dark form casting a long shadow down the street. People for years to come would say she seemed ten-foot-tall that day. It was how she felt. She was happy no one could see her nearly smile. Killing a man wasn't something you smile about, but she just couldn't help it. She hoped that if there was anything else to prove about her on the job, then this proved it in a long casting shadow over her proof she could do the job.

The sheriff told everyone that every hotel was provided with a complement of arms just in case of an emergency. Joleen thought how she could have used that information. Then Trip said, “*dam Sheriff that would have been a good thing to know.*” The sheriff said that the guns and ammo in the hotels are just for emergencies and are not replacements for your own guns. He said this to the room, but he stared at Trip the whole time he said it. Joleen filed that stare away as something to consider later. The men had no sort of

identification on them. They did, however, have matching weapons. Two random gang members with pricy matching guns. This didn't add up. It was clear something was missing from the story. Joleen picked up the rifle from the first man. It was new. The man's revolver from what she could tell had never been fired. She decided to see the dead men and see if they had any answers.

With no identification or way to identify them the doctor that acted as the town undertaker was preparing the bodies for burial. Just in case someone comes looking for a missing person Doctor James Henson uses a camera the town purchased to take a closeup picture as well as a full body shot of the dead. Dr. Henson likes to say he has a collection of the dead in his office. Joleen spoke to the doctor about examining the bodies. He said, *"I don't care if you eat them as long as I don't have to watch."* She replied, *"actually I was hoping you would stay just in case I had any questions."* She checked their hands. They were rough with the wear of men that worked with their hands but no telltale signs of people who handle a gun for a living. Whoever they were they were not gunfighters. Their clothes were new and ill-fitting. Dr. Henson found a Russian Orthodox Bible in one of the men's bags. It was customary for the undertaker to keep anything found on the body to pay for the

expense. Joleen gave him all the money she had on her about twenty dollars so she could take the belongings with her.

She went back to the office and sat at her desk. In the bag with the Bible, she found some unsigned letters in some foreign language. Giving that the bible was Russian than the letters must also be in Russian. There was a lock of hair and a little pink bow. Either he had a daughter or a girlfriend somewhere. Maybe both. No wedding ring but that doesn't mean anything as far as she knows the Russian Orthodoxy might not trade rings. She would have to ask someone about that. She found a small tin box with two baby teeth. Giving the nature of the man, he most likely has a daughter somewhere that loved her father. What he didn't have was the typical stuff a gunfighter would have. No knife, no gun oil and most of all no extra rounds. It was like someone else loaded his guns for him. She unknowingly said out loud, "*just what was there plan after they ran out of ammunition?*" From behind her, she heard the sheriff ask, "*what do you think it means?*" She replied, "*I think these guys were paid to go up there and intimidate people on the street.*" Joleen told the sheriff what she found in the bags and on the bodies. He seemingly shifted in annoyance about the time she started in on the bodies. Joleen said, "*if I am stepping past my position then please.*" The

Sheriff interrupted her saying, *“I wanted you for this kind of insight, so this is your position. It’s just now I have to go and talk to Dr. Henson about him not saying anything about the money.”* Joleen said, *“make sure you find out what they were paid for and if paper currency where was the currency issued.”*

Before she left Joleen signed out a rifle from the arms locker along with the 45-70 rounds. She wanted to take the rifle to a local that worked in leather so she could easily carry it on her back. In the morning, she would order a rifle for herself, but for now, this would do. She didn’t like the weight of the rifle, but the distance and stopping power made it a good weapon to have for now. Back in her room she broke the rifle down and cleaned it. Then she reassembled and loaded it. In the morning, she would take it out and fire some rounds through it to check the sights and how accurate she could be with the rifle. She read enough on the Winchester 86 to say she would order one. When she was done with the rifle, she did the same with her Colt. As she did all this, she wondered about Sam and how he just was there. No sound such as a door opening or closing and there was no outside ladder. Sam was keeping way too many secrets.

Just outside of town in an old abandoned ranch, Joleen measured out the distances she wanted to test. At 500 yards, she was hitting her targets, but with a large flat plate, she was grouping her shots about 9” apart. The discrepancy in the two results seemed to say it was easier to aim at a small target than at a large generic one. After she ran through her tests, she searched the ranch. No one claims ownership of the land and house. The town uses it for storage but mostly the barn, not the house. With a little work, it wouldn’t take much to fix it up. It already had a well that worked and a wood burning stove in the kitchen. Having her own house would establish herself as a real resident of Hope, but living outside of town by herself could be dangerous. She could see herself in the house cleaning her guns, cooking and making love to John. Even here she couldn’t stop thinking about John and her together.

Sheriff Wednesday said the property was once owned by a man named Daintree. He was hung for his crimes, and the town took control of his homestead. They sold most of the land off, but the original home was torched by some angry citizens. The house she saw was a foreman’s house. He said, *“talk to the mayor. I am sure he would love to see someone out on the property. For a price.”* He said, *“the house was built like a bunker and was very defensible.”* It would

appear Daintree was worried about Indian attack. He built the house as a place he could go to just in case he lost the big house. He wasn't married and as far as the town knew he had no children. Joleen decided she would speak with the mayor tomorrow. Today, she wanted to be on her beat.

As she walked her walk, she found her beat was active. There were people in the street and all kinds of activity. Some shops seemed to open overnight. A new sense of community was in the air. Then she saw a shadow in the street. Someone was standing on the roof she was on just the other day looking down. She ran for the hotel. Up the steps and through the door. She found a sort of dressmaker's mannequin holding a broom handle on its hip like a rifle. It was dressed like a deputy with a hat that looked an awful lot like hers. From behind her, she heard a voice. In a thick accent, she couldn't quite recognize Sam said, "*they made it for you, so people won't forget what happened here.*" He fought to find the words and it was apparent English wasn't his first language. He said, "*they call it their angel.*" She thought it looked emaciated.

At the end of her shift, she went home to find a paper saying they were evicting her. The building was

being sold, and they wanted to change it from rentals to retail. She thought about how the land her mother bought back in San Francisco doubled then tripled in value in the last twenty years. Her good work was costing her a place to live. As she packed, there was a knock at her door. With a gun in her hand, she greeted her visitor. It was John. He said, “*I guess that is one way to answer a door.*” She lowered the gun, and he came in. She holstered the gun then turned to John. They stared at each other. She kicked a wood box over to him then hopped onto the box, so she was face to face with him. She kissed him. He kissed back. She untucked her shirt and stripped it off as she helped him do the same with his. She wore a type of bustier that held her in place and deemphasized her womanly form. It left an angry mark across her bust line. Joleen jumped up and onto him wrapping her legs around him. John tripped on the box, and the two went to the floor.

They fumbled and fought to remove each other’s pants. John was surprised to see they wore the same type of underwear. Joleen wasn’t like his other girls. As a boy, he would call on many different girls, but none of them were the kind of girl he could see making a life with. John got on top, and soon he realized what being a foot and a half taller than she did for their lovemaking. She was on his chest, and he just

saw the top of her head. They spun around, and Joleen went on top. She straddled him like a horse so they could see each other eye to eye. In this cowgirl position, they made love to each other for the first time. In the real world and not just their dreams. It was everything she wanted it to be. Afterward, she lay on his chest looking up at him as he looked down at her. This was something James would have never have done. After sex, he liked to eat or smoke. Joleen hated his smoking.

The next morning, she got dressed, but she left off what she called the tit hugger. The bustier that hid her form. Instead, she wore the vest. It was what her mother did. The vest acted as a bustier of a sort forcing her chest up and helping create a bigger bust line. In the mirror, she looked more like her mother than ever before. She thought about how her mother didn't care what people thought about her. How she did what she wanted. Or at least what society would allow her to get away with. Unlike her mother, Joleen would keep her shirt buttoned. She left John to sleep. She strapped her gun on. In what has become a habit she drew the gun than with a twirl she re-holstered the gun. It was a little foolish, but it somehow helped center her.

She was off that day, but she wanted to talk to the mayor about the ranch just outside of town. As she walked people smiled and nodded. Some took more than one look, and she felt a little on display with her tits all pushed up. In the mayor's office, the mayor dropped his coffee cup. He said, "*it was like I went back twenty years. You really look like your mother.*" They spoke about the land. He told her that the town tried to sell it, but no one wanted the cursed property. He said, "*people think the land is cursed by the spirit of that man.*" As it turns out Daintree killed his mother as well as the man that was to be the mayor a former slave named Apple. he said, "*if the town council approves it then consider the land yours.*" She decided that she would move back to the hotel then if they sell or give her the land she would move in there. Either way, she needed to be out of the room in three days.

She came back home to find John still in bed. He was naked under the sheets. He asked, "*Joleen where are my clothes?*" she sat down on the edge of the bed and pulled the covers off him. Looking him up and down she said, "*what do you need them for.*" It wasn't really a question. She ran her hand down his chest to his abdomen. She had a quick flash of James and how their last time she grabbed and twisted him. This flash kept her from going any further. She kicked her boots off then the vest and pants. In just the shirt

she climbed on top. She kissed him. As they kissed, she slid back as he slid into her. They made love again. Afterward, he asked, “*no really where are my clothes?*”

Chapter Five

Joleen walked out onto her porch on her new piece of land. It has been about a month since the town sold her the property for five silver dollars and time to move the stuff in the barn out. A sign on the new gateway said, “Wolf Warren Ranch.” It was going to be Warren Wolf, but it sounded like someone’s name as if a man named Warren Wolf was the owner. John moved in about two days after she took control of the property. It would be another month before she had any furniture. As of right then, all she had was a bed. But that was all they needed. She bought the bed from the old rooming house she was in. She sipped her coffee as she considered the cup. She could do a lot of things, but a good cup of coffee wasn’t one of them. The first thing she did when she took possession of the house was clean it from top to bottom. She found some strange and nasty things. In a crawl space under the floor, she found a pile of ripped women’s undergarments. She also found a bag filled with silver coins and another with gold coins. A fortune. It was blood money left after this Daintree had sold his plantation back east. She gave it all to the town.

Together they had three horses. Two chestnut Morgans named Tim and Tom and a black Arabian mare named Night. A few wild Mustangs show up

occasionally, but the idea of taming them is just a dream. It would appear that one of them had their way with Night. She was well on her way to having a foal. Every morning John feeds the horses then he cleans the stalls. At night Joleen brushes them down after recleaning the stalls. A horse is a living thing and needs the attention. About two weeks ago they hired Sam to help around the house. He now lives in a small structure on the property near the barn. Joleen is helping him with his English, but he still refuses to speak in front of anyone including John. His help with the horses and the house is making it easier to live outside of town.

Over the last couple of days, there has been an increase in violence on the railroad grounds. Assaults, robberies and two murders. Whoever is doing this is making sure the violence is over the top. The assaults resulted in people being blinded or disfigured. The murders were ritualistic. A message is being sent. The question was who was sending it and what does it mean. With that in mind, the sheriff had a runner go out and find Joleen. She was walking her beat. She felt good. She finally found some peace in her new look. More of a woman than the boyish one she tried before. Most of the people on her beat not only accepted the new look but found her more relatable. In the office, the sheriff suggested she should take a new position

with the town. The town of Hope had plenty of deputies, what they needed now was a detective.

While not being equal to the sheriff regarding power she would be above the other deputies. She could give orders, and in the absence of the sheriff, she would be in charge. Her first job would be to find out if something was happening around the train. The train yard is the lifeblood of the town. Whoever controls the yard controls the town. She thought about the gang activity a month ago. The intimidation tactics, now the violence on the railroad property was it all connected? She needed more information, but she didn't want whoever this was to know they were investigating any possible connection. With so many new people in town as well as all the new deputies she didn't know who to trust.

After some talk, the sheriff agreed to have Joleen work from another site. The detective branch would be in its own operation with its own offices. Joleen would be in charge with six deputies under her. Trip laughed at the wording until he realized his name was on the list. He changed his toon when Joleen said, "*I need to know I can trust the people I am working with,*" To keep this professional she decided to keep John with the regular operations. She would only give

him orders at home and in bed. On the other side of the town square, there was a store with a room for rent on the second floor. With some work, it could easily be converted into the type of office space they would need. For now, they would stay in the pseudo uniform.

Back home the furniture had arrived. In his heart, John understood why she didn't want him on her detail, but he also didn't like the idea of trusting her safety to others. After nights of talk and thought they had how the furniture would be laid out long before it arrived so he and Sam could set it up before Joleen came home. Sam knew he should be long gone before she did. Either he was going to pick a fight, or they would spend the night testing the structure of the furniture. Sam went back to his little home. Inside away from prying eyes he brought out a silver Russian Orthodox Cross and thought of his real family, not the fake ones he claimed out in the desert.

Joleen came home to find Sam waiting for her and her horse. She was riding Tim for now with Night in the family way. Sam took Tim and pointed to the packing crates. The furniture arrived. In the meeting, John seemed a little lost. Like he thought he was coming over to her office. Joleen didn't know what she was about to walk into. By the door, she could smell

the aroma of cooking meat and hardwood. Inside John had the wood stove fired up and was cooking a feast. Massive steaks, potatoes and some sort of chili sauce. Then she noticed he was butt ass naked with just an apron on. She checked outside to see if Sam was in his house when she joined John in his state of undress.

A man walked along the tracks. He wasn't an employee of the railroad or one of the men who walked the rails looking for work or trouble. They had a certain look to them. This man was dressed like a city man in a derby. He looked out of place. From inside the tower built by the railroad, Joleen followed the progress of this trespasser. She needed to know where he was going. Then she would find out why? There was enough evidence and criminality to arrest this guy, but with a little patience, she could tie him into a bigger conspiracy. He had a gun which wasn't illegal except it was concealed. A big mistake in a place where people openly carried personnel hip cannons such as a Colt Navy or in one case a cap and ball 54 caliber derringer.

The derby man met up with two others. They were locals, but Joleen only knew them as people she would see in the town meetings and on the street. They had their guns on their hips. They both also had the

same guns as the gang members from a month ago. Joleen looked over at Trip. He was staring thru the spyglass, but really he was asleep. She quietly reached over to flick his ear. Before she got to his ear Trip said, *“I see you.”* The man somehow mastered the ability to sleep while being awake. He said, *“the guy in the gray hat is Jim Downs from the Drowning J. I don’t know the other one, but he works at the Frying Dog.”* Joleen said, *“who names these ranches.”* It wasn’t really a question, just an observation. Joleen took the spyglass and focused on the derby dude. She thought, *“Yes, Trip named him.”* He had a silver cross in front of his tie, but it wasn’t the usual cross. She knew it meant something. Trip said, *“we will have a harder time prosecuting these guys if we don’t catch them in the act.”* She thought, *“holy shit does Trip know the law?”* She replied, *“we can bust the privates or let them lead us to the generals.”* Trip replied with a question, *“you want to bust them in their privates?”*

The next day Joleen had two of the deputies under her watch follow the two locals. The Derby Dude road out that night for parts unknown. They were chosen because they were locals and could blend in with the crowd. The man named Jim Downs went to the railroad depot. He ended up at the post office in the station. He paid to have a letter sent. The deputy didn’t attempt to see what the letter was or to whom it was

sent. Downs then went back to the Drowning J and back to work. The other man from the Frying Dog went to a local brothel disguised as a hotel. A man or woman could book a room cheap, but the service was extra. It wasn't against the law for now, but Miss Jane Teacher operated it as if it was a secret. One that everyone knew. The man booked a room and two companions or room service for the night. He paid in the same silver dollars the men from the roof were paid in. Silver coins from back east were an anomaly. The deputy exchanged a local coin for a sample of the man's payment.

Joleen laid the coins out on a piece of felt. The coins were all minted in the same year, and none of them had a mint mark. From what she could remember this meant the coins were most likely from the Philadelphia mint. So, whoever is doing this either has ties to the east coast or is from the east coast. Maybe both. Whatever they are doing must be on the railroad. The two men were from different ranches on different sides of the city. A hired hand can be hired to do anything. It depends on the caliber of the man. Joleen knew at least one of them was into prostitutes. The kind of man that will blow through any earned income long before a job is done. She could wait for this man to grow angry with work that will no longer pay out or

try and turn him into a paid informant. It would be an easier decision if she knew his name.

After a few days, Joleen received a telegram from the New York Police Department. They had gone to the post office and copied the name and address of the letter sent from Hope. The name on the letter was Ivan Smith. The address was a warehouse near the waterfront. They had said that a new criminal element had moved in. A wave of Russian immigrants had taken over the local activities. Smith was an alias. The name Ivan S had come up in multiple murder investigations in Queens. She was surprised to see how efficient such a large operation their department was. She had a hard time getting her subordinates to do the simple things like finding out people's names. She started to think about the evidence. Ivan sounds Russian. Sam has a Russian accent. Could there be a connection? Sam has connections with many people in town. He knows the inner workings of the town. She decided to keep him close where they can keep an eye on him.

John came home and soon came dinner and fun. They lay in the bed sweating in the heat of the evening and activities. Joleen wondered just what she did to find this man. She wasn't looking for anyone nor

was she interested in finding anyone. All her life was about justice and truth. To find both she had to push aside the trappings of the times. The idea that a woman is less than a man. Her stepfather Allen treated her like an equal from an early age. He helped her see a side of life that many women couldn't. Most would have been barred from seeing behind the curtains of power. She also realized that her status as a woman was an asset of sorts. People would act as if she wasn't there or let secrets slip because she was "*only a woman.*" As a teenager both her and Allen used this to great effect. He had many exclusives that left people wondering, "*just how does he do it?*"

Sam was staying at the office that night, so Joleen told John what she knew. He was surprised to hear he could speak. John said, "*he has been in many important meetings throughout the town. He knows everyone's secrets and lies.*" She wanted to tell him it was worse than that. This boy knew how the sheriff's department works and has access to the arms stored away across town. They talked until Joleen decided to speak with the Sheriff in the morning. She thought about how she could use the invisibility of her sex to help take criminals and politicians down. She would either wait until he leaves for another job or have John lure him away. She realized it was a mistake not to tell the Sheriff about Sam and what she knew. John asked,

“but what do you really know? He doesn’t know a lot of English and sounds Russian, or you think he sounds Russian.”

The next day Joleen watched the sheriff’s office. Once Sam left she went in. The room was alive with work and body odor. The deputy force had doubled in the last week. With her folder of evidence as well as her hunches, she sat waiting to talk to the sheriff. A deputy she didn’t recognize walked out of the office, and she slipped in. Without looking at her Sheriff, Wednesday said, *“what made you think it was ok to feel up a female suspect?”* Joleen looked out the door at the man that walked out. She turned and said, *“she was asking for it?”* Wednesday looked up to see Joleen and said, *“well you aren’t Tim.”* She replied, *“no but I think this Tim guy should meet my knee.”* He blinked then said, *“I have a very busy day, so unless you have something, please go knee Tim then send in the next moron.”*

Joleen pulled up a chair and laid out her evidence. It included a reward poster for a runaway Russian boy from New York City. The drawing looked like Sam. The name was Savva Anton Maklakov. She pointed out the name Sam. The boy was the son of a crime lord back in New York City. She said, *“this is*

just speculation, but I think Sam ran away from home and when they were hit by the supposed Indians it was really an attack on him to get to his family. He then claimed that two of the people on the wagon were his parents. That is, he didn't say they weren't."

Wednesday just stared. Joleen replied with his stare by saying, "*and yes he can speak.*" Wednesday walked over to a wall. On it was a photo of him and Sam. He was like a son to him, but something kept him from taking him into his home with his actual children.

She left the Sheriff's office and went back to her office. Along the way, she was watched by Sam. He wasn't sure if or what she knew. He was born in Moscow but raised on the streets of Brooklyn. His family was steadily taking over some of the streets. He wanted nothing to do with the criminal lifestyle. He read about the cowboys and the west. He wanted to go to a place where it didn't snow, or he wasn't the son of the man that would drown you in concrete then dump your body in the East River. He made it as far as the Arizona Territory. There an old enemy of his fathers found him and killed everyone in the wagon train. He played dead and somehow got away. He used this opportunity to escape his life and start anew.

About a year later he was found out by an associate of the family. It was his uncle, Anton. He was on his way to the west coast to see if the family could gain by moving west. He was also sent to pick up Savva and bring him home. In town, he saw the possibilities of this place. The Chinese controlled the west, the Italians and Irish controlled New York. Here in the west was an open territory where goods came and went. Nothing could go from one coast to another without coming through here. The family that controlled the rail yard controlled the country. He left his runaway nephew there to watch the town and learn it's secrets while he went back to tell Savva's father about the town of Hope.

It was apparent to Sam something was wrong. Doors that were always open to him were now closed. Meetings were being held behind locked doors. He would be sent out on errands just as important information would come in. He wasn't allowed to get the mail anymore. Worst of all was the fact that he couldn't ask why he was being frozen out. Joleen knows he can speak. He wonders if she knows anything more. The plan was slowly coming into place. He would be someone important to the family, not just the son of a boss but a boss in his own right. He couldn't let the flow of information stop now. His Uncle Ivan was already in town at a hotel near the

yard. If everything goes as planned, he would buy the hotel, and it would become the base of operations for the family until they could set up a compound outside of town.

The territory Marshalls were still pushing for the attack being either Indian or small gang-related. The Indian thing was absurd. Sheriff Wednesday said, *“no they don’t hire white thugs to do their work for them. If this were the people, we would know that by now. We would all be out in the desert staked to the ground. All of us know who did it.”* He went on to say while it could be a local gang that is involved in the shooting he doesn’t think any could do what he thinks is coming. John said, *“yes but this is still just speculation. We have way too many questions with too few answers.”* Trip said, *“maybe we should sit Sam or whatever his name is down and let him answer some of these questions? Let’s give him enough rope to either save his life or hang himself with.”* Trip was having trouble accepting that Sam wasn’t what he pretended to be.

That night Trip went home only to find Sam there with his family. He was rebuilding the fence Trip had promised to do about a week ago. Looking out at this boy who was pretending to be a friend made Trip

mad. He wanted to go out and beat the truth out of him. He had the boy in his house. Around his family. Trip had to get rid of him. He thought, *“how can I do that without letting him know we know what we know.”* Hope came in and whispered into Trip’s ear, *“stop staring at him, or he just might think you’re suspicious of him.”* She told him that the sheriff warned her about what they thought about Sam. She volunteered to watch him so they could search his place. From a secret opening in her dress, Hope pulled a small revolver. She said, *“I’m not stupid.”*

Sam came home to find everything in place. But there was a smell he didn’t recognize. Until he did. It was the soap Joleen uses. She doesn’t seem to know how it has a scent that lingers in a room. He tries to figure out why she would be in his home. Do they know? What do they know? Was it just her or was it that meat sack she has been living. Sam hates John. He would never say anything about it, but he hates this man. That day in the walk-in closet as he watched her strip and bath he felt she was his. This man was touching something that was his. The plan was so close to taking shape. He couldn’t let this man or his woman interfere with it now. He would have to find out what they know even if it means breaking cover.

The Doctor told Joleen, “*this is good news.*” She was having a hard time seeing it that way. She wanted to be seen as a Deputy and not just as a woman but now she was doing something only a woman can do. She was pregnant. The doctor gave her instructions on what to do for the first three months than the rest. She remembered a story her mother told her about how she miscarried in the middle of a shootout. She didn’t tell her about the months of depression she suffered through after the incident. The news of a baby changes things. She would be responsible for this life as would John. One of them should step away from the job so that he or she would have a stable and safe family life. With everything happening here in town maybe she or they should move away. As she walked down the street, she didn’t see Sam following her. For once she was distracted from her usual alertness.

Joleen woke up to find herself tied to the bed. Her vest was gone, and her shirt was cut open. Her arms were tied to the posts making it so she couldn’t move. Sam came into view. He had a knife in his hand. He said, “*I know you know something. I just need to know how much of what is coming that you know.*” He pushed one side of her shirt open to reveal a breast. He looked her up and down then said, “*you should be mine. I am your match, not that moron.*” With that, he cupped her exposed breast. She spat in his face. He

didn't act offended or even surprised. He said, "*you will learn to respect me. In time you will love me.*" With that, he opened the rest of her shirt and felt up the other breast. Joleen's eyes went wide.

Sam spun around and put the blade to Joleen's throat. John stood there in his uniform with his gun out. Sam said, "*this doesn't have to go bad for you John.*" John looked at Joleen then back to Sam. He said, "*I think it's only going to get worse for you Sam.*" Joleen looked over at Sam and said, "*Sam drop the knife. You can still walk away from this.*" Sam pulled the knife away and passed it to his left hand then held it out away from his body and dropped it. As he did John followed the knife not seeing the gun in Sam's hand. Sam used this distraction to fire. He got off 3 rounds before John could react but when he did, he shot at Sam's head. One round struck him in the face. He fell to the left then went out a window. John went to Joleen. He cut one arm free then gave her the knife. As this happened, she tried to inspect John. She cut his vest free to find that Sam had hit him in three places. She went to get up, but John pulled her in. He said, "*don't go.*"

Joleen woke up and looked around. She was in bed. The windows John wanted to put in were in.

Looking down she realized she was very pregnant. On her left hand was a silver and turquoise ring. She didn't realize she wanted this kind of future. Joleen could feel the baby kick. A future of babies and love that could build a life away from the justice she wanted after the death of her brother. Just maybe she could have both. She got out of bed and went to her knees. She saw a spot of blood on the floor. The room went dark. She opened her eyes to find herself back in reality with John's lifeless body, with his head in her lap. He was dead along with that life she didn't know she wanted until it was gone.

She thought about all the things she wanted to say to him. She couldn't even remember saying she loved him. His lifeless body stared up at her as she saw Sam's blood on the walls, but he was long gone. Sam or Savva got away before he could tell the truth. She couldn't help but think that if she had told someone about Sam earlier just maybe she wouldn't be here now. Her father died before knowing he would be a father and now history was repeating itself. She straightened John out and cleaned off his badge. She then covered his body with a sheet from the bed. She grabbed his gun and the 45-70 from her rifle rack. Joleen said to John, "*Sam isn't getting away.*"

Outside she found that Sam had taken John's horse. Joleen replayed what she saw in her head. From what she could tell the bullet hit him in the face. He would need medical attention fast. There are very few doctors in town. To cover them all, she would need help. On the way out, she stopped at a neighbor's house and asked if he would keep an eye on Night and the house. She told him about John but not about Sam. Everyone would find out about Sam soon but for now, he was popular and trying to discredit him could be problematic. In town, she found Sheriff Wednesday. He could tell something was wrong. Joleen didn't take the time to change her shirt. Sam had cut the front open, and it still was. The shirt was also covered in blood. Inside the sheriff's office, they put together a search party with the intent to take him alive but the understanding that dead was also an option. He gave her a clean shirt that was too big for her. She tied the ends hoping to make it fit then she put on a spare vest she kept in her office. John had once suggested she should keep some clothes at her office, but she never got around to doing it.

Down the street in the hotel owned by his uncle, Sam was being worked on by a local doctor. The bullet entered his cheek and exited through the back of the ear nearly taking out his throat. Sam was sedated with a mix of opium and ether. The doctor

couldn't do anything for the hearing in his left ear. He sowed his face up the best he could. Sam would have some massive facial scars for the rest of his life. After the doctor was finished, they slit his throat and left him in an alley to bleed out. Sam was put on the train for the east. By the time they found the doctor he was long gone. The bullet lacerated some of the nerves leaving him unable to move the left side of his face. Whatever boyish looks he had gone with the wound.

From the place, they found Doctor James George they started a search. A trail of blood led them to a man in a bar. The man didn't know he had stepped in the pooling blood. He saw the deputies walk into the saloon. Without a word he spun and drew his gun. Trip told him, "*drop it you have no way out of this.*" The man looked past Trip then back to him. He said in very broken English, "*you are wrong.*" He put the gun to his chin and fired. The bullet came out the top of his head as the blast caught his beard on fire. His fiery body hit the floor. Trip and another carried his body out, but they didn't try to put the fire out. Trip said, "*let him burn.*" The trail was cold, and it seemed that Sam was gone.

As the search went on Trip, sheriff Wednesday and Joleen went back to her home and collected John's

body. In the barn, Night had her foal. The neighbor was a man named Jim Hunt. He had experience with this, and the birth was uneventful. Within minutes of being born the new member of the family was standing next to her mother. She named the foal Dawn. Joleen said, “*John thought it should be Dawn because it comes after the night.*” Dawn was mostly black with an almost gold and white ring around its right eye. Joleen remembered one of the wild horses with the same marking. Staring at the foal, she thought about John and the baby. He would never know he was a father. She also thought about her own father and her mother. Her mother made a decision to help ensure she could grow up safe. Now it was her turn to make a choice. Stay and fight or go and protect her child. As Joleen stood there, Night came up to her and nuzzled her ear. It was as if the horse was trying to say everything is going to be alright.

Chapter Six

A layer of dust covered the room. Joleen sat at her desk. The office was abandoned a little over a year ago. She would reopen it with a mandate from the town. Her office would work independently of the sheriff's office just in case it should need to investigate the sheriff's office. This would be an official position with the town. With her mother and step-father now in town, she could focus on her job. The boys will have plenty of family around. A courthouse is in the planning stage. The town could have a judge soon. For now, the circuit judges will still make their way around. If the territorial governor authorizes it the town of Hope could be an important part of the justice system as well as a step in becoming a state. But that's in the future, for now, Joleen will have her office to set back up and work to do.

About eight months after John's death Joleen gave birth to twin boys. She named them John and Edward. A midwife and her mother Candice helped with the births. They decided that the boys will take the name of Warren. About four months into the pregnancy Joleen stepped down from the job so she wouldn't risk the pregnancy. After a few mistakes, the sheriff decided to close the detective office but keep

paying for space. Sheriff Wednesday knew Joleen would be back. The house felt empty in those months before her mother showed up. At one-point, Joleen thought of moving back to San Francisco, but she realized that she didn't see that as home anymore. She wanted her sons to have the childhood she should have had. Eventually, her mother showed up then her step-father and leaving became just an afterthought.

On the wall of the office was a drawing of Sam. It had an artist's projection of what he would look like with the scar. Joleen opened the windows to let some air. Somehow even in a closed room, the dust of this town made its way in. As a homeowner and resident, she now knows that the dust is just a byproduct of the dry climate of this part of the territory. A young girl came in with a bucket and mop. She was surprised to see Joleen. She asked, "*miss do you belong here?*" Joleen answered, "*there is no other place I belong.*" The girl said, "*I don't know what that means. I want to know if you are supposed to be here. I am here to clean before Deputy Warren comes back.*" Joleen stood up. Her badge was in a special clip on her belt. She said to the girl, "*I am Deputy Warren, but it's now Detective Warren.*" The girl said, "*I don't care if its dancehall Warren you are here early and are in my way. I need to clean in here.*"

After a short talk, Joleen learned that the girl was named Agnes Henderson. She worked for the hotel. The building the office is located was bought out by one of the hotels. They seemed to be in a frenzy to buy as much real estate as possible. She told Joleen that she was supposed to do this until she reached the age of 16 when she could work in the back room. Or in other words, she was supposed to become a prostitute in 2 years. Joleen offered her a job in the office. Agnes said she would have to speak with her mother. Her father was not in the picture. He was wanted for stealing horses and had a shoot on site issued by the territory. Joleen said, *“I’ll talk to your mother.”* Agnes said, *“well ok but I think she will say no. The woman offered her a good sum for me.”*

Joleen hit the street. She was walking with a purpose, and it showed. She turned a corner and found Trip standing there with his back to a wall like he was waiting for her. He asked, *“so off to do some detecting?”* Joleen pulled her revolver and twirled it in her hand then holstered it. She said, *“I am going to have a long talk with a woman about selling her daughter. You in?”* He smiled and said, *“right behind you, boss.”* They hadn’t found a good title or at least one she felt comfortable with. She would be the boss but not a sheriff. When she spoke to sheriff Wednesday, she was told she could have the pick of

the deputies. She said, “*I will only take people that want to be there.*” Is if by an actor’s queue Trip walked in and asked Joleen, “*so when are we moving in Boss?*” She spent the last two months training Trip and 3 other men on how to investigate a crime. It helped that her step-father Allen was there. He was a well-known investigative journalist and taught her everything she knew.

They made their way to the hotel. She wanted any contract Agnes’s mother may have signed as both evidence so she could be released from it. On the way, she felt all the eyes on her. She knows that some people think she shouldn’t have come back. She was a mother now and worthless but finding a man to help raise her children. The last 2 years stole all the goodwill she had made with the community. She understood what her mother meant by motherhood changing things, but she couldn’t see why it was any of their business what she did. In the hotel, she found the manager. She explained that the contract was invalid. The manager then said that there was no contract and if Joleen wanted the girl all she would have to do is pay them back. She wanted to shoot this man. He was from back east. As in England. He had the accent and seemed to look down on her even though they were the same height. Trip dropped 2 gold coins on the counter.

The man said, “*no we only paid 3 pieces of silver for the girl.*”

Trip said, “*I don’t know what’s worse. Being sold or being sold cheap.*” Joleen said, “*some people see life as being cheap. These people sell their souls for the price of a drink and consider it well spent.*” They found the mother in a cheap little saloon on the outskirts of town. It wasn’t legal but if no one complained the Mayor said they should be allowed to stay open. The room cleared when Joleen and Trip entered the saloon. Sitting in a corner was Agnes’s mother. She was seemingly passed out. In front of her were a bottle of whiskey and a pipe. Trip picked up the pipe and turned to the bartender. The bartender tried to bolt for the door. Trip kicked a chair into his path, and he tripped over it. Joleen knew this pipe well. She said, “*the opium problem has arrived in Hope.*”

Joleen grew up in San Francisco. As a young girl, she would work with her step-father as he reported on the events of the city. Allen wrote many stories on the opium trade and its costs. He thought it was a component of the anti-Chinese movement. The problem was that it was legal to sell in the country. It made little sense to hide it in an illegal saloon. Agnes’s mother was dead. She was cold. Joleen remembers a

few times were people had just stopped breathing. Trip put the bartender in a seat. From his vantage point, the bartender could now see the woman was dead. He looked to Trip then to Joleen and said, *“I just serve the booze, that stuff is sold by someone the owner brings in.”* The man looked back to the dead woman then back to Joleen. He said, *“he comes in for about an hour or so and sells to some of the locals. I don’t know his name or where he goes after that.”* Joleen said, *“this bar doesn’t have a license to operate here and is now closed.”* She wanted to do more, but the law didn’t allow it.

It took the news of the bar being closed an hour to find its way to the Mayor. He didn’t have a problem with anyone opening any kind of business if taxes are paid, or bribes are passed. In his near twenty years as the Mayor, he has had his hands in almost everything happening in town. This includes the less than legal aspects. A saloon selling cheap booze to people that wouldn’t be welcome in a better establishment has its place in a town. But then he heard about the body and girl sold for a drink and medication of some kind. He would have to find a way to turn this to his advantage. A girl being sold is nothing new nor is the problem with this new drug. He and his new partners buried plenty as he put it “nobodies” in the desert. What is new is the population knowing about it. He fears the

public finding out his involvement almost as much as he fears his partners. These Russians. When he had told them, they couldn't buy a piece of land next to the railyard without the railroad's permission he had found the railroad yard manager's head in a box on his desk. In his mouth was a letter giving them permission.

Joleen told Agnes about them finding her mother dead. She seemed numb to the news. Joleen figured this little girl had already written her mother off as dead. Now she had this strange girl with her. This was a question. Can she bring her home to the boys? What if she is like Sam? Can she turn her back to a person used and abused by people who didn't see her as being of any value? She knew she had to do something. This girl most likely had never known any kind of kindness in her life. The decision was made for better or worse. Agnes would come home with her. Joleen got on her horse, but Agnes wouldn't get near it. It was the first real emotion Joleen had saw on the girl. She was afraid of the horse. Joleen got off and brought the horse to Agnes. With Agnes on the boardwalk, she and the horse were face-to-face. Night looked back to Joleen and made a whinny sound. Agnes smiled. Joleen said to Night, "*yes I agree she needs a bath.*" Agnes's smile disappeared, and she found that universal look all children get when a bath is mentioned.

Allen was sitting outside watching the sunset as he smoked. Inside the house, he could hear Eddie and Johnny stomping around making horse sounds. The boys now want to be horses when they grow up. Under his chair was a Colt Peacemaker. He sat there thinking about his own son and wondering what he would be if he had lived. He could see him as a doctor or reporter working next to him. In the last few years, Allen had a growing pain in his back. He started to lace his tobacco with the opium a doctor recommended. He did it in such a way so the girls wouldn't know. From inside he heard one of the boys making a wolf howl. He thought to himself, "*the horse thing didn't last long.*" He smiled and continued to smoke. In the distance, he could see a rider. When the rider came closer, he could see Joleen and an unknown girl on the back. Allen got up and dumped the contents of his pipe then ground it into the dirt. After that, he went inside. He told Candice to put the boys in the back room. She told the boys to go to their rooms and be quiet. She knew that was a lot to ask for.

Allen went back outside and slid the revolver into his holster just as Joleen and Agnes rode up. The girl looked young. Maybe 13 or 14. She was also filthy. He helped the girl off the horse. Joleen asked if

he would settle Night in for the evening. She made a conscious effort not to say Night for the night. He took the horse into the barn as Joleen, and the girl went inside. After a few minutes, Candice came out and asked if he would help her set up a bath for Agnes. Allen said, “*so her name is Agnes.*” Candice said, “*I’ll explain the whole thing tonight.*” Agnes stood in the house not understanding what she was doing there. She saw a young boy in a hallway. He smiled at her, and she smiled back. Then a look of dread came over him. Agnes turned to see a bathtub being carried out along with some buckets. From deep in the hallway she heard, “*bath time.*”

Allen dumped the last pot of water into the tub then left the room. Joleen asked her mother, “*why won’t you use the hot water heater and the tub in the bathroom?*” Candice just shook her head and went to find Agnes. On the way out of the room, she said, “*using a steam engine to heat water is a waste of time. The amount of time it takes to start you can have a full bath ready. Maybe someday they will have water heaters that don’t blow up your house if you forget about them.*” Joleen wondered if it was more about her father died in a train explosion rather than the time. Candice came back with Agnes. She had to cut off the girl’s clothes. She was almost fused to the clothing. Without them, she looked younger than fourteen.

Joleen asked, “*Agnes just how old are you really?*” She said, “*momma said I was to say 14 if asked and not my real age.*” She hesitated then instead of saying she showed all her fingers out. Joleen asked, “*ten?*” Agnes just nodded. Her mother had padded the clothing to make her look older.

After the bath, Agnes sat in front of Candice with her back to her as Candice brushed her hair. Agnes had naturally straight hair and with all the dust and dirt cleaned out it was a deep auburn. Joleen stared into her eyes. They were a pale blue like hers. This girl would easily be mistaken for a sister of hers or maybe a daughter. Agnes was dressed in one of Allen’s shirts. Before Joleen could say a word, Candice said, “*tomorrow we will go and buy some new clothes and see a doctor.*” Agnes said, “*momma said I was never to be seen without my special clothes. I was to let them do their business in the.*” Candice stopped her and said, “*that is not your job anymore. Your job will be to grow up and do those things you want to do.*” Joleen wanted to go and dig Agnes’s mother up so she could shoot her. Joleen needed to sleep so she could speak to the town council with a clear head.

In the morning Joleen rode into town. There was a smell of burnt wood and cloth in the air. The illegal bar was burned to the ground. Trip was with the

volunteer fire patrol. They put the fire out. He said, “*we found a body in the remains. You want to bet on who that was?*” Joleen shook her head and replied, “*someone didn’t want the owner to speak with us.*” Trip pointed to a man standing on the side of the road and said, “*no that’s the owner. I think the man inside was the bartender.*” Trip said how the owner was talking all tough about how he was going to reopen and we couldn’t stop him. Joleen knew that unless she found him in the illegal bar openly operating it, she couldn’t arrest him. The fire would take care of the eyewitness and her ability to arrest him. She remembered watching the sheriff do something a little underhanded.

She walked up to the man. He had a smirk on his face. He said, “*hey little lady don’t you have a bedpan to clean or something?*” He had a couple of men standing next to him she didn’t recognize. She asked him, “*is this your establishment?*” He looked to the smoldering ruins and back to Joleen. He said, “*yeah.*” She replied, “*you do know that it is up to you to clean this crap up?*” *If I have to, I will issue a fine and arrest you.*” He said, “*the fucking thing is still smoldering you fucking bitch.*” One of the men with him tried to stop him, but it was too late. He took a swing at Joleen. A mistake. His roundhouse went over her head as she brought up her fist into his diaphragm

than a quick kick to the genitals. The two men backed away. Joleen put her hand on her gun as the owner fell to the sidewalk grasping his balls and trying to find a breath. Trip was on his feet with handcuffs and his hand on his holstered gun. The two men left without saying a word. Joleen realized their silence spoke volumes.

The town council was in a closed-door meeting. Joleen waited so she could speak to them. About an hour into the meeting a page came out of the hall and asked her to come in. The mayor was speaking to the council. He asked Joleen to tell the council about what she found in the illegally run bar. She gave a description of the body and how the people on the bar just ignored it. She then mentioned the opium pipe. The council stirred. The mayor said, *“you see this evil opium needs to be out of our town now and forever.”* Joleen said, *“the dead woman had sold her ten-year-old daughter so she could buy this drug.”* One of the council asked what happened to the girl. Joleen told her she was at her house and was being protected. Before she left a council-member asked her what she thought about this town ban only allowing it to be sold to doctors? She said, *“I grew up in San Francisco, and I saw firsthand what this stuff does. If you are asking me if I think it should be banned, then I would say it*

needs to be eradicated.” With the room in a tizzy, Joleen left.

Out in the hall, the mayor stopped Joleen and asked, “*what happened to the owner, this Guy Thomas?*” Joleen made a mental note to the fact that the Mayor knew his name. She replied, “*he took a swing at me, so I arrested him.*” The mayor’s face went slack. He was never a person that was easily shocked. So, seeing this look on his face told Joleen he was possibly a part of this. His past is an open book. A book filled with double deals and job steering that would have a politician in any other city in jail. The trouble was that the town was built on such actions from the founder to his successors. Considering what happened to the bartender, Joleen wanted to get back to the jail and post a guard on the prisoner. There was a history of people dying in that jail. Her own father left a suicidal man alone with his belt. Also, this man may know something more about all this. He may know why they are smuggling legal drugs.

Sheriff Wednesday stood staring at Guy Thomas. The man stood staring back at the sheriff. A standoff that was almost pointless with one of them on the locked side of a jail cell. The sheriff asked, “*if I unlock this cell and let you go, just how long would*

you survive?” Thomas’s eyebrows furrowed. The sheriff said, “these guys seem to be more interested in covering their tracks than keeping friends, and I am willing to bet you know more than that bartender that was left to sizzle in your bar.” The sheriff took note that this guy named Guy was not the kind to think about all angles when making a partnership. That is, he didn’t or couldn’t see the big picture. The sheriff said, “let me spell this out. You are a liability to your partners now, and they are the kind that likes to deal with as in kill their liabilities.” Guy sat down and said, “I think that fire was meant for me. The two men back there were there to take me back to them and what I guess was a hole in the desert.” From the shadows, Joleen asked, “so why smuggle a legal substance?”

Guy told them that the men running this operation said they could see what was coming. That set up an operation that can move this when it becomes illegal will generate millions. Guy asked the Sheriff, *“do you smoke or drink?”* The sheriff shook his head, but he then said, *“what you are talking about is the addictive nature of those things much like the opium. A person who controls the supply can make a lot of money.”* Joleen chimed in, *“with that comes power and influence.”* Guy asked, *“would it surprise you to know your mayor is involved in all this?”* It surprised the sheriff but not Joleen. The sheriff said, *“I know he is*

crooked, but that doesn't sound like the man that just fought to ban." He stopped when he saw how the pieces came together. Guy said, *"Hope is a test case for this new business. Make it illegal than sell it secretly to see just what happens."* He looked to the open doorway then back to Joleen. He said, *"one of them has a hatred for you that goes past just being a law dog. Most people call him Scarface but not to his face other call him."* Joleen interrupted him and said, *"either Sam or Sava."*

Across town, the two men sent to find Guy was talking to a man in the shadows. They told this man they had no choice but to leave him there with the authorities. They all spoke Russian. Out in public, these men were not allowed to speak at all, or they could give their ethnicity away. Sam leaned in and said, *"if he speaks to them then you two can expect to find your own holes out in the desert."* One of them said, *"we have a plan in motion to shut him up and deal with the law."* Sam pulled a revolver from his hip and shot the man who spoke in the genitals then the head. He told the other one, *"whatever you planned better not have any links to us or bring the territorial law. We don't need the army here."* The man went to walk away when Sam said, *"take that out and dispose of it and in the future, don't think for yourself. As you can see it won't end well."*

The sheriff set up a watch on the prisoner. No one can get in to see him. His meals would be searched and tested for poison. In effect, he would be the safest person in town. An attorney with the territorial government was sent, searched and set in to take a statement from the prisoner. The guy was taking to the idea he was the prisoner and not Guy. Joleen and Trip went to the rail yard to search the train cars, but they were stopped by the railroad officials. The manager of the yard a man named Harold Granger said, *“no way are you searching every car for something that is legal.”* Joleen realized he had a point. They needed to have the town council make the opium illegal before they could do anything. Mr. Granger said, *“I don’t care if your town makes trains illegal. None of you are searching anything on this yard.”*

Millie and Francis Beck were in bed working on a family. They have been married for about six hours, and they spent the time in bed doing what newlyweds do. Millie couldn’t believe she found a man she could spend the rest of her life with. She didn’t know that rest was about another ten minutes. She got up, leaving Francis in bed for a little water and fresh air. The room was closed off and stuffy. She opened the shutters on the window to find a man with a

club. He struck her in the head, and she fell to the floor. The man climbed inside and went to the bedroom. He found Francis in bed, naked, waiting for his new wife and not the knife he got instead. The man-made short work of him so he couldn't make a sound. In the other room, Millie woke up too soon. The man grabbed her and slit her throat. He then tossed her body on the body of her now dead husband. Then he stared at the wall they shared with the town sheriff's office.

The office was busy. The sheriff's department almost doubled in the last two years. They took over the adjoining building to the left, but the people on the right built their home and wouldn't sell. Sheriff Wednesday knew they needed a new facility. He wanted a separate facility. The main hub and several smaller offices like they have for the detective bureau. He also wanted a large jail facility. With the new court and the town passing new laws, he could see a need for a place to lock people up. His new office was in an old storage room that stored tobacco. He hated the smell, but it was this or a room that stored dried fish. He got up and went to the door. A sharp thundering crack echoed throughout his office. The walls bowed in causing a rippling in the plaster. He checked the door. It was stuck in the door jam. A smell of burnt wood and plaster came underneath the door. He kicked the

door lose to find most of the building was smoldering rubble of brick, wood, and bodies.

Out in the desert, a man desperately tries to hold in his guts. He eventually loses the battle and dies a grim death. Sam said to the men he sent out to take care of this man, *“I don’t want this one speaking to the officials. Let him know I don’t like it when people think for themselves.”* The men who first castrated the man then nearly disemboweled him understood this was a warning to them as much as a punishment to this guy who hired a man to blow up the sheriff’s department. Sam didn’t mind the death he just doesn’t want the territorial government or the army getting involved. He still paid the man. A good explosives expert without a conscience can be a good asset.

It took the rest of the day to put any fires out as well as help the wounded and collect the dead. Joleen looked over the carnage. From what she could tell the bomb was set next to the shared wall between the home and the cells. The side walls of the cell and the roof was all stone and steel, but the back wall was wood. The explosion turned the cells into a sort of blast furnace sending explosive gasses and fire into the rest of the building. Guy Thomas, his lawyer and the people in the home next to the office were blown to

bits. In total twelve deputies lost their lives along with seven that would most likely never work in law enforcement again. There was a man in a cell for petty larceny and a woman with her two children on the street passing by that also died. Sheriff Wednesday said, *“if they want war then let’s give it to them.”*

As the ashes were being extinguished, the mayor was staring out from his office. He knew that he knew too much for these people to let him live. They had just bombed the sheriff’s office so killing a mayor might not be that far of a stretch. He could remember how his mother as mayor would send him out to collect from different businesses for the honor of working in town. He had ended all that and wanted to slowly roll back the corruption. He thought, *“I would eventually have enough money to make the job legitimate and end any activity that could be wrong.”* He knew that was akin to a bank robber saying just one more job and I will become a legal citizen. Now he wonders just how long until town hall blows up. He nearly jumped when a knock came to his door.

Across town, Sam was told about just how much damage was done and how it missed the sheriff and Joleen. Sam knew that Joleen had an office across town from the main office, but he thought they could

have taken out the sheriff. He turned to his right-hand man a Russian born man with an American name. He said, “*David I want you to go and close down the operations for now. Tell them to take the product to Jeb’s town or some other place.*” David Smith nodded his head and left. Within an hour the future shipments were halted in other towns, and the opium and other goods were on their way to a one building town called Jeb’s Town.

Jeb’s town is a two-story adobe building that served as a weigh station long before the town of Hope. It now acted as a trading post with some of the local nations and the outside world. It also dealt with any kind of vice a man could want. Sam didn’t like the challenge or lack of challenge in selling in such a place. As a young boy, he was almost sold there. He knew they like to use and abuse women and children there. The younger, the better. The army stayed away. Some of the officers had a taste for young girls and boys. Sam didn’t care about any of that. If he had a stake in the operation, he would grow it not hide it out in the middle of nowhere. For a price, they would store his product. For a percentage, they would help move it for them. Sam remembered at a time like this what his father says, “*keep the inner circle close and Russian.*” So, he would use these places and people, but they would never be part of the operation.

Bill Gaines stared into the unknown. His lifeless eyes betrayed his seemingly look of life. He was the last of the deputies that died from the explosion. He was hit by flying debris and died from what the doctor called crush syndrome. Sheriff Wednesday looked at his hands. His gloves were covered in black soot and the blood of friends. He said to Trip, *“I made a mistake. We all did. We acted like this was just some town back east. We acted like we were just a piece of a system. Out here in the wild, we are the law. We are the only order. We let these men do what they want for far too long.”* Trip asked, *“what do you want us to do?”* The Sheriff answered, *“we take the war to them.”* The sheriff turned to Joleen and asked, *“are you with me?”* Joleen said, *“let’s go talk to the mayor.”* The sheriff knew the symbolic nature of what he was doing as he took his gloves off.

Chapter Seven

Gerard Drake has been the mayor since his mother was murdered over twenty years ago. He outlasted every one of the original town council members. He helped remake the town after the explosion and army nearly ended it. He said to himself, *“and yes I may have made a little something on the side but so what. I made this town. Not any of them.”* But he also knew that none of that mattered now. The Russian’s sent him a message in a box clearly saying they would have no trouble in getting rid of him and his family. The head of the railyard manager was a very real threat. He had his children and wife to think about. He also had his mistress and their three children to think about. He knew he couldn’t talk or be seen in a position where they could think he talked. The mayor removed a small, well-worn ledger from a locked secret vault in his office. He turned the page to June of 1884 fifteen years ago. The day Hope was founded.

Sheriff Wednesday, Joleen, Trip and the sheriff’s son Samuel made their way to the town hall. Only the Sheriff knew what was going to happen. He was going to make this man talk. David Wednesday said to himself, *“too much water under a burnt bridge to let this go.”* Joleen new that in just a few months it would be the twentieth century. Such things like this

can't happen anymore. She feared this would end in a lynching of the mayor. David had lost a lot in the last two years. His youngest daughter died from the measles. His oldest daughter married a man and left town for parts unknown. He had received a letter suggesting her husband was beating her and broke one of her arms. Then the escalating tensions on the street and now the loss of so many of his deputies. He may be on the verge of a break and heaven help the man who gets in his way.

Instead of going into the mayor's office sheriff Wednesday went into the council chamber. He told the others to stay and wait. He told Joleen, "*if you see him then detain him.*" He closed the doors behind him and talking could be overheard. About ten minutes later he came out with a paper. He gave it to Joleen. She opened it and found a bill removing the mayor from power. The sheriff said, "*it's the first step to arresting him.*" He turned to Trip and his son. He told them, "*go to the mayor's house and move his family to the ranch. If he's there then arrest him.*" Joleen went to draw her gun, but the sheriff stopped her. He said, "*we will do this as quietly as possible.*" They entered the office to find Nancy Thomas the mayor's secretary dead on the floor with her throat cut. She also had some stab wounds to the back suggesting they did it so she couldn't call out. Bruises forming on her arms also

suggested this was not long ago and was done by more than one person. The mayor's office was empty. He left her to die in his place. On the mayor's desk was a ledger with a name circled. Joleen asked, "*Maria Santos?*"

Across town, Maria Santos was fixing a meal for her children. She had a job at the hotel, and her man could give her and their children a little. He had to keep them a secret so he could stay mayor. Maria didn't like sharing her man, but he needed the other wife for her money and family power. As she cooked, she realized the sounds from the other room stopped. The sheriff and Joleen approached the house. It was a small but well-kept adobe on the outskirts of town. The house had a traditional small courtyard with an adobe wall and a path leading up to the door. On the door was a red handprint. A bloody handprint. They both drew their guns. Joleen realized this was a poor move. They should have waited for some backup. She also realized it was already too late. For better or worse they were in it.

The front room was awash in blood. The smell of fresh meat hung in the air. Joleen remembered the smell of her brother's death. She mouthed out the words, "*this just happened.*" In a pile of gore and

putrefaction, they found two child size heads. They had been hacked to death. Wednesday's gun started to shake. Joleen saw something in his eyes. It was fear. Just then a door opened, and a man came out with a meat cleaver. Joleen and the man froze in place, but Wednesday pointed and fired. He shot the man in the upper arm. The one holding the cleaver. The cleaver fell, as the man tried to back out of the room. He was covered in blood, brains and bone fragments. Joleen saw a flash of steel, and she fired hitting the man in the head. The hit caused his hand to spasm firing the gun he was pulling. In the room, the man came out of they found Maria. The man hadn't finished the job. She was dead but not cut into pieces. Joleen looked around and asked out loud, "*if she had three children where was their third child.*"

They searched the house but no sign of the last child. Then they saw something in a chicken coop. Hiding among the chickens was a young girl about two or three years old. She was bloody from chicken pecks, but she hadn't called out. The Sheriff said, "*it was an open secret that the mayor had another family. I think even his wife knew.*" Joleen asked, "*with the ledger open to her name the mayor sent the Russians to them, but why?*" The sheriff said, "*maybe to slow them down by sacrificing this family?*" Joleen thought there was something more to this. Joleen said, "*we need to get to*

your ranch.” The sheriff replied, *“no you need to take the child somewhere else while I go home. Go to your office. If you find any deputy or willing person, send them to the ranch.”* Joleen rode into town to find her office on fire. The fire brigade was trying to put the fire out. She realized that she had only one place she could take the girl.

As Joleen approached her home, she saw smoke in the distance. At the gate was a burning buckboard with two dead horses and four dead men. The windows were either shot out or knocked out. She heard a voice from the house, *“Joleen wait.”* Allen came out with his gun drawn and walked over to the fence. He said, *“everyone is alright. I’ll meet you at the side gate. Get in quickly.”* He met her at a hidden gate in the fence and soon they were in the compound. Allen took Night into the barn as Joleen, and the girl went inside. She found her mother and Agnes both with rifles. Joleen remembered a story her mother told her about a standoff on a cliff. She was with a group of children one of whom was now a member of the town council. Candice said, *“the boys are in the central room.”* She looked away then back and said, *“I had to give them a little brandy to calm them down.”* Joleen wanted to be mad about that but having two manic toddlers right now would be worse than them sleeping the brandy off.

Joleen told her mother and step-father what happened in the last couple of hours and how the mayor was now on the run. Candice was in shock. She knew Gerard from before she left for San Francisco. She had a hard time accepting he was this kind of person. Allen said, *“no one that handsome could be good.”* Candice looked at the young girl then back to Joleen. She asked, *“so what’s her name?”* Joleen answered, *“I don’t know she hasn’t spoken a word since we found her.”* Candice got up and went to a homemade Icebox. It was rare, but sometimes the train would bring blocks of ice and sell it to the townsfolk. She poured a half a glass of lemonade. Then she went to a cupboard and pulled a sugar cookie from a bin. The girl followed her with her eyes. Candice put the cookie on a plate then put both in front of the girl. The girl looked at the cookie like it was something she had never seen before. She picked up the glass and sniffed it. Then she took a sip. She looked at all the adults in the room then she downed the lemonade in one gulp. She put the glass back on the table never touched the cookie. Allen got up and went back to watching the main gate. Agnes was on the roof watching the back.

Joleen went to the roof to check on Agnes as well as to look around. She came upon Agnes and

asked, “*anything?*” Instead of answering her she just shook her head. She then said, “*the girl’s name is Rosetta, but Maria called her Rosie.*” Agnes looked back at Joleen. She asked, “*are Maria and the other two dead?*” Joleen nodded then asked, “*did you know them?*” Agnes brushed away her tears with her sleeve. She said, “*I worked with Maria at the hotel. She would sometimes bring Rosie and Josie with her. The oldest, Gerald worked in the stables.*” She looked away from Joleen out into the hills. She said, “*I guess it was a secret, but the three were the mayor’s kids.*” She sniffed then wiped away some more tears and asked, “*does he know?*” Joleen figured this ten-year-old girl already knew too much of the world to be burdened with the truth of what really happened. She knew Agnes would eventually find out, but not now. She said, “*no one knows where the mayor is?*” Agnes said, “*I hope the handsy bastard is burning in hell.*”

Agnes came down from the roof. She said, “*Rosie.*” The girl’s head darted quickly, then she ran to her. Rosie started to cry. It was the first emotion she showed since they found her hiding with the chickens. They embraced like old friends who hadn’t seen each other in years. Joleen went to the gun cabinet. She pulled a lever-action 45-70 and some ammunition. She turned to her mother and said, “*we can’t stay here. At night we will be sitting ducks.*” Rosie asked, “*what’s a*

duck?" Joleen said, *"take the kids and the horses and go south. There is a passage most people don't know about and."* She stopped when she saw her mother with a rifle and two guns on her hips. Candice said, *"Allen can do that. I am coming with you."* Joleen wanted to say no but stopped when she saw her mother's eyes. It was the same look she had when she killed the man that killed her brother. Joleen went to a rosewood box. She pulled an old Navy Colt revolver with rosewood grips and her name engraved on the barrel. It would be like her father was with them. The heavy gun steadied her nerves.

After a quick tutorial on how to operate a buckboard, they decided that Agnes should do it while Allen rode shotgun. Joleen kissed the cheeks of her still sleeping boys then Agnes. Rosie wouldn't let Agnes go, so they put her behind Agnes in the wagon. Then they were off to what Joleen hoped would be safety. She looked back at her house. She and John made this place a home, and now she wasn't sure she would ever see it again. Joleen and Candice rode out for the sheriff's ranch. Joleen tried to think about what she learned while riding but all she could think about was the children. She started to think about her own childhood. How about these kids she had it so easy. Most of them were working before they were ten-years-old. Agnes was on her way to be raped by older

men for money. She may have already been raped. She thought about what she said. How the mayor was handsy. She asked, “*what kind of man goes after a little girl?*” Candice couldn’t hear her. Her own blood was boiling. She wanted to shoot someone. She thought to herself, “*Gerard is a dead man.*”

Gunfire struck the side of the house. Sheriff David Wednesday and two of his sons returned fire. The gunmen hid behind a turned over wagon and dead horses. The wagon was loaded down with metal plates and sandbags. Trip was down on the floor and not moving. David sent his wife and their younger children away before the gunmen moved in so no one could check on him. A shot hit a lamp and knocked it onto the floor starting a fire. Timothy, David’s second son, went to put the fire out. He used a blanket and managed to extinguish the flames just as a shot came through and struck him in the shoulder. Trip stirred then regained consciousness. He got up and took Timothy’s spot. David could see blood trickle out of Trip’s ears as well as an angry hole in his shirt. David knew that they would soon run out of ammunition and the men outside would win.

A shot rang out from the hillside. One of the gunmen’s heads exploded. The fight once lost was now turning in their favor. The gunmen were pinned down

on two sides. They quickly pushed out some of the sandbags and tried to build a bunker. Another shot and another gunman went down. A voice came from over the hill. It was a woman's voice, but it was cold and without pity. Joleen said, "*you are surrounded. Give up, and you can live through this. All we want are the names of your bosses.*" A couple of the gunmen tossed their guns out. Then a fight started among them. The fight led to a gunshot then silence. Just underneath the silence was a hissing sound. Joleen wasn't familiar with the sound. From the house, David yelled, "*get down.*" Candice grabbed Joleen and pulled her down. At first, nothing happened then an explosion. When she looked back, there was a crater filled with steel plates and gore where the wagon and gunmen were.

Their best guess was that one of them was there to set off a bomb just in case they failed to do their job. David said, "*most likely it was to keep their men from talking.*" Joleen looked at the carnage and wondered just how they could fight such a foe. Candice carefully stripped off the vest and shirt of Trip while David did the same with his son. Trip was wearing the new vest with steel plates on the front, and one of them caught the shot that was meant to kill him, but the force most likely bruised or cracked a rib. Timothy was in bad shape. The round took a lot of flesh with it. He needed someone who knew what to do. When they moved

him, his arm shifted causing it to start to bleed in gushes. He bled out long before they could get him out of the house. David lay there with his son and just stared off into the distance.

Candice gave Trip a little of the opium extract she had in a medical kit. She then slipped a little into a cup of tea and gave it to Sheriff David. They covered Timothy, but David wouldn't let them move him. All he said was, "*my boy is home.*" David's oldest son Samuel came back in. He was covered in blood and sweat. While the rest of them were in shock or mourning, he went out and cleaned up the gore from the gunmen and their horses. He used the steel plates to make an impromptu blockade. Without a word, he walked by everyone and into a back room. He came back in what seemed like to Joleen a few minutes later dressed in clean clothes. He still had a slight odor of meat on him. He grabbed a bottle of a clear liquid from a cabinet. He didn't bother with a glass, he just took a drink straight from the bottle. Candice picked up the bottle and smelled it. She nodded then took a drink from the bottle. She offered it to Joleen who just shook her head. The covered body of the fifteen-year-old boy reminded her of her brother lying in the street way back when.

Samuel said, *“father came home about an hour after mom, and the rest had left. He wasn’t happy to see Timothy there and told me I was responsible for his safety.”* He took another drink from the bottle then went on, *“we gathered all the guns and ammunition in the front room. Tim and I went around and closed all the windows.”* When he said Tim, he looked down at his brother. There was a long pause then he said, *“at first the men in the wagon said all they wanted was the girl and my father. Before he could answer them, I shot. I shot first. Then all hell broke loose.”* Joleen said, *“no, these men came to kill all of you. That is the kind of people they are. It’s why they brought the explosives. They wanted to make a statement.”* Samuel looked at the body of his brother then to Joleen. He asked, *“what kind of statement?”* Candice answered, *“fuck with us and die.”* Joleen said, *“target us, and we go after everyone you care about.”*

They wrapped Timothy in a blanket and left for town. Trip was up and watching from the rear of the wagon. David sat next to Samuel. He said to him, *“that was not your fault son. I should have never.”* He paused then said, *“I should have stayed back in town and fought then there not bring them to your mother’s home.”* The town had a strange feel to it. All eyes were on the lone wagon and the people inside. What few deputies that remained were helping in the cleanup. As

soon as they saw the sheriff, they rallied around the wagon. If they could see the loss in his eyes, they somehow looked past it. The sheriff was back, and they needed his leadership. Joleen knew that this was the most important moment in the fight. A strong leader would rally the people to fight while a broken one will let the chaos take hold. The sheriff jumped out of the wagon. He started to direct the deputies as they both cleaned up the rubble and watched for more trouble. Everyone with a gun he enlisted in the force. With no mayor, he had the power to deputize citizens. By the end of the day, the town was clear, and the deputy force was tripled.

The sheriff took control of the new hotel the mayor was building. He had said it would be their new base of operations until something else could be worked out. Sitting around a poker table, the sheriff asked, “*what do we do now?*” Samuel slammed his fist on the table and said, “*we go and burn there house down.*” One of the newly deputized deputies said, “*you haven’t been there have you kid? The place is a fortress with four-foot-thick walls and iron gates. They have enough supplies to last out there for years and enough men to put up a fight that even the army would have trouble with.*” David turned to the man and asked, “*Josiah, you worked on the place. Is there any way past the wall?*” He just shook his head. One of the

town council was a man named William. Candice knew him as Billy. He and Bertha his wife once fought off armed men in the desert with Candice. He asked, “*if we can't take them then can we talk to them?*”

From the doorway to the main room came a voice. He said, “*well maybe I could help with that.*” All the guns in the room were suddenly pointed at him. He somehow expected this. It was the man in the fancy suit and derby from the rail yard. He put his hands up and said, “*I am not armed.*” Someone in the room said, “*don't worry we'll put a gun on you after you're dead.*” The sheriff put his hands up then slowly brought them down. As he did all the guns in the room lowered. The man smiled then came closer. He said, “*I represent a party here in town that owns many businesses and wants to see the town grow. They know about the recent problems with gang activity and the loss of the town sheriff's department.*” The sheriff said, “*this hotel is theirs isn't it.*” It was more of a statement than a question. The man said, “*well my clients don't want any connection with the corrupt mayor, so they are donating the hotel to the city.*” Joleen asked, “*what's your name?*” He replied, “*my name is not important. What is important is that we end the violence here.*”

The man walked to the window then he turned back to the table. He said, *“you don’t have any evidence of any wrongdoing by my clients. If you move on them, then the army will come back, and no one wants the army back.”* The people at the table, as well as the others in the room, stirred at the mention of the army. Joleen turned to the man and asked, *“Mister Not, we could only take this deal if you agree to turn over Sava and anyone involved in this bombing.”* He looked at her a little confused and asked, *“mister Not, why not Mister Important?”* Joleen answered, *“because I don’t think you are important.”* He frowned then said, *“this Sava person isn’t with them, and they don’t know anyone involved in this horrific attack.”* Sheriff David said, *“I am sure they won’t mind us looking around.”* The man said, *“this might just be a territory, but it is still America, so yes they would mind.”* The man turned to the table and said, *“you can take this offer or not, either way, my clients will defend their property within the law. Now good day to you all.”* He turned to go to the door. Joleen said, *“Mister Not, I am sure we will speak again.”*

After a few days, the rest of the families came back. David’s wife Tuesday was there with the remaining seven children. At first, they were going to stay in a hotel until they knew it was safe but after one night they knew they had to go home. Out of the fifty

men and women that took the badge that day, twenty-six decided to stay on. One of them said it was the first time they felt like they mattered. Trip and his wife Hope worked with a planner to convert the hotel into the new sheriff's office. They tossed the idea of establishing a police force rather than a new sheriff's department, but that was for later. Sheriff David stayed with his wife and children to prepare for the funeral of their son Timothy. The town council said they would announce a name to replace the mayor until an election could be held. Many people believed it would be sheriff Wednesday or his wife Tuesday. Joleen decided to move her offices into the hotel when it was finished. The council also voted yes on the jail on the outskirts of town.

About a week later there was a knock at Joleen's door. It was Jane Thomas, a member of the town council. She said, "*I need to speak with Candice.*" Like William and Bertha, Jane was a part of that standoff twenty-three years ago. Now at the age of thirty-seven, she was an influential force within the town council. She and Candice embraced like old friends. Jane said, "*the council voted. They want you for mayor.*" She went on to say how they needed someone the town trusted to be both impartial and free from corruption. Up until then Candice and Allen were talking about going back to San Francisco. They also

talked about taking Joleen's children with them to force her to come. This would mean she would have to stay and remake her life there. She knew she would have to tell Allen. Then she realized that she was talking like she already took the job and knew she wanted it even if it ended her marriage to Allen. She told Jane she would talk to Allen then come into town and set things in motion. Watching all this happen, Joleen felt like she could see things already in motion and on the way to a climax for better or worse.

Chapter Eight

The front of the town hall was covered in red white and blue bunting. It was officially the twentieth century, 1900. The new mayor stepped out of her office and went down the stairs. It was a beautiful day. Candice wasn't sure what she should do. With all of Gerard's dealings out, most of the office was slowed to a stop. Nothing for a mayor to do. She hired a couple of accountants to decipher just how much he stole from the town. All projects were on hold. That is all projects except for the new sheriff's department and the jail. The new station was a hotel that was converted into the largest facility of its type. She worried about the possible militarization of the town. Sheriff Wednesday was building an army to take on this family that has taken over a stretch of land just outside of town. Their property sits just outside of the town charter. The local native population could intervein, but after years of wars and occupation by the American government and armies, they wanted little to do with the problems of white people. Having lived in the town when it was more of a cooperation, Candice could understand why they felt this way.

Joleen was settled in her new offices with a new view of the town and a clear view of the compound off in the distance. Using a telescope, she

could watch them. That first month she watched them every day. She watched for signs they may be getting ready to move on the town. She watched for Sam. Sam was wanted for murder and terror. He had killed her husband, and he was responsible for the destruction of the old sheriff's office which killed many deputies. Over time she watched them less. Her duties as the head of the detective's department kept her busy. Joleen found herself in between sheriff Wednesday increasing the size of the sheriff's department and her mother, the mayor's fears of a militarized law enforcement. In that time, they investigated seven deaths, twenty-three cases of theft and multiple assaults. Life returned to normal.

At the stroke of midnight, opium-based drugs became illegal for use unless given by a doctor. The sheriff was planning a raid on a couple of opium dens in town. He wanted them gone, but he also wanted them to have the opportunity to go without bloodshed. The sheriff set up a special task force for dealing with the new law and its repercussions. They made this all public so the vendors of this now illegal drug could know what was coming. They took over an abandoned building and started to practice raids. With every run through they developed techniques for entering and clearing rooms. They made a shield and a shaped explosive charge for entry. The sheriff bought a

shotgun for every member of the task force to limit the potential damage from a handgun or rifle round. He bought twenty Winchester 1895 pump shotguns. An expense that the mayor's office was not happy about. He gave one to Joleen and one to Trip. There was an unspoken understanding that they would be a part of the raids.

Two days before the first raid a body was found just on the outskirts of town. The body was a man without any form of identification. He was tortured before he was killed. Every finger and every toe were broken. A thin metal wire was run through the body in his arms and legs that effectively held him in place. According to the doctor the town uses as a coroner, "*whoever did this knew where to put the metal wire so he wouldn't bleed out.*" He also said it would have taken some time to do it. Eventually, whoever did this shot him in the head. The most disturbing part was that the heart and liver were cut out. Joleen knew that it would be easy to try and say that this was Sava's or Sam's people. They wanted a reason to go in and deal with them, but she didn't want to interject her personal feeling into an investigation.

At five am the sheriff assembled the taskforce at the sheriff's station. It was done in the open, so

everyone could see it coming. After some investigations, the task force had narrowed the list of potential places down to four. They split up into four teams with the sheriff, Trip, Joleen and John Sims the head of the taskforce all taking control of teams. Sims made sure everyone had their equipment and was in the new uniform. At the beginning of the year, the sheriff's department adopted a new uniform. Tan pants, tan shirt and the brown leather vest from the previous pseudo uniform. While there was a prescribed uniform, the colors were not mandatory, so many wore different colored shirts and pants. The new standard made sure that people could identify a deputy from just another man in a vest.

A large metal door opened then closed quickly. The door was in an alley behind a closed store. At one end of the alley was a kid. He sat there watching. He was clearly a lookout. Next to him was a rope that seemed to be attached to the wall unless you really look at it then you could see that it goes into the wall. Joleen was on the roof of an adjoining building watching the boy and the door. They will have to take the boy before they can take the door. She took off her vest then unbuttoned her shirt. The men with her turned away and watched the door as she did this. She slipped out of the shirt and into a dress. Finally, she took off her pants. The dress was a bright red and

tailored to look like disheveled and hide the metal plates for her protection. Dressed as a prostitute, Joleen stumbled down the alley towards the boy. The closer she got the younger he got. She pretended to trip into the boy. As she did, she brought him down and away from the rope. The door was next.

The door was metal, but the jam and walls were wood. They placed the charges on the wood walls. Something felt wrong with all this. Joleen said to no one in particular, *“just one way in or out? Why have the security, the lookout? He would be too close to warning them so they could get away? A fight wouldn’t go well for them. Just what was on the other side of that door?”* Joleen sent two of the deputies around the building. Then she sent two more into the adjoining buildings looking for passageways. When everyone came back the two that went around said that there seemed to be a false front to the store. From the street, it was a deep empty room but up close it was just painted black and about three feet deep. Joleen and one other stayed at the door. She sent the rest to the false storefront. Joleen pulled the rope and counted to three then they activated the charges.

The explosives went off, and the door fell outward. On the other side, the false front broke away

and a hoard of people came out to the waiting arms of the deputies. Most were so high that the sun stopped them. They just came to a standstill and stared into the sun. It was clear that this was the first time many had seen the sun in a while. Three men came out guns out and firing but going from a pitch-black room to the sun gave the deputies enough of an advantage to take care of the gunmen. Joleen and the deputy moved in. He carried the shield, and she had her shotgun up and ready. As they came in the back, two other deputies moved in from the front. Inside they found bags of the drug in many different forms. There was also a lot of money and other items. People were trading their stuff away to buy the drug. In one bag Joleen found a collection of gold and silver filled teeth. All told their raid was the most successful. The other three didn't consider the quick escape or a lookout. What wasn't found in any location was any connection to the Russians. In a bag by a bed that smelled like piss was a spool of wire that matched the body, they found a few days ago. Joleen said, "*so the killer was here.*"

Joleen lay on the bed next to him. They met about three weeks ago in the new sheriff's station. She knew she had a type. She liked tall men who worked in law enforcement. Jack James was a Texas Ranger when they first met. He was on the trail of a man wanted for murdering his own wife and children.

Joleen rode around town with him as they checked all the known hot spots for hiding out. That night they met up at a saloon for drinks. Joleen didn't drink, and she found out that Jack also didn't drink. The evening was coming to a quick end, but Joleen didn't want it to end. She knew she wouldn't see him again. He would be off on the trail of this man, and she would be in Hope preparing for the new law. She leaned in and whispered into his ear, "*let's get out of here.*"

They went to his room at the hotel that was once owned by the now-defunct mayor. The room was simple with a bed and a chair. He said to her, "*make yourself comfortable.*" He sat on the bed and pulled his boots off. Joleen sat on the chair and did the same. She unbuttoned her vest and let it fall back into the chair. They stared at each other not saying a word. She got up and unbuckled her belt. She put her gun and belt on the chair. Then she slipped out of her pants and climbed into his lap. The two made out then made love the rest of the night. Near dawn, she slipped out and left him in his bed lightly snoring. She thought how this wasn't like her. She had children back home and a responsibility to them and to finding John's killer. He shifted in the bed and in the moonlight, she could see his well-defined body. A part of her wanted to go back and join him another side knew she had to leave.

A week went by, and her life went back to normal. Then Jack came back. He found his man and in his attempt to take him the man was shot and killed. It was a sort of justice with the courts back in Texas already rendering a guilty verdict. He came to her office to talk to her about that night. He found Joleen in something she almost never wore. A skirt. The circuit judge was in town, and she had to dress like a lady or the judge wouldn't allow her to appear in court. He came in and sat on her desk in front of her. He told her about the shootout and the man. Joleen went to her door and locked it. At the door, she said, "*stand up.*" She came around and pulled his pants down then pushed him back on to the desk. She kicked off her boots then pulled her panties off and climbed into his lap. It was quick and dirty with the desk rocking and sliding. Afterward, he said to her, "*I just accepted a job with the sheriff's department here in Hope, so I guess I am staying.*"

That was two weeks ago. They tried to keep a safe, professional distance, but after the raid and all the adrenaline they ended up meeting up and in his bed again. There was nothing in the rules against her and him being together. She was with another deputy, and they considered themselves husband and wife even

though he didn't live long enough to exchange rings. Now here she was in bed with another deputy. She didn't know if she wanted it to end or if she wanted it to never end. Where John was cautious and calculating, Jack was impulsive and quick to act. Where he was like John or at least where he seemed like John was in his respect for her. Joleen liked being treated and considered as an equal. He would never be on her team again. She didn't want to be there if something happened to him.

Another body turned up with the same wire threaded throughout. This one also had the eyes cut out as well as the tongue and the genitals. According to the doctor, all the work was done while he was alive. Joleen looked over the report from the doctor. She said to herself, "*so this is someone who wanted an answer or just wanted to inflict pain.*" A month prior they had arrested a man who was stealing calves and skinning them alive after dislocating the joints. He said, "*I just love to hear them scream.*" The idea of someone killing just for the fun of it wasn't out of the question. It was common for people to have no form of identification. As the town grows the number of new people coming in grows. Short of bringing everyone in town to see the body they would have to list him as a John Doe and bury him in the red cemetery.

On the west side of town, there is a cemetery with a red fence and gate. Most of the locals call it the red cemetery. Poor people, as well as the unclaimed bodies, are all buried there. A Catholic Priest operated the cemetery. Father Jose Don Hidalgo moved to town when it was called Knuckle Smash and stayed when his parish closed. With his efforts and the rising population, the parish reopened with a new chapel being built. Next to it was an official hallowed ground cemetery. On the other side of the official cemetery was the red cemetery for those people whom couldn't be buried on hallowed ground. Most people call him Father Joe. He works with a clinic helping the poor find help as well as those dealing with the opioid addiction.

James Hicks came to town about a week ago trying to escape his past. His past and the army. He was a deserter. He found a job in the rail yard and soon blended into the local scene. He had his favorite seat at a local saloon and his favorite whore in a local bordello. Neither of whom could identify him in a lineup. He made an easy target. That night he drank himself to a near passed out state then walked or stumbled his way home. His home was a tent in the lower part of town near the rail yard. He would never

make it. As with the other victims, someone would just move into their tent and take possession of their possessions. About twenty feet from his home a man helped him up and carried him off. James woke up strapped down to a table. He looked around, but he couldn't see anything. Off in the distance, he heard a voice, *“metal is god. We all are tied to metal. Metal is in us all, and it holds us up.”*

The next day James Hicks's body was found at the entrance to the red cemetery. Father Joe recognized him making him the first victim to be known. He had confessed to being a deserter and paying for women to have sex with. His arms were wired down to his sides, and his legs were wired together. Like the others he had his eyes removed, and genitals cut off. All done while he was alive. So far none of the missing parts have been located. The doctor said that this one was different. He said, *“this guy had double the wire in him. He was wired not just through the skin, the wire effectively tied him down.”* He went on to say how the wire had changed in diameter from the wire found in the raid on the drug den. Joleen looked at the wire. It seemed to match the wire that was stolen from the rail yard a couple of nights ago. Joleen walked the fence along the rail yard. While the rail yard has a sense of security, she found that anyone could easily just walk in.

Joleen went home to find the usual chaos. The boys were turning three soon. Allen wanted to bake a cake, and he left the flour out, and the boys found it. The boys discovered the joy that was flour, and it was all over the floor and Allen. Agnes was out with the horses. She spent several hours tying bows into the manes and tails of all the horses in the barn. Rosie was in her closet. They met her just after her father killed her mother and brothers. She was hiding in a chicken coop. She felt safe in small places. They cleaned out a closet for her so she could go into it when she needed to feel safe. Rosie would sit there and watch the boys then go to her closet. They had made up a room for her, but after a day she ended up moving in with Agnes. That first week Joleen would find her in the boy's room sleeping in a chair. She had said that she missed her brothers and the sound of the boys made her feel better.

After helping Allen clean up the house, Joleen took a bath. The house had the water system installed, and hot water was just a pull chain away. She sat in the water wondering if she should keep going with Jack. In their training, Jack kept trying to go in alone ahead of the shield. Wednesday said he was aggressive but what she had seen was borderline foolishness. She also had

a hard time not staring at his ass. He was to be just a one-time thing. Then a two-time thing, but now she was finding reasons to see him every chance she got. She didn't have the best luck with men. Her first significant relationship ended when the man told her she wasn't marriage material. The second died in her arms. She wasn't looking for something long-term, but she also didn't want to have just a fling. Most of all anyone in her life would have to understand that the kids come first.

She sat at her desk and read the reports for the last couple of days while keeping an eye on John, Eddie, and Rosie. Allen didn't want to be out when Candice came home. They weren't talking at the time. She took the job as mayor without talking to him. This was just after they spoke of going back home. Their marriage was a sham. Or it was when they first married. He loved her as she did him, but he wasn't in love with her. He was in love with the bay area and a man he left behind. He liked being close to Joleen, and he considered her his daughter, but she wasn't his. In Hope, he couldn't be himself. So, every day he takes care of three unruly children while trying to write a novel. Candice wanted to be with her daughter and her grandchildren. She also wanted this chance to be a mayor. A type of power a woman couldn't hope for in their world.

A week later and the circuit court judge was in town. His first act was to toss out all the arrests in the drug den. He then wrote a ruling that said the new town ordinance wouldn't hold up in court without a territorial or national law to back it up. His ruling forced the town council to meet and plan. Eventually, they removed the ordinance making any opioid drug illegal. It was a hard blow to a town that felt it had a way to fit a growing problem. The next day Candice told Allen and Joleen she would have to ride out to the capital to see if there was any way to save the law. The day before she left Allen said he would go with her. Joleen thought that a little alone time away from the kids and town may just help bring them back together. It also meant that the kids would be home alone. Allen and her mother were leaving in three days.

They bought a ticket for the train then after some thought they decided to go by coach. They would leave early and take a route that would take them away from the usual traffic. Candice packed a 45-70 Winchester with enough ammunition to take on an army. That night Joleen handed her mother her father's gun and namesake. Her mother held the gun in her hand. A physical connection to her late husband and a past that seemed like a dream. She said, "*I'll bring her*

back to you.” Joleen said, “just make sure you come back.” Five deputies went with them including one of Wednesday’s sons Samuel Wednesday. It was always Samuel never Sam. Even with the trains running, many people still went by wagon and coach. That morning two people got on the train with Candice and Allen’s tickets. While this was happening, the coach slipped out of town.

Another body was found near the rail yard. This one was wired into the fence in a standing position as if wired or nailed to a cross. Joleen pushed her thoughts of her family sneaking across the state and went to work. She said to tome one in particular, *“The man was around six-foot tall and maybe one hundred and seventy pounds. It would take some strength to hang a man like this.”* Using her thumbs, she forced the eyelids open. The eyes were gone. She would leave the rest for the doctor, but it was clear with all the blood in the crotch region that his genitals were most likely gone. She asked herself, *“with the body posed like this would that suggest some sort of religious thing or was it a coincidence? The wire not only binds the men, but it damages the muscles making movement impossible.”* One of the deputies at the scene asked, *“did you say anything?”*

They found themselves three hours out of town before there was any sign of anyone else. They rode past a man and woman on a buckboard wagon on its way to somewhere. The man tipped his hat when he saw Candice in the coach. She smiled and waved. She took note of the woman. She didn't smile or even look up. It felt wrong. The coach had a trap door that allowed passengers to talk with the drivers. Candice was small enough to pass through it. Up top, she looked around for trouble. In the distance, she saw a flash of light. A sharp stinging pain ran through her side. She fell back into the coach through the trap door. The driver sped up the horses trying for a hill and some cover. Another thump. Candice and the others in the coach watched as the driver fell by the side of the coach. Samuel had the reins, and he backed into the trap door, so he could drive the coach from inside.

About three hours after her mother and the rest left a woman came into the police station saying her daughter was missing. She was on a street corner waiting for her mother to come out of the den. The den is what the people selling the opium are calling their business. Joleen bit her tongue so she wouldn't scream at her for leaving her daughter outside a drug den. She seemed high, and just maybe her daughter was back at their home. To no one's surprise, they lived in the tent district. Going back to the founding of the original

town there has been an area made up of tents. They were the original structures with the adobe buildings going up next and eventually the brick structures. Many of the tent structures still stood as cheap housing for people who came to town with nothing. Joleen was ready to send a deputy to check the tents when she saw a thin braided wire on the ground. It was rolled into the shape of a ring with one end sharp and a little blood.

Joleen knew it took time to wire someone so they may have a shot at finding the girl before it was too late. She realized it was strange that he took the daughter and not the mother. The girl was fourteen according to the mother, but Joleen didn't know if she could be trusted. It wouldn't be the first time a mother sold her daughter for the drug. Within five minutes Joleen had a search party, and they were scouring the streets for the girl. About three blocks away Joleen heard gunfire. A deputy saw someone with what looked like a body. As it turned out, he shot at a man carrying a bag of flour. He missed the man but hit the flour tossing it everywhere. The two men argued over the flour and gunfire. As they did Joleen saw the flour in the cobblestone street turn red.

Joleen walked over to the man's bag and took a handful. He went to complain, but Joleen took out five

silver pieces and gave them to him. She said, “*leave the bag.*” She pointed to the staining flour and said, “*let’s see if we can find that trail.*” Dumping handfuls of flour, they made their way into an alley. The blood stopped at an open door. Joleen pulled the shotgun off her back and said, “*go get back up and come back.*” The Deputy didn’t say a word he just left. Joleen went through the door. The room was empty. In the center in the light of a window, she saw the girl. She was naked with a wire running throughout her body. Whoever did this had stitched her arms to her torso and her legs together. The wire penetrated all the way up to her scalp. Then her eyes opened. She was somehow still alive. One of her eyes was gone. The remaining eye was filled with tears while the other a well of blood.

She told her not to move. Trying to recall the girl’s name she replayed what her mother had said. Joleen said, “*Sandy I know you are afraid, but you need to be strong.*” The deputy came in and turned to vomit. He bolted for the door. Joleen heard a commotion outside. She went to see what was wrong when Sandy said, “*please don’t go.*” Her one eye turned to Joleen. Outside they could hear Sandy’s mother screaming. Sandy said, “*she never cared about me before.*” Sandy started to shift. As she did the places where the wire went into her body wept blood. Sandy said, “*he was white, tall with short curly blonde*

hair and old. Maybe twenty-two. He has a scar on his hand.” With her finger, she traced the shape of a diamond. Her breath grew shallow. She asked, “*why is everything so hard?*” She started to convulse. Sandy said, “*the man said Mister Tandy sent him to clear out the tents so he could sell the land.*” She stopped convulsing and grew still. Joleen took off her jacket and covered the body.

Candice woke up in a bed in a strange room. She was naked with a sheer cloth covering her chest and lower half. She hurt all over. Feeling around she found a bandage on her hip. She touched the bandage. The pain was hot and immediate. A door opened, and Allen came in. He said, “*oh thank god you are awake.*” He told her that she was shot on the trip in the hip and was in and out all the way there. That was two days ago. He said, “*we spoke to the governor about our problem, and he said that the judge didn’t have the authority to overrule a law set in place by the town. He gave us an order to allow the law as well as the authority to open our own court in town.*” As it turned out that was the good news. He told her that the shot may have broken her pelvis. She would be laid up for weeks. Candice said, “*it didn’t matter I have to get back to Hope.*”

An hour after they found the girl a new search was on. Jared Tandy owned most of what people call the tent district. Most people thought he was a good man renting to people who couldn't afford to live anywhere else. His renters could tell a different story. Sandy's mother worked in a kitchen for one of the hotels. She also worked for him. He used her for sex as payment for their tent. He also was having sex with the thirteen-year-old Sandy. They would find that he was using many of his tenants for sex and other jobs. He had a fondness for young girls and didn't seem to care about their welfare. Joleen thought that he hired someone to come in and force the tenants he wanted out to leave. With the search on, she went to the doctor and asked him to check if the girl was pregnant. At first, the doctor looked shocked. He said, "*no she can't be more than thirteen.*" A quick check and a confirmation. She was indeed pregnant. Joleen knew that once the people searching found out about this, the search would become a lynch mob.

The ride back was the most painful experience Candice ever had. Each bump was worse than the actual shot. About an hour out they decided to send a rider ahead to notify the town about the ruling. Samuel went ahead with a rifle and a mission. He left them with one less set of eyes and one gunless. About two hours later an army captain with a team of cavalry

troops met up with the coach. He said the governor sent him to help them make their way back to Hope. Allen wondered what the Hopi would think of the American army escorting them back. The captain pulled out a paper from the long riding gloves he had on. He gave it to Allen. A minute or two later Allen said, “*they know more about the murderer. The guy piercing people to death. The guy was hired by Tandy to clear out the men from the tent district.*”

A mass of people moved from the town square to the compound on the other side of the rail yard. Joleen had no authority over there. She also knew that the mob of people didn't care about boundaries. Tandy was seen running toward the compound. It was an open secret that Tandy was working with the family. He sold them a stretch of land for a dollar. Then in a strange twist, he gave them the dollar to pay for it. He was at the gate. But the gate wasn't open. His hands were bloody from trying to climb the gate. The mob grabbed him and forced him to the ground. He was kicked all over. They picked him up and started to carry him back to the town line. Someone showed him a rope. He said to Joleen, “*help me, and I can help you find the guy and Sam.*” Joleen said, “*I can only help you on this side of the line.*” She pointed to the marker in the ground the family put in to designate the town boundary.

An hour later and Tandy had stopped twitching. They hung him from a water pipe on the rail yard. He never spoke a word about Sam or the man he hired. He begged for his life, but most people knew that if he had spoken, he would have had an even worse death than the slow one he got at the end of the rope. He was kicked and punched. He was told if he gave a name he would live. He took the name to the red cemetery. They put the rope around his neck, and he was hoisted up rather than the drop used by a hangman. This meant that he strangled to death rather than a quick neck break. Joleen had a hard time feeling sorry for a man that raped a little girl then had her murdered when she became pregnant. She thought to herself, “*still this was an action by the public that was alarming. Just how much control do we have?*” Out in the desert, a man on horseback watched the lynching. He had a length of wire in a loop tied to his saddle. He held up a piece of the wire twisted into a loop to his eyes and watched the event through the loop of wire. The loop was covered in blood.

Chapter Nine

A man sat just outside Joleen's office. He had on a suit and a dark brown derby. He was a city man from the polished shoes to the leather bag. Nothing about this man said he belonged. Joleen had passed him thinking he looked a little like her step-father Allen. Except Allen look more like a man of the west than this guy. Eventually, he stuck his head into her office and asked if he could ask a couple of questions. Joleen looked at her stack of reports then back to him. She said, "*yes I do mind but if you can make them quick then go right ahead.*" He seemed a little put off by her answer, but he still came in and sat down. He didn't bother to introduce himself. His first question was telling. He asked, "*when will Joel Warren be available to speak?*" She wished she hadn't let this guy in. This wasn't the first time a man like this came looking for her thinking the name was a typo and she was a man. Something about these city people that made them think that a woman couldn't do this type of work. She said, "*there is no Joel. My name is Joleen. I am the lead detective and a deputy sheriff. Do you have any questions?*"

The man smirked. He said, "*no I want to speak to Joel Warren, the son of the Knuckle Smash kid. The sheriff of Hope.*" She didn't know where to start with

this. She said, *“there is no Joel. I am the only child of Edward and Candice Warren. If you want the sheriff, then you want sheriff Wednesday. His office is down the hall”* The man smiled and said, *“so the stories are not real then.”* Joleen asked, *“was that a question?”* The man got up and smiled at her. He said, *“you see little lady, I am someone too important to waste my time on such a trivial fabricated story such as yours.”* He went to go on, but Joleen said, *“I gave you my time, and now it’s over get out, or you will find out just how wrong you are.”* He put on his hat and said, *“I’ll go, but I am going to stay to write the real story and let people know just how much crap this all is.”* The man left without giving his name.

Just outside her office, she could see another man. She wondered if they traveled in packs. Unlike the prissy little ass that just left, this one looked like a man that spent a little time on the trail. He had on blue jeans a white shirt and a dark jacket with a day rider hat. All of it was covered in dust. He followed the first man with his eyes, but he didn’t turn his head. He had a saddle bag over his left shoulder. Joleen went to her door and stared at the man. When he finally looked up, she asked, *“I guess you want to speak with Joel Warren too?”* He looked her up then down and said, *“I don’t know who that is. I want to see the person who wrote this.”* The man held up a couple of papers. They

looked like the reports from her office. He said, “*I am a reporter on the hunt for a big story, do you have time to talk?*” He reminded her of the men that worked for her mother and stepfather back in San Francisco. The kind of guy who would come in with a bag of notes and leave a best-selling book.

He sat down and handed Joleen a newspaper. It was from El Paso. “Three Bodies found just outside of town with limbs sewn together with wire.” Joleen looked at him. She then tapped the newspaper on the reports he had in his hand. She asked, “*and just how did you get that?*” He looked at it then back to her. He said, “*your sheriff sent these out to other marshal departments around the country looking for a name and a connection. I know a guy with the marshal’s in Texas. He gave me this.*” Joleen looked him over. He was handsome in a small-town kind of way. A big fish in a little pond. She also knew she was checking this guy out. She had a type, and this guy was matching that type rather well. He laid out his search and all his evidence. He said, “*this man is a killer for hire, but I think not all of his kills are paid for. I think he likes to kill.*” Joleen moved some of the papers around she said, “*there is one thing you didn’t tell me.*” He looked puzzled. He said, “*what did I forget?*” She smiled and said, “*your name.*”

He looked at her and wondered if she was coming on to him. He said, “*my name is Ernesto Wieser but most people call me Ernest.*” His mother was from Mexico and his father was from Germany. He said, “*so naturally they met in Texas.*” At first, he looked just like any white trailhand that came through town. A little handsome but not the kind of guy a woman would follow around. She thought that she could see the Spanish influence in his face. Then she realized she was just staring at him. Jack had left town to go back to Texas to see his family. That was a month ago. Also, they weren’t really anything. He was a bed warmer when she wanted a warm bed. His impulsive nature was in direct conflict with her own methodical one. She didn’t like who she was when she was around him. She made some real mistakes with him around. It wasn’t fair, but it was easy to blame him. She spoke with Ernest for a while then he got up and left. She watched him as he went.

Joleen watched this man go from the sheriff’s offices across to a hotel. It was the Hotel she had stayed in just before she found a place way back when she first came to town. She thought about Sam or Sava and the hole in the wall that looked over the bathroom. Thinking about this made her think about just how

much time she was wasting thinking about this. When she first came to town she had a goal. Over time her focus changed from justice to family but underneath all that was the need to help those who couldn't help themselves. She pulled out the files on three murders that went unsolved over the last three months. She also pulled all the information they gathered on the man that killed by sewing people up with wire. She looked at what she considered a failure and knew they could do better for these people.

Later that day she called on all the people working in the detective bureau. In that meeting, she held up the three files. She said, "*we have three murders here and three families that are going without justice. Three murderers free. I think we can do better. I know we can. As of right now, this is our focus. We will solve them and bring the murderers to justice.*" One of the new men on her team put up his hand. He said, "*I spend a lot of time working with the drug task force. I think too much time.*" He stood up and went on, "*like everyone here I signed up to solve crimes not kick down the doors or holding a gun watching a door, so my question is what will happen to me when the sheriff comes and demands I go and help?*" Joleen said, "*Hank this office is separate from his, and if he wants one of us he will have to request it from me. Tell him that.*" Joleen made a mental note to see the sheriff

and let him know that his army of deputies would have to do their own dirty work from now on. Before dismissing them, she told them about the reporter and let them know they could speak with him if they wanted but it wasn't an order.

Trip looked at the file then back to Joleen. He said, "*a reporter named Ernest. Really? An Ernest reporter?*" Joleen thought about that one for a second then said, "*do you think any of his readers make that connection?*" Trip wasn't happy that this man wanted the file or that the killer got away. He said, "*this makes us look like we can't do our jobs.*" He went to go on, but Joleen stopped him by saying, "*the new mayor wants an open door to everyone. That means all of us. No secrets.*" Trip got up and took one of the three files. He didn't open it or say a word. Trip comes across as a simple man that can sometimes be over his head with the job, but he has a closing rate the beats most of the others. When a neighboring town or city wants someone to help, they call on him. He also has the best relationship with the nations. He is the only one that can go on tribal land without permission. After the years of army occupation, the open-door policy from Joleen's father's time was over.

Joleen opened one of the remaining files. A young mother of two was found brutally raped and beaten to death in an alley on the outskirts of town. Whoever did it took the time to break almost every bone in her hands. In the notes, it mentioned she had a tan line where a ring should be, but they left her money on her. That part of town was known for catering to the hotels and the rail yard. Nothing residential. The original lead on the case tracked her name down and found her family. Abigail Drake came to town about five years ago with her husband Donald and their two children Hanna and Gail. They lived in the tent community. Donald worked as a laborer for the railroad. One of many that maintained the rails. Abigail worked for one of the hotels as a maid. She was found with a hundred dollars on her. That was a lot of money, especially for a couple living in the tents. It was also a lot of money to just leave on the body.

The original person on the case made detailed notes, but he didn't develop any suspects. David Frank later went back to the sheriff's department. He had said he didn't like all this paperwork. Joleen wondered if it was the paperwork or his inability to find a lead in this case. She said to herself, "*for a man that didn't like the paperwork he did a good job at it.*" He even did a rough sketching of the scene including the body placement. Joleen took the sketch and went to the alley

where she was found. It was midday but still dark in this alley. None of the buildings that lined the alley had windows facing it. That seemed strange to her. In such a hot climate having a cross breeze can be the only thing making it possible to be inside. In the reports, the husband of the victim had said the ring was just a simple gold band. David was considering her husband when he stopped. The ring seemed odd.

Joleen went to the hotel to speak with the owner. He said, “*if you find her let her know she was fired.*” The owner of the hotel didn’t seem to know she was dead and had fired her for not coming to work. David spoke to the other maids and the support staff but not the owner. Joleen noticed that the hotel had a large cleaning staff. She knew that some of the nicer hotels like to both provide prostitution services while keeping it in secret. Just maybe Abigail wasn’t a maid. That alley would also work as a place to put a body, and a hotel wagon wouldn’t look out of place down in that part of town. But all this was conjecture with no proof. Joleen saw the prissy little ass of a reporter go into one of the rooms. A maid followed him. Joleen wondered about the money. Looking back at the report she noticed that the cash was all US notes. So, this was most likely from a larger city maybe back east. The bills were all small.

Joleen went back to the alley. She paced as she thought it out. She said, “*Someone broke her hands and beat her to death, but they left the money. Maybe the person who left the body wasn’t the killer but someone that was hired to or forced to remove the body? This person left the money for the family.*” She left the alley and went back to the hotel. After speaking to the other maid staff, she found where they kept their personal belongings while working. The maid she spoke with said they were told not to wear a wedding ring. Tucked up in a secret spot Joleen found the ring. She said to herself, “*whoever dumped the body knew she was married. It was someone that knew her.*” She knew the logic wasn’t solid. She could have mentioned her husband and children while being beaten as a ploy to make it stop. Begging for mercy. She also knows that there was little mercy for someone in her profession. She asked, “*if she was working as a prostitute then why were they still in the tents? Just maybe she was an actual maid, and a customer didn’t like being told no?*”

Joleen went to speak with the victim’s husband. He had sent their daughters to live back east with his wife’s family. He said, “*when we came here this job was supposed to be enough to live on, but everything*

costs so much that Abby needed the job. I wanted to go back east, but she wanted to stay here in Hope. She thought there was a future here.” He still had the money. He put it in a safety deposit box in the bank. He said, *“I don’t know where it came from all I know is that it got her killed.”* Joleen told him she doesn’t think she was killed for the money. She asked him if anyone from the hotel came to speak with him. He said, *“that dude that hired her. The guy that checks people in came around. I didn’t like the way he was staring at my girls, so I told him to get.”* Joleen asked, *“did your wife ever take the girls to work with her?”* He said, *“yes but only once. She didn’t like how her boss was staring at them.”* He turned his back to her and said, *“if you know who killed her tell me the name and walk away. Everybody knows that justice is at the end of a rope.”*

Joleen went back to the station. If she were right, she would need some help. She met up with Trip who was taking a statement from a man that looked hung over. Trip said, *“yeah that guy that was buried out in the desert. According to his brother here, it was meant to be a joke, but they hadn’t accounted for the rattlers and his body heat.”* Joleen said, *“I think the people selling children are back.”* There was a case where people were selling their children into sex slavery. The people who were responsible got away.

Joleen said, *“I think that one of them was at the hotel and they saw the victim’s daughters. When she wouldn’t sell, they tried to torcher her until she either said yes or was dead. One of them then went to her tent to get the girls only to find the victim’s husband with them. Before they could move on them, he had taken them back east.”* The lack of a ring might have given them the idea she wasn’t married making her an easy mark. Joleen leaned in and whispered, *“we now have someone we can talk to about the sex slavery operation.”* The man Trip was taking a statement from said, *“then what the fuck are you doing here? Go get this motherfucker and beat the truth out of his ass.”*

Back in her first days on the job as a detective, Joleen had rescued a young girl from her mother’s neglect. Agnes was sold to a hotel. She would work as a day laborer until she was the legal age of sixteen to become a prostitute. To speed up the sale Agnes’s mother had told them she was fourteen and not her real age of ten. One look at the girl and anyone could see she wasn’t fourteen. They knew that some men would pay well to essentially rape a young girl. Many places made this practice possible. Both she and Trip knew they had just uncovered a sex slavery ring. Back then the investigation turned towards the drug problem. Anyone involved in Agnes’s sale had either fled or was dead. From time to time they would find more

information but nothing that went anywhere. It was a well-known secret that people traveling west were easy targets. Even with the advent of the train, many were still victimized. The town charter clearly spells out the limits of their power. Outside of the town line and they became civilians.

About a month ago the mayor was told that they could join in the territorial marshal's program. The only catch was that they didn't allow women to work as marshals. Either Joleen would have to stand down, or they would have to permanently separate the offices and deal with the loss of authority that would bring to the detective department. Candice weighed the options. On the one hand, they could prevent any future actions across the town line like the lynching. It could also help prevent the territory from taking over. On the other hand, it could help facilitate that take over as well as diminish her position. Then there is the legacy. Her daughter made something for herself. She came back to the town of her birth and lived up to the legacy of her father. To take that away now would be a betrayal of everything they both stood for.

A shot of pain ran from her hip and up her side. The gunshot wound was still a sore spot that was causing other ill effects months later. She did her best

to hide just how debilitating the injury was, and the citizens did their best not to notice. Still, she was finding her recovery was going slower than she expected. In all the books she read over the years, the heroes were repeatedly shot. They somehow just walked it off and came back for the next volume. In her books, she tried to show the reality of a gunshot. Now she was living it. In times like this, Candice thought about her late husband. He had plenty of wounds, but he somehow worked through the pain. On her desk was a small bottle of a medication made from an opium extract. Her doctor gave it to her for the pain, but she just couldn't bring herself to use it.

Sheriff Wednesday stood on the town line staring at the man hanging from a pipe across on the other side. He was the latest in the line of people being lynched just outside of his ability to do anything about it. John Sacks and a man named Harold Drake had done what they thought would be a joke on John's brother. They buried Jim Drake up to his neck in the desert. It was an old-time style of punishment with the many nations. They would bury him until the morning then dig him out. What they didn't expect was that a rattler would see him and his heat. He died from multiple bites. A murder that would have gone up as insolvable except it was solved and the guilty party was found. When it looked like he just might get away

with it, his bail was paid. John Sacks was lured out of town to justice at the end of a rope. The second man was in his office. Harold knew that there was a rope waiting for him.

It didn't help that the local paper would write pages on how the massive sheriff's department was being used to arrest people for a substance that was legal everywhere else. Editorials spoke on how they thought that real crime was going unpunished. They also praised the lynching as public services. Most of them don't know how the many small villages and towns around them were dissolved by the territory when they gave up their own police force and went with the marshal's program. The territory was still controlled by the same people that tried to bring it into the union then the Confederacy as a slave state. Places such as Hope that had laws and rules set in place to control discrimination were being eliminated. A woman mayor, a woman deputy and all the people from the nations in his department would be targeted by the territory. The Spanish American war from two years ago took the eyes of Washington off the west and on territories to the south and Asia. This absence let the old south rise again and impose its will on the people.

There was a search in town for the manager of the New Grand Hotel. Not the Original Grand or the Oriental Grand but the New Grand that was not really that new. Daniel James was the manager of this hotel as well as the real manager of two others. He hid behind two people acting as the managers so he could organize criminal acts such as human trafficking. He was the one behind the sale of Agnes and other children for work as sex slaves. He also knew much about how the practice worked and more importantly was all the bodies were. Both living and the dead. They needed him alive if they were going to rescue the victims from this fate, but the citizens wanted their pound of flesh. Some wanted it more than they wanted to see the children returned to their families. So, the search was on.

Joleen knew that James wouldn't leave town. Not if he wanted to remain alive. He also wouldn't just turn himself in. She suspected that some deputies were working with the group taking the law into their own hands. It was the only way they could have found out about John Sacks and Harold Drake. She didn't know if she could trust anyone in that department. Even sheriff Wednesday was not immune to suspicion. He seemed to have no trouble with vigilante justice when it served him. Then there was her mother and step-father. When she was a little girl, she had a younger

brother. He was killed by a drunk on a runaway wagon. After being acquitted, they had tracked him down and killed him. She knew that the current situation was working against both, but she couldn't put the idea past her that one of them could be masterminding this whole thing.

Both the sheriff's department and the citizens were doing a door to door search for James. Joleen decided she would take a step back and look at just what this man was doing. He would have needed both help to pull this off as well as a place to take the children. It would have to be private and secure. She immediately thought about the compound across the town line. She knew that the man that killed her husband was there. She just couldn't prove it or do anything about it. Sam or Sava pretended to be just a mute boy looking to stay out of trouble. In reality, he was the runaway son of a crime boss from Russia. She also knew that it could just be her way of finding an excuse to invade the compound and letting justice have its day. When his family found him, they also found Hope and the rail yard. They moved in and took over. Joleen could link many crimes to them just not in a court of law. Thinking about it she realized that if there was proof, then she could call the army. She also realized that Sava would think about that. So where ever he was, he wasn't in the compound. She said to no

one in the room, “*it’s one thing to protect family it’s another to protect an employee.*”

Ten miles out of town a man sat on the second floor of a hotel that once was the town of John. He sat there with a spyglass watching the main road into town. John town was one of many little hideaway places set up to help people moving west. Like so many of them, it eventually became a place where illicit men did illegal things. It was known for being a popular hideout for robbers. The owner was the biggest pimp in this part of the west when it came to the nastier parts of desire. He would regularly have women kidnapped so his clientele could rape then murder them. He was also a big man in the world of child sex slavery. This was Daniel James’s home away from home. Here he was protected from anyone short of the army. He was so secure that he would take children off the reservations without fear of the nations. In his bed was a beaten and bruised girl of maybe twelve. She lay in a ball with one eye open watching her attacker. The other eye was white and cloudy. He was naked from the waist down. Daniel looked over at the girl. He knew that she was no longer going to be any fun. He said, “*I guess we are done. Time for you to go.*”

Two men took the girl out into the wilderness in the back of a wagon. They didn't tie her up because they didn't see Jenny Castings as a threat. They had tossed her in the back of the wagon where she bolted for the back then curled into a ball. One of them had thought that they could maybe use her before they killed and buried her but now all he wanted was her gone. The two kept an eye out for riders. They didn't watch the girl. Jenny slipped up behind them and took a gun off the bench. The last thing the first one heard was the sound of his own gun blowing the top of his head off. The shot spooked the horses who stopped instead of running. Jenny turned and shot the other before he could finish saying, "*no wait.*" She emptied the revolver into him. He rolled out of the wagon and staggered away until he fell and rolled onto his back. The girl took the other gun from the second man and pointed it at the dying man. Jenny went to the man. After looking him in the eyes, she squatted in his face and pissed on him. Then she emptied the other revolver into his genitals. The man had a jacket in the wagon. She put it on and turned the horses and wagon toward the town of Hope.

Back at the ranch, Allen was in the weekly war against a foe that was as formidable as any he had ever met. It was bath time for the boys. John and Eddy hated bath day. They knew all the best places to hide

and all the excuses to use. To help with the effort, Allen gave into one demand. Rosie and Agnes had to be out of the house. As the boys sat in the tub trying to explain why there were just merely dirty not actually dirty the girls sat on the roof laughing. Rosie still wouldn't talk to anyone but Agnes. Even then it wasn't more than two or three words at a time. Off in the distance, Rosie saw a wagon approaching the house. On the bench was a girl. She was wearing a man's coat and from what she could tell not much else. She was also laying on her side. Rosie pointed at the wagon and said, "*look.*" Agnes saw what was coming. She went down the ladder and back into the house. The boys screamed at the sight of the girl in the room with them naked in the tub. She just shook her head and told Allen what they saw.

Joleen stood in the doorway staring at Jenny. Agnes was washing her face. Jenny wouldn't let Allen approach her. She had dryfired the revolver in her hands when she saw him. It was Agnes and Rosie that finally calmed her down. Allen said, "*from what I can tell the girl was repeatedly raped and beaten. She lost an eye. She had what looked like gunshot residue on her hands.*" He pointed to the jacket. Joleen looked through the pockets until she found a flyer for the John Town race. The John town race was a race where people would take a shot of whiskey then run a course.

After every lap, they take another shot. The winner was the one left standing. The race ended when the town was supposedly closed. Joleen asked, “*now we know where he might be but what can we do about it?*”

Sheriff Wednesday laid out a map on a table. He put a shot glass on the location of John town. He then put another shot glass on the location of Hope. He said, “*ten miles. It might as well be ten-thousand miles.*” Joleen said, “*if we send for the army we might just start another war with the nations. If we send for the nations, then we may end up with the army then war.*” She took a shot of whiskey from the table. Allen knew just how much Joleen hated alcohol. He looked at the map then back to the others. He said, “*what if we ask the people of Hope?*” Wednesday looked back and said, “*if we do that then we might as well disband and let the mob rule.*” He took another shot then said, “*we are on the edge of losing this town to the lynch mob and the people who think that justice is whatever they say it is.*” Candice picked up a shot then downed it. She said, “*I think we already lost that battle. There have been too many problems. Too many lives lost to compromises and traitors. The citizens don’t trust us to do the job. Without that trust then we are lost.*” Joleen said, “*All we have is this right here and now. We can’t prevent the takeover, but we can save those children in that town.*”

An hour later and every deputy was back in town and geared up for war. The Marshals were sent for and would be there about a day later. Every deputy, as well as the sheriff, left their badges on a table. Wednesday looked at his badge. Then at the one his son had. He was given that badge by the father of the woman standing next to him. He was going to war with her, and he wasn't sure if any of them were coming back. The badge gave him a purpose. It gave him a life that he couldn't have had before it. He was on the road to a quick death when he was given a chance to wear that badge. The badge also cost him a son. He said, *“for years I didn't understand just how important this simple little piece of tin was in my life. Now that I know I have to give it up.”*

Joleen put on a special holster made for a special gun. Her namesake. The gun her mother had made for her father just months before his death. She considered the gun and the events about to happen. She wondered if how she feels now was how he felt way back then. He rode out to protect people not knowing if he would come back or not. He gave his life to protect people and a town. While he failed to keep the train from its appointment in town, he did delay it enough so that no one died from the explosion. For years she

couldn't understand how he could do that. How he could leave her mother to protect strangers. But now standing there on the edge of a fight that could end in chaos she thought she knew. She saw David with his wife Tuesday and their kids. She tried not to laugh at the name David and Tuesday Wednesday.

Two men walked a wide circle around the town of John. They were walking a picket line as sentries. One kept his finger on the trigger of a musket. It was to alert the town if anyone came close. Only people that had an invitation could come to town. Those people used the main road and came into town in the daytime. The people that stayed at night usually had bad intentions or were held against their will. The two men walked this path every night. They watched these men walk around knowing they would have to take them without letting the guy with the musket get a shot off. About every fifty feet there was a lantern on a post. Part of their job was to keep the lamps lit. When they made their way out of sight, Joleen blew a couple of the lights out. The two men split up to relight the lights. When the guy with the musket put it down, they struck. Quick and clean they tied them up and had two people take them out of the way.

Daniel James sat on the end of his bed staring at his hands contemplating the meaning of life. How hard it was to bring about. How hard it was to hold on to and how easy it was to end. He sent two men to bury a girl who he was finished with. If she was lucky, she died on the way. That morning he went down and inspected the new merchandise. The people they were able to take along the road. Among them was a young girl. He had stared at her eyes. They were an intense blue that seemed lit from behind as if her eyes glowed. That was this morning. He looked back to the girl on the bed. Her eyes were open, but the glow was gone. As he did what he did, she wouldn't stop crying. He eventually choked the cry out of her. Now all that was left was a battered and broken body and his hands. He thought to himself, "*it's still early. Maybe I could find another plaything?*"

John Town was just a hotel like structure surrounded by fences and stables. They knew that most of the people they took off the trails were kept in one of them. It would be the one with the most guards and closest to the hotel. Everyone took up positions in town in the shadows. David and the only son that came with him snuck up to the largest of the stables. Daniel came down the stairs on his way to get a new girl. As he did, he noticed that two of the lights were out on the perimeter. He checked his watch. If they weren't lit

soon then either the men walking the picket were dead or were going to be. Everything ran in Daniel's time. Soon the lights were relit. In the breezeway between the hotel and the stable, he ran into Joleen. She stood there with her father's gun on her hip making her seem even smaller than her five-foot-three-inch frame. Daniel smiled. He said, "*I am going to take that gun from you little girl and the things I will do with it.*" As he spoke, he went for his gun. Joleen let him try. He pulled and fired. He practiced with the quick draw and fire. What he didn't count on was his attacker being shorter than his targets. His shot went over her shoulder. Joleen drew and fired. Her shot hit the target. Daniel dropped his gun and went for what was his genitals, now just a lump of flesh dangling loosely from his legs. As he bent over, he looked back at Joleen. He did this just in time to see the shot that parted his eyes.

The shots woke the men. They came pouring out to find thirty former deputies of the town of Hope waiting for them. Not another shot was fired at first. A couple of them knew what was waiting for them. Some shot at the deputies while others shot themselves. When it was all over not a single deputy was hit, and all but three of Daniel's men were dead. David came around to the surviving three. He asked, "*did you three know?*" They just looked away. David Shot all three as

they kneeled. He said, “*on the other side of that big stable is a mass grave filled with the bodies of men, women, children, and infants. It has to be a hundred or more.*” He emptied his rifle into the now dead men. He was past the point of caring. He wasn’t a sheriff anymore. He was a husband and a father who just saw too much.

They rescued twenty women and children. They were told that any man that was taken alive was killed and put in the pit. One woman said, “*they were the lucky ones.*” They gathered all the belongings that had any value from the hotel. It would be split among the people rescued. Once that was all done they set the buildings on fire. John Town burned to the ground. Joleen could see Daniel’s face in the flames. His condescending smirk as he shot and missed. The look on his face when she took his manhood in one shot. The smell of his bowels letting loose after the second headshot. She didn’t think she could go back into law enforcement. All that was left was to go home and live a life of quiet and peace.

About the same time as the attack miles away, Candice stared toward the location of John Town. She thought about her daughter as well as her late husband. She wanted to go, but her hip never recovered from the

gunshot wound. That night was particularly bad. It throbbed so hard that it hurt her head. As she stared out the night seemed to turn to morning. Everything came into a clear focus. Then it all went black. Allen found her lying on the floor. She was twitching and shaking. One side of her face seemed slack. Allen remembered the signs of a stroke from his own father. He helped her to a settee in the parlor. She looked past Allen to a form that seemed just out of focus. She looked back to Allen. He was saying, “*don’t you leave me.*” She closed her eye then when she reopened it the night was now daytime. Joleen was there along with her grandchildren. The two boys and the three girls. It didn’t matter that they weren’t blood. They were family. Joleen was saying something, but she couldn’t understand. Candice thought about how the name she gave her daughter was a type mistake. Someone a long time ago setting type had misspelled Jolene as Joleen.

A voice from above her said, “*they will be just fine.*” Candice looked up and saw Edward. He looked like he did on that day they met back in the town of Knuckle Smash all those years ago. She got up and hugged him. All the pain was gone. She looked back and saw her body on the settee. She felt like she did when she stepped out of that stagecoach on what would be the adventure of a lifetime. Joleen was now asleep on a couch with the boys on either side. She saw

Rosie who seemed to be able to see her and Edward. She looked to Edward. He said, “*do you see what you did.*” She responded, “*no what we did.*” He said, “*no I was just a memory. You did this. This is your family and the world is a better place for it.*” She hugged him then asked, “*now what?*” He turned to her and said, “*now it’s time for a new adventure.*” The two went off into an unknown that everyone eventually finds.

A few days later and Candice was laid to rest next to Edward. In place of a traditional headstone was a statue of a rabbit with a placard that just read “*Mayor Candice Warren.*” The funeral was attended by everyone in town and from the nations. Joleen wondered if this might just be the last time such a gathering would happen. Jack was still in Texas and would most likely never come back. Ernest was there. He has been around for about two weeks now writing on the marshal’s service takeover. He was also spending time on the ranch. She didn’t know how she felt about him or the missing Jack. For the first time, she was no longer thinking about her girlhood quest for justice. She had nine children on the ranch. Two of the women and four children from the raid stayed. They had nowhere else to go. Joleen knew in time that everything would level out and it would all seem normal, but now the ranch was chaos.

A day after the funeral, Joleen and David sat on her porch drinking whiskey and staring out. Tuesday was with the six girls as they did the things girls did. The three boys were on the roof. The one boy that stayed was named Hayden. Eddy and John followed this eight-year-old boy around like he was the second coming. David asked, “*so now what for you?*” She said, “*I think I have my hands full here. What about you?*” David smiled. He said, “*I am thinking about an office in town.*” Joleen asked, “*an office for what?*” He said, “*mayor.*” The territory had taken over the running of the town, but the town charter clearly had the office of the mayor as the ultimate civic leader. David said, “*when we are ready to take back our town I want to be ready.*” Joleen stared off at the setting sun. She wondered if they would ever be ready or if Wednesday would be the right choice for the future.

Chapter Ten

Cindy watched as the town marshal made his way to the ranch on what has become an almost daily trek. It had been about two years since the territory took over. She kind of felt sorry for this man put in this awkward position. Jacob must enforce the law in a town that does not want him for a territory that doesn't want the law enforcement the townspeople want. She thinks on how easy it must be to give orders from hundreds of miles away and how difficult it must be to enforce those orders. Jacob was just barely twenty-years-old, but no one wanted to oversee a town that didn't want them, so he was it. Every few days he must come to the ranch and speak to Joleen to see if she would help him with the people without a badge, to be the law in action if not name. Every time he comes he risks the chance she will finally say no, but Cindy knows Joleen, and she knows that she would never turn someone away that needs help.

Cindy was fifteen when Joleen and a group of now-former deputies rescued her and the others from a life of slavery and death. Cindy and five others stayed with Joleen for a while after the raid. Now it was just her, a woman named Ruth and her two children, Jesse and Jane. With the two children, Joleen's house was filled with children. Joleen had two children named

Eddie and John, then there was Agnes, Rosie, and Jenny. Joleen's stepfather Allen helped build a larger house on the property to house everyone. He had planned on moving back to San Francisco after Candice's death, but he found he didn't want to leave his family behind. Joleen was his daughter in spirit if not blood and the boys knew him as Grandpa. Every time she watched Jacob come to the ranch she would dream that he was coming for her and not help. Not everyone disliked him.

Joleen and Allen were teaching the boys how to sit in the saddle right. A month ago, Joleen and Agnes went to town and bought six horses. They would have a horse for everyone on the ranch. With the twins turning six it was time to teach them how to ride. The boys were going to be put in charge of their own horses, doing as much as they could. When they were big enough they would have chores in the stables. Johnny was already helping with the horses, but Eddie had a wild streak that seemed to spook the horses even when he would just walk in. Everyday Eddie would remind Joleen and Allen of her long-dead brother Jacob. He was fearless and overprotective of an older sister that didn't need his protection. After telling Eddie to take what they are doing seriously, Joleen saw the marshal on the trail to the house. Allen looked over

and saw him as well saying, “*oh, gee I wonder what he could want?*”

Twenty minutes later Joleen was on a saddled horse and riding into town. It was obvious that this marshal was coming to see her in person so he could see Cindy. The only two who couldn't see it were him and Cindy. Every few days there was a new complaint made by a resident of Hope against the marshal program. When the marshals moved in, they did so with a heavy hand, but they did something that the sheriff's office couldn't. They stopped all the vigilante justice and spooked the Russians out of town. The night before the marshals moved on the town the Russian's compound just outside of the city limits was evacuated. The Russians knew that the city limits meant nothing to the marshals. They also enforced the ban on opioid substances which was a town law and not the territory. Within a year they had cleaned up most of what was ignored by the law. For that, the townsfolk went and elected a man that represented the old way of doing things in Hope. Sherriff Wednesday became Mayor Wednesday.

When someone in town came into conflict with a marshal, they would go and see the mayor who would side with them every time. Mostly it was just

petty stuff, but once the marshal saw Cindy, everything became an emergency. Joleen felt some sort of responsibility for Cindy, but she wasn't her mother and besides Jacob was a good man. On the way into town, Jacob said little. They made their way to the town hall to find the mayor on the steps waiting for her. Jacob tipped his hat and started to ride off when Joleen said, "*Jacob just come over and see her already. She wants you to. I mean she wants to see you as well.*" The Mayor said to Joleen, "*I sent him to come and get you. We have an opportunity here that I think we should act on.*" He pointed to the marshal and said, "*as far as he is concerned he doesn't care who the new sheriff is as long as they follow the town charter.*" The mayor put both his hands out and asked, "*so do you want the job?*"

Joleen stood there saying nothing. The mayor said, "*you're already doing the job, all of the marshals here in town want to work with you, the town wants you. The only ones that don't are in Washington and they don't count.*" Joleen said, "*yes but the territory wants to be a state and defying Washington could stall that process. Also, I want the job, but not if I have to hide it whenever someone from the government comes around.*" The mayor said, "*I hear what you are saying, but I also know you are taking the job. I know it because I know you. You will put others before your*

own wants, it's why it as to be you." Joleen thought about how the west was over. How many things changed in just the last five years. The days of the outlaws were over. Law enforcement would be more than a badge and gun, it would be justice and responsibility. Most of all it would be about people and what they need. Joleen smiled then she said, *"only if I get to set the terms and select my officers."* The mayor said, *"not a problem, you will be starting from scratch anyway."*

A few days later and Joleen was in her new offices as they were being opened and cleaned. The marshals were using another building, so this one in the town hall was closed off. As soon as Joleen said she was taking the job Cindy volunteered to help. Jacob hadn't come to the ranch yet, but Cindy seemed optimistic that if she were in town, then they would see each other. Just outside the office was the prissy little reporter. His name was Lucius Tipps, and he was as big of an ass as anyone could be. The last time Joleen saw this man was the day of her mother's funeral. He wrote a story about how the weight of the job killed her mother saying how it was just too much for a woman. His story got him kicked out of the hotel and barred from all the others. He ended up paying a family in the tent district nearly a thousand dollars to stay in their tent for a few days. He later wrote a story

about the plight of the poor in a town run by a woman that won him awards back east.

He was demanding to see the “she sheriff” and why she felt she was worthy of the job. He said how he was going to write a story about a town that would defy the will of Washington. Joleen knew that there would eventually be trouble, but she didn’t think it would be so soon. Joleen stepped out of her office and went to this man. He smirked as she approached. She wanted to wipe that smirk off his face with her boot, but he would just write about the violence of women in the west. She had her gun but not the badge. Lucius was quick to point that out. She said, “*when the mayor formally opens the office he will give me the badge.*” He asked, “*so with no mommy to prop you up, do you think you can do the job of a man?*” Before she could answer Trip came up behind him and said, “*I don’t think you belong here, boy.*” Lucius spun around to protest when he saw this man with five gun-belts on and holding two rifles. Joleen thought she could see a yellow streak run up his back as well as the smell of piss. Lucius turned to Joleen and said, “*this is far from over little missy.*”

Later that night Lucius was in a bar nursing a shot of whiskey grumbling about how he was being

treated in this little town. He said, *“these people just don’t seem to know better or know their betters. People like you and me are here to protect them from themselves.”* He sipped a little of his shot then asked, *“what kind of backwater hell has never heard of tea?”* Ernest just shook his head saying, *“they just can’t see how the times are changing and they are a relic of a time that was more myth than fact.”* Lucius said, *“the civilized rule the world not these backward nobodies.”* Lucius looked down at his drink as it seemed to divide them multiply into several drinks just before he passed out. He woke up out in the desert in a great deal of pain. From his left side, he saw a fire on the right was Ernest. Lucius tried to move, but the pain was just too much. Ernest said, *“when I first came to this town I was hired to take care of a problem. I am a reporter and a problem solver. I solve problems with this.”* Ernest held up a loop of wire stained red with blood. Ernest said, *“I can’t have you hurt her. I loved her at first sight, and I will kill anyone that gets in my way of being with her. When I am close enough, she will be my finest work.”* Ernest took another length of wire and started to add it to the wire he already had woven into Lucius.

The marshals cut Lucius down from the side of the barn he was wired to in a sort of crucifixion. Joleen watched as they used wire cutters made for cutting

barbed wire. She sent Trip to find Ernest so he could see the latest in this man's work. She knew Ernest as a reporter hunting the killer down. Joleen thought how she didn't like this man, but he didn't deserve to end up like this. The killer would weave the wire into the body trying to keep the victim alive as long as possible. He had wove pounds of wire into the small man. Trip fought with the new toy sent by the territory. Cameras were nothing new but sending them to crime scenes was, or it was for them. Joleen noted that the killer put the body on the town line making it a crime the sheriff's department should handle, but they were nowhere near ready to investigate. Trip took more than a few shots with some being of his thumb, the ground, the camera lens-cover and the crime scene.

That day Joleen was interviewing people for the new sheriff's department. Over the last two years, many of the deputies either left or took jobs outside of law enforcement. The deputies that came from the nations went back and started their own tribal law enforcement programs. Mayor Wednesday's sons went to work for him when he was elected. One major change Joleen was planning was a name change to reflect the reality of their situation. This would be the first Police department for the town of Hope. They were bound by a town line, and the title deputy was tarnished by the last department, and the heavy hand it

used. She planned to roll out a new image and inject professionalism that was lacking.

Her first three interviews were a waste of her time with none of them knowing how to read, but as the day progressed she met with several people that would do well. The next day the new badges arrived saying police not deputy. They came with a note asking if this was a mistake. It was unusual for a small town to use police and not marshal, sheriff or deputy. She hired three men on that first day and six on the second. Trip took the new hires out on a walking tour of the town making sure they knew what was expected of them. As she sat there staring at what will be her new badge, Ernest came in. He had more than a few questions about the crime scene as well as the investigation. Joleen told him that because they weren't up and running that the marshals would be handling it. She offered to take him over to see the lead marshal, but he said it was a waste of his time. The marshals didn't care for the press. Ernest closed her door and walked over to her. She got to her feet just as he pushed her up against the wall. He kissed her as she wrapped her legs around him. Joleen looked at the door that didn't lock and said, "*oh, why the hell not.*"

Joleen and Ernest sat behind her desk after an afternoon of making love. Their quickie became a marathon. Cindy came back from lunch and saw what was happening. She made sure that no one walked in on them. All the interviews for that day were pushed back for what she called, an in-depth interview with a member of the media. The lead marshal Jacob showed up to talk to the reporter. Cindy did the only thing she could think of to stop him. After blocking his way, she kissed him. At first, he seemed surprised then he kissed her back. Then his face turned red, and he took in a gasping breath and ran. As they dressed, Ernest said, *“I hope that you don’t think that I’m that kind of guy, I mean I’m not easy.”* Joleen said, *“it seemed easy to me.”* Ernest said, *“no what I mean is, I want to see more of you.”* Joleen asked, *“what like next time without my blouse on?”* Ernest said, *“no, I mean, yes, but no, I mean.”* Joleen stopped him with a kiss and said, *“yes I want to see you again.”*

Ernest walked out of the office and saw Cindy there. She was red-faced and trying not to smirk. He grabbed a hat and walked out only to come back a few minutes later to exchange Joleen’s hat for his. After he was gone, Joleen came out and walked over to Cindy. She asked, *“how much of that did you hear?”* Cindy said, *“not much. I saw more than I heard. We really need to fix that lock.”* She hesitated then she said, *“it’s*

not my place to say, but just maybe things like that shouldn't happen here." Joleen wanted to say how it wasn't her business but she could see her point. Also, if people are going to take her seriously then maybe she should take the office that way. Cindy told her that the marshal came over and she stopped him from interrupting them by the only way she knew how. Joleen and Cindy looked to the marshal's offices. Jacob was pacing back and forth talking to himself. It was clear that her kiss left an impression. Cindy said, *"I hope I didn't break him."*

That afternoon Ernest was on the trail on his way to a job. It paid well and had the added benefit of being a story he could write about later. The owner of the Lazy K ranch wanted his daughter's husband gone. He was beating his daughter and cheating on her, but most of all he was a thief. John Kendal saw how this man was skimming off the top of every sale. Kendal put an add in the papers from Hope to Huston looking for thirty feet of eighteen-gauge copper wire. A few days later and he received a telegram telling him the wire would cost one thousand dollars in either silver or gold. It also told him to put the money on the edge of his property then send this man out for it. The telegraph ended saying, *"if I see any sign of anyone else there then I will come for you and your family."*

After half a day of waiting, the son-in-law finally arrived. The man was very young, in fact too young to be George. The man was so lazy that he sent a ranch hand out on a job that his father-in-law told him was so important that he had to do it. The boy went to pick up the money, but it was wired to the post. Ernest knew that he would have to do this the hard way. He also had to stop the boy. Juan opened the bag and saw all the silver inside. It was more money than he had ever seen in his fifteen years of life. Just for a second, he thought about what such wealth could do for his family then he put those thoughts aside. He knew that stealing was wrong and men such as Mr. George wouldn't let someone like him get away. Juan felt something cold touch his neck, then a voice asking, "*why is it always silver with these men?*" Juan closed his eyes waiting for the inevitable shot that would end his life. Ernest said, "*take a coin and put it in your pocket. I was hired for one, not two, and I don't work for free.*"

George rode out to where the silver should be. He had never seen his father-in-law so mad before. George told him that the boy was too loyal or stupid to take the money. Kendal told him that if anything happened to the boy, he would take it out on him with

a bullwhip even if his daughter protested. So now George found himself on horseback riding like an employee doing stuff with his hands. He decided to take his anger out on the boy making sure not to leave any marks. At the spot where the money should be George saw Juan. He was naked and tied to a post standing up. George slipped off his horse like a man that didn't ride. He picked up the bag with the silver then he turned to Juan. He grabbed his genitals and whispered, *“if any of this is missing then you will lose these.”* George then backed away asking, *“who did this to you?”* From behind him, George heard, *“I can't believe it took you this long to ask that.”*

Ernest stood back and admired his work. This was his best so far. To make this he had to break from his usual practice and kill them before he went to work. He also regretted the kid, but Juan just had to turn around and look at him, and no one gets to see the artist. He stepped back then forward to move a limb into a new position making sure not to tear the skin. The parts he didn't use would be tied to George's horse and sent back to his family. Ernest dislocated the joints then cut them free dissecting the bodies down into parts. Then the fun began. He mixed and matched the parts weaving them together with the wire until he had his art and a pile of unused pieces. He had to keep George's head, but the boy had bigger genitals, so he

used the boy's in the right place and put George's in the mouth hanging out like a tongue.

A few days later the news of the death of a rancher named George Cross was sent out. Ernest wanted Joleen to see his work. He wanted to be appreciated for his art and how he worked for her, so when he found out that the family buried the remains before his art could be appreciated it drove him mad. He found this out while with Joleen in her office. She called him in so she could tell him about the new citing as well as this new act of depravity. He told Joleen he would go out and speak to the family and would be back as soon as he could. Joleen said, "*when you come back we'll talk about you living with us.*" Ernest didn't know what to say. A few years ago he had planned on making her a part of his art, now she wanted to live with him in a house full of children. Among them was a little girl that got away.

Joleen went home to a house filled with noise and motion. Allen was living in the old house so he could have his male friend live with him away from the kids. She remembered how he never hid his sexuality from her when they were living in San Francisco. Over time Allen seemed to want to keep his private life private. About a year ago Samuel moved

into the old house with Allen. The move coincided with the bigger house being finished. The boys and Rosie were not happy when they moved to the new house away from Allen, but they finally found the new house with more room worked better. Ruth and Agnes worked to keep the house from being overrun my dirt while making sure that the boys, Jesse, Jane, and Rosie stayed out of trouble. The five children all were around the age of six, and together they found as much trouble as they could. Jenny spends most of her time by herself. She has her chores, but she won't do them with anyone. When she isn't doing her chores, she finds a new place to hide and reads. She will read anything she can put her hands on. She also carries a 32-caliber revolver. She keeps her hair over the eye patch that covers the missing eye. She remained by herself this way until Samuel moved in.

One day a few weeks after Samuel moved in he was on the porch reading a book when Jenny walked up to him. She hadn't spoken a word in the time she was living with them until she asked, "*what are you reading?*" At first, he didn't know what to say. All that came to his mind was, "*holy shit, she just spoke.*" After a few seconds, he told her he was reading a biography of Queen Victoria. Out of some instinct, he went to brush the hair out of her face, but she backed away from him. Samuel could see that the eye patch she was

wearing was leaving marks. That night he made her a new patch the color of her hair than two more in pink and red. The inside of the patches was lined in silk from a tie he cut up. When Samuel is around, she'll move her hair to uncover the patch. He hoped that she would eventually grow accustomed to the look. Although seeing her smile was worth every tie he cannibalized.

Joleen pulled Ruth aside and told her she asked Ernest to move in. Ruth had suggested it but now that Joleen asked she wasn't sure if it was a good idea. He hadn't spent much time with the kids, and none of them really knew much about his past. She had her own children as well as the many others that seemed to fall on her shoulders when she moved in. Ruth suggested that Joleen and Ernest take her room. Her bedroom was away from the kids with its own entrance. It would allow the children to get to know this man while allowing Joleen and Ernest privacy. Joleen wondered when she married Ruth. She felt like a disapproving spouse. One that disapproves after suggesting the very thing she was disapproving of. Ruth also made a note in her head to buy a few door locks.

“You see when you run a ranch as big as the Lazy K you have to trust that everyone will do their job and be safe,” John Kendal said as he sat back in his leather chair smoking a cigar while cradling a glass of bourbon. He went on saying, *“you see when you are as important as I am you have enemies and those enemies will do anything to hurt you.”* Ernest sat in a chair writing down everything this man said. He noted how he didn’t offer him a drink or cigar. He thought to himself, *“I bet the booze and cigars are for the important people or in other words just for him.”* Ernest asked, *“where is the widow, your daughter?”* Kendal said, *“I couldn’t take the crying anymore, so I sent her back east with my wife to spend some time with her family in that hell hole city of New York.”* Ernest asked, *“so no family here?”* He replied, *“my sons are on the other side of the ranch fixing fences, and the house help are taking the week off. I can’t stand those people my wife hired so when she is gone so are they.”* Ernest smiled then he pulled out a silver coin and dropped it on the table.

Kendal jumped at the sight of the coin. He said, *“I don’t know where you got that or why you are showing it to me.”* A few seconds after getting to his feet Kendal felt dizzy. Ernest said, *“I got this from you for services rendered.”* He pulled out the little loop of copper wire he carried and showed it to Kendal. Ernest

went on saying, *“all I wanted was for her to see my masterpiece, but you ruined it.”* Kendal asked, *“I don’t understand, what do you mean?”* Kendal fell back into his seat dropping his glass and cigar. Ernest said, *“men like you don’t know how to appreciate true beauty. You buy and sell people like a commodity. I make people into art. I elevate them into a new state of being.”*

Ernest pulled a bottle of clear alcohol from the liquor shelf. He smelt it trying to determine its alcohol content. He said, *“this stuff should do.”* He went over and picked up the fallen cigar. Ernest said, *“you got drunk and passed out with the lit cigar that set you on fire. A funeral pyre for a master of his own domain.”*

Chapter Eleven

Out of respect for the nations, Joleen had the words Sheriff engraved on her badge rather than Chief. Even as the importance of the nations is diminished Joleen still found herself in the same position as her father surrounded by people that didn't trust them. So far, the people of Hope trusted the nations more than the army with many still calling them blue coats. With her hand on a bible and one in the air she took the new oath of office and swore to uphold the law. In the audience was her stepfather, two sons, several pseudo-adopted children and her new male friend Ernest. Later that day the officers were sworn in. Trip became the first detective under the new program. After spending some time with Allen Trip felt like he was ready to either solve crimes or report on them. Joleen thought about how the two jobs seemed to be almost the same thing. They both searched for the truth.

The rest of the day went like any other with the police handling the petty disturbances that the marshals were tired of handling. Mostly the drunk and disorderly problems that any town with as many bars as Hope had. It seemed like every day for the last year a new bar opened. Most didn't see their first anniversary. The tried and true saloon was being replaced with every kind of bar from the old English

pub to a bar that specialized in nothing but foreign liquors. The population turned their addiction to poppies into a severe drinking problem. There was talk in the papers from out of the territories that a push to make liquor illegal could happen as well as women getting the vote as soon as 1930. Joleen sat at her desk reading the story Ernest wrote about the body found on the Lazy K as well as the tragic fire that claimed the life of the rancher as well as one of his sons after he ran in to try and save his father. Something didn't feel right about the story, she just didn't know what it was.

As she sat there staring at the pages a small man in an ashen derby walked into her office. He had on a suit the same color as the derby and a bright gold monocle in his left eye with a chain that went into a breast pocket of his jacket. With the derby on he was maybe five-foot tall. He had a thin pencil mustache and tiny goatee. When he took his derby off, he had a head of thick black hair with a little gray. When he spoke, it was clear that he was Russian. He said, *"Sheriff, my name is Alexandrov Anatolievich, I represent the Yurievich family. They own the large ranch just across from the railyard."* Joleen stared at this man wondering what would happen if she jumped across her desk and beat the location of Sava out of him. She asked as calmly as possible, *"why are you here today?"* He said, *"the family left after the events*

of two years ago, but now they want to return, but they don't want any trouble with your office." In the two years since the family left the town charter was amended to include the railyard and the compound, this man was calling a ranch. Joleen said, "*Sava.*" The man smiled then said, "*Sava Yurievich was killed in a bar fight in New York a year ago.*" He handed her an old newspaper as well as a report from the New York City police department.

"It just doesn't seem right. After all that Sava did to this family, to die so far away. It just doesn't seem right," Allen said as he read the newspaper from New York City. Joleen was watching her sons. Because of this man, everyone called Sam they could never see their father. Joleen said, "*we can finally put this behind us.*" Even as she said it she didn't believe it was true. Sam showed her just how far she was ready to go for vengeance. She was willing to let her moral compass break and do the very thing her parents did when her brother died. Just maybe it was for the best that he died so far away.

Anatolievich walked into a room filled with smoke. He said, "*they have no plans on stopping us from moving back in.*" An older man seated at the head of a table with a long black beard streaked with gray

asked, *“and what of my son? Did she believe my Sava is dead?”* Anatolievich said, *“these people will believe anything they read. It's almost unreal that they could be a threat.”* Off in a corner, a man with a prominent scar on his face said, *“don't underestimate them or you will pay the price.”* Anatolyevich responded saying, *“Sava, I don't take advice from dead people.”* The men in the room started to laugh at this until they realized Sava's father wasn't laughing. He stroked his beard then said, *“we will play nice with this town and their bitch sheriff until it's time to not play nice then they will learn who is really in charge.”* Another man in the room asked, *“maybe we should place an add in the papers for some copper wire. Let the man make his art with the bitch?”* Sava said, *“no when it's time to deal with Joleen I will do it.”*

A few days later the Family moved back into the compound. Both the police and the marshals watched their every step. Hidden in a secret place in a wagon was Sava. As much as he wanted to stay away, he also wanted to have done with this town and their sheriff. All he wanted back then was to have her. He watched her bath thinking about her and wondering just what he would have to do to take her. That was over six years ago. He still thought about having her, but this time he thought about having her then killing her and just maybe doing both at the same time. John

was his first kill but not his last. While on the run he killed many men for the family as well as for himself. About six months ago he found a family on the side of the road traveling west. He killed the father and son then had his way with the mother and two daughters with one of them only being twelve-years-old. He held on to them for five days then he killed the mother and older daughter. He held onto the younger daughter for about a month until she killed herself. He thought about the boy he was and the man he was now and thought about all he would do to Joleen and her family.

Cindy sat at her desk writing on a calendar when she saw Jacob walking up the stairs. They hadn't spoken since the kiss. Cindy got to see another side of this stoic stern-faced man when he blushed at the sight of her. He came in with his hat in his hands and walked over to her desk. She asked, "*may I help you, Marshal?*" He looked at the door to Joleen's office and seemed like he was going to say something, but he just stared. She asked, "*are you here to see the police chief?*" The sound of her voice seemed to wake him up. He said, "*no*" then he looked at his hat then back to Cindy and asked, "*I wanted to know if you would like to maybe have dinner sometime, with me?*" Cindy tried to hide her excitement as she asked, "*could we make it lunch? It's hard to have an evening away from the ranch.*" He said, "*yes, not a problem. Would you like to*

go now?” She answered saying, *“its nine in the morning so maybe a little later?”* Jacob sat down and said, *“ok I can wait.”* Cindy smiled at him. Joleen said from her office, *“for the love of god Cindy, just go already.”*

Joleen found herself in this large office with very little to do. All the work was done, and it would be weeks before she had the kind of information like they had when the sheriff’s department ran things. The marshals did very little paperwork, so there wasn’t a lot of reports to build crime models on. She had the basic arrest reports, but most of them were incomplete. She thought how most of these men wouldn’t have lasted a week as a deputy. Crime was seemingly down from the time when they ran things, but that might just be because they weren’t keeping proper records. If no one is keeping score, then no one can tell who is winning or losing. She thought how closing your eyes to crime doesn’t make it go away. She pulled out her new pistol a Browning 1900 chambered in 32acp. It’s a semi-automatic with a magazine rather than a cylinder. The gun was compact and thin making it easy for her to conceal. Her new role had her more as an administrator rather than an operator so carrying a large revolver wasn’t necessary. She remembered the stories about how her father didn’t carry a gun for years, but she didn’t feel right without one. On the wall

behind a lock and a pane of glass was her father's pistol and her namesake. A reminder of where she came from.

Joleen went into the outer office to the desk with the machine. They bought a typewriter for reports, but no one wanted to use it, so it sat on the desk gathering dust. She grew up in the publishing industry with both parents being active writers. Learning to spell properly as well as sentence structure was a part of her early life in a time when many of her peers were illiterate. For her the typewriter was easy. She started from the beginning typing out what she could remember about her life in San Francisco with her mother and stepfather Allen. She typed about her brother and who he was not just how he died, then she typed about her first love, the law. While she was typing about her time in law school, she looked up and saw Cindy reading the pages. She was up to Jacob's death in the street. Joleen wasn't sure if she should let her read anymore. She had typed how Allen and her mother murdered the man that killed her brother and got away with it. She wasn't even sure why she started to type anything, she just didn't want to stop. Joleen said to Cindy, "*if you continue reading you'll learn some truths that you can't take back. Some things people shouldn't know.*"

That night at dinner, Cindy sat there picking at her food staring at the place where Allen should be. He was unhappy that Joleen was typing about what happened with as he put it, *“that monster.”* He said that it felt like a betrayal to the memory of his son and her brother. Joleen said that the writing would never leave the house, but Allen said, *“no, you have your mother’s voice and not using that voice would be the real crime.”* Joleen said to him, *“I’ll keep working on it, but no one else will read it until you give approval and the part about him will be removed.”* Allen seemed to take what she said, but he still stayed in the old home when dinner came around. That night Allen gave the pages to Samuel. He already knew the story but seeing it in type made the act seem real. Samuel said, *“if this gets out you could be in some trouble or maybe praise.”* Allen said, *“I don’t want either, I just want to protect my family and Candice’s name.”*

Ernest sat on a rock watching the house. He told Joleen he needed some time before moving in then he said he had a lead on the killer in the remains of John town. Instead, he wanted to watch them and see if he could use this to his advantage. He said to himself, *“inside that house is the one that got away. I can’t live in a house with that hanging over my head. she has got*

to go.” He watched as they went to bed and which room Rosie was in. Off in the dark Ernest saw another watching the house. He was dressed like a ranch hand, but one look at him and anyone could tell it was just a costume. Garin Pavlovich was a low-ranking member of the family. He knew he couldn’t get caught alive or he could risk the family, so he was prepared to take his own life if found. What he didn’t count on was Ernest. Garin was sent to watch Joleen and see if they had any weaknesses to exploit. As he watched, Ernest snuck up behind him and put a knife to his throat. He said, “I know why you are here and who you work for. If your boss wants a chance to take her out without any connection to it, then tell him to meet with me in the ruins of John Town in one week.”

Joleen thought she saw the gleam of a piece of metal out on the property line. She thought whoever or whatever it was can keep until morning. She didn’t know what to think about Ernest’s reaction to her offer. As she saw it, he lived on the road with no real home to call his own. She said, “*could it be that some people want to live their lives on the move, never stopping in one place for too long?*” Ruth said, “*he doesn’t know us just like we don’t know him. Although it would have worried me more if he jumped at the chance. Him thinking about it shows some respect for what it would mean.*” Eddie ran into the room and

stood next to Joleen. She looked at him and asked, “*why are you not in bed?*” He just pointed to the door. Joleen went to at and saw that Jesse and Jane were holding John down as Rosie kissed him. Jesse said, “*he lost the bet now he has to pay.*” Joleen made a mental note to keep an eye on the six-year-old John and the seven-year-old Rosie. She asked, “*what was the bet?*” Jane said, “*who can balance the most eggs without breaking any.*” Ruth said, “*that doesn’t sound good.*”

The man named Garin went to the compound and told them what the man said. He then showed them a length of copper wire. Sava took the wire and held it up to the candlelight. He understood what it meant and who this was. Sava asked, “*what did he look like?*” Garin said, “*I wasn’t stupid enough to try and look at him. He kills people that see him.*” Sava said, “*only if they know it's him.*” Sava turned to his father and said, “*this could be an opportunity for us. If we kill the bitch sheriff, we could take over the town making it easier to run the railyards.*” His father nodded then said, “*go meet with this man. See what he offers and if it would be good for the family.*” Sava took the wire and wrapped it around his wrist. He said, “*I will jam this inside her so he will get the blame for her death then I’ll kill her than her children.*”

After the eggs were cleaned up and the children put back into bed Ruth, Cindy and Joleen sat staring at the mopped floor. Ruth poured a glass of whiskey and a shot for Cindy. She knew better than to offer any to Joleen. Joleen said, *“I am willing to bet that the whole thing was set so Rosie could kiss John.”* Cindy held up her shot and said, *“to first kisses.”* She then sipped the liquor from the shot. Ruth asked, *“what do you know about first kisses or first anything?”* Cindy said, *“Jacob wasn’t my first kiss or even my twenty-first kiss. I was ten years old, and he was the most handsome boy I knew.”* Ruth asked, *“and?”* Cindy said, *“and it was disgusting. He had the worst breath and a body odor that could kill a horsefly.”* The women laughed. To the surprise of everyone, Joleen poured a little of the whiskey in a glass and took a sip. She asked Ruth, *“what about you?”* Ruth emptied her glass then poured some more. She said, *“his name was Jack James, he was ten, and I was nine. As kids, we would all go swimming in the summer until one day our parents said we couldn’t anymore.”* Joleen asked, *“swimming or skinny dipping?”* Ruth said, *“both. At the time I didn’t think anything of being naked or seeing a boy naked. I have or well had nine brothers, and it was just something I saw.”* Cindy asked, *“had nine brothers?”* Ruth said, *“that’s a story for a different night. One with a little more whiskey.”* Cindy asked, *“what happened to Jack James?”* Ruth emptied

her glass again and said, “*he died in John town. Our children are asleep upstairs.*”

The next day Joleen sat at the typewriter thinking about her days in law school and just how much James hurt her when he went behind her back and had her expelled from school. In the next room, she could hear Jacob and Cindy talking. They whispered but not that well. Cindy looked at the door between them and Joleen then to the storage closet. She put her finger up to his lips in a shushing gesture and led him to the room. In the dark, small room, she closed the door and pulled him in close. She kissed him, and he kissed her. she asked, “*could you maybe take the gun off, its poking me in my side.*” He said, “*my gun is in its holster on the floor. That’s not my gun.*” She kissed him again then took hold of him saying, “*no that isn’t a gun.*” She unbuckled his belt and slipped her hand down his pants. He said, “*maybe we shouldn’t do this here?*” Just outside the storage room, Joleen wondered if she should interrupt them or let things go where they were going.

Jacob and Cindy lay in bed after an afternoon of intense lovemaking. Cindy looked at the ring on her hand then to Jacob’s hand and his ring. She said to Jacob, “*now we have to tell Joleen.*” That morning he

told her that he was offered a job back in his hometown, and it was just too good to pass up, but he didn't want to go without her. An old friend of his family was starting a security firm specializing in security for the Jewish community. He wanted to make a name for himself and give to his family legacy. Cindy's family had no religious proclivities unless planting corn was a religion. He asked her to come with him as his wife. Before he could finish the word wife, she was saying yes. He said, *"I don't have the ring, but as soon as we get to New York I will have one waiting for us."* Cindy said, *"I don't care about such things, all I want is."* She stopped then asked, *"New York?"* Cindy was from Medina County in Ohio and had never seen a large city before. The thought of so many people stopped her for a second then she said, *"The circuit judge is in town, and I have my parents wedding bands in a drawer in my desk."*

Cindy walked into the typewriter room and up to Joleen who looked at her then back to the machine. Joleen said, *"if you are trying to scare him off then that would work."* Joleen pointed to the ring on her finger. Cindy said, *"no just the opposite. We just got married."* Joleen stopped typing and looked at Cindy. She asked, *"married?"* Cindy said, *"yes, we went to the judge and just did it, well we did it about four hours ago."* Joleen asked, *"when did he ask?"* Cindy said,

“about four hours ago.” Joleen wanted to be mad but Cindy wasn’t her daughter, and Jacob was a good man. She asked, *“so are you going to convert?”* Cindy answered saying, *“that will depend on his family and how they take the news. Also, we are moving.”* Joleen thought about the timing and asked, *“where and when?”* Cindy said, *“soon and away.”* She had a hard time saying New York City. To her, it felt like she was saying they were moving to the moon or mars. Joleen said, *“give me four hours then come back to the ranch and bring your husband.”*

Cindy and Jacob came around the corner to the ranch and saw the whole place was lit up and filled with people. There was music and laughter and all the people Cindy came to know as her family. Ruth met them at the gate saying, *“well since you didn’t let us throw you a wedding we decided to throw the party.”* Cindy looked at this party that should have taken weeks to plan but somehow was organized in hours. Ruth said, *“never underestimate Allen’s ability to put a party together fast.”* Cindy said to Ruth, *“when this is all over I need to tell you something.”* Ruth said, *“I know all about New York, and as much as I will miss you I am excited for you as well so just let that go and enjoy tonight. Tomorrow will take care of itself.”* Ruth looked over and saw John dancing with Rosie. She said to herself, *“something tells me you two are going*

to be trouble.” She went to say something to them when she and a tall man collided. Ruth was tall a little over six-feet, but this man made her look tiny.

The party was in full swing with the band blaring and people dancing. Joleen walked around the perimeter of the party watching everyone. Mayor Wednesday wondered if she would ever take it easy. As she walked around, she saw that the doors to the stable were open. She went inside and saw the shadow of two people in the mists of having sex. She said, *“you still have a room in the house.”* Ruth said, *“Jesse has been having nightmares, so I am sharing it with her.”* Realizing it was Ruth with someone else Joleen tried to vanish into the wall. She said, *“ok, never mind.”* Ruth and the man laughed then went back to what they were doing. She then asked, *“what is your name?”* He said, *“you can call me whatever you want.”* She said, *“then I’ll call you Frank.”* He said, *“well what do you know my name is Frank.”* She asked, *“really?”* He answered, *“no but it’s better than Apple Junior.”* He was the youngest son of a man that named himself Apple after ditching his slave name when he left the plantation after the war. His former master named all his male slaves Percy. He came to the town when it was named Knuckle Smash and married a Chief’s daughter. Before he was murdered, he was elected the mayor of the town known now as Hope. He

said to her, *“most people call me AJ but if you want I’ll be Frank with you.”* He smiled at the unintentional joke. Ruth thought that nothing was better than seeing this man’s smile, how it lit up his face and the room.

The next day while Joleen and the kids cleaned up the ranch, Ruth helped Cindy pack. She decided to leave most of her belongings at the ranch for the girls. Cindy said, *“all I need is this ring and the picture of my parents taken at their wedding.”* Ruth said, *“some clothes wouldn’t hurt.”* Cindy looked at Ruth then she said, *“I get what you meant by how I didn’t understand firsts.”* Ruth smiled and said, *“there are many firsts, and with every one of them you will feel just like this.”* Cindy asked, *“what was the first that you remember the most?”* Ruth said, *“the first time I saw Jesse then Jane. That is something that will be with me forever.”* Cindy saw a very tall man just outside with the kids as they cleaned the yard. She asked, *“who is that?”* Ruth said, *“AJ or Frank, someone I hope to get to know better.”* From the hall, Joleen asked, *“better than you did in the stable?”* Cindy looked back at AJ then to Ruth and asked, *“wow that must have hurt?”* Ruth said, *“not if you know what you are doing.”*

It was pitch black with a billion stars out on display. Sava and six of his men rode into the wilds

toward a raging fire. He sent one of them out to see if anyone was around. In the shadows of a ridge, a man said, *“come closer to the fire.”* Sava and his men dismounted with one of them staying with the horses. Sava asked, *“why don’t you come closer to the fire, so we can talk like men?”* Ernest said, *“for the same reason you won’t be getting your man back. People don’t get to know who I am unless I let them.”* Something rolled down the ridge. The man’s head bounced off a rock and went into the fire. Ernest said, *“you sent that man to die.”* Sava said, *“I wanted to see if the stories were true and they seem to be. You killed him quickly and without a sound.”* Ernest asked, *“did you bring it with you.”* Sava held up a bag and said, *“thirty pieces of silver, just as you said.”* He lowered the bag and asked, *“why so little? With what you are doing for us we will own this town and the railyard. My father would pay this much in gold for such a job.”* Ernest said, *“since I am selling my soul I think that this is just the right amount. Biblically speaking.”* They spent the rest of the night talking about the plan and just how they would take over the town.

Chapter Twelve

Rosie followed John out to the stable then out the back to the small building where Sam lived for the short time he was there. He went inside, and she followed where she leaned in and kissed him. After the party, they were both grounded and told not to be alone with each other anymore. Agnes laughed at that one saying, “*alone together.*” Rosie didn’t understand why they couldn’t play with each other. When she asked why she said “play around” which brought Ruth and Agnes to tears of laughter. She kissed him again then the door opened, and a man came in. Neither of them knew him. Ernest hadn’t spent any time on the ranch or around the children. In the dark of the room and the light from behind him putting him in shadow, Rosie recognized him as the man that killed her family. Ernest kicked John knocking him against the back wall. He then struck Rosie in the face, picked her up and took her.

Jenny was on the roof watching the gray skies when she saw this man carrying Rosie away. She had a choice, find someone and tell them or follow this man. If she went after him she could be caught, then die with her but letting him go is a sure way to get Rosie killed. She checked her gun then climbed down and followed them. Ernest kept talking to Rosie even

though she was unconscious. He said, “*you were the one that got away, and after all this time I thought that I would never be able to finish my work but now thanks to Joleen I will. And yes, you are right this will hurt my chances with her, so I helped someone take care of that for me. If he wins, then it won’t matter. If she wins then your death will be blamed on him.*” Ernest dropped a silver coin with a Russian emblem on it as well as some other bits of evidence that would lead to the family. As he did this Jenny climbed into the wagon and underneath a blanket. Ernest held onto the tied, gagged and unconscious Rosie as he drove the wagon out into the wilds.

Allen saw the door to the storage building open and went to check it out. Inside he saw a smear of blood and the limp body of John. He then saw a silver coin with Cyrillic writing on it. After a quick search, he found Ruth, who was with Eddie, Jesse, and Jane down by the well. They came running back to find John missing. A blood trail to the house led them to him where he was trying to load a gun. Agnes saddled and took a horse to town to get help while the others looked for Jenny and any signs pointing to where they went. Both Allen and Samuel had guns on their hips. Samuel had never owned or fired a gun before, but he knew that if they hurt Jenny or Rosie, then he would empty the gun into them. Across town, both the police

and the marshals were mobilized. After some talk they gave up on trying to keep Joleen out of the search, even the Mayor was there with a gun ready for whatever was coming. Joleen wanted to go and check on her son, but first, she needed to find the girls. John was safe surrounded by guns and people willing to use them while every minute they had them Jenny and Rosie were that much closer to death.

From a rented room across from the town hall, Sava watched for them to act. He knew they would take the compound. When they were gone, he would act. The law would use a legal paper to invade the ranch then when they were all inside the doors would close, and the slaughter would begin. He saw that the mayor was also there. Sava said, "*I think we will need a new Mayor as well.*" Sava's job was to signal when it was time to close the trap then he could either join in or go and kill Joleen's family. He planned on taking her gun and killing her children. As he watched the law enter his home, he thought about the day all those years ago when he watched her strip then climb into the tub. All he wanted at the time was a touch of her creamy white skin. Now all he wanted was her blood and the blood of her children. His scarred face was a reminder of how much he hated her.

Alexandrov Anatolievich was waiting by a table filled with guns. He knew his part in this farce. He also knew he could play it angry because he was. He knew that the evidence was flimsy at best and at worst a violation of the constitution. As Joleen and Wednesday walked over to him, he said, “*on what grounds do you have the nerve to barge in here waving guns.*” His job was to act outraged then leave. Instead of answering him, Wednesday backhanded him across the face then handcuffed him with his arms back and lowered him to the ground face first. The other members of the family knew this was off script, but they also knew they were all expendable. Wednesday got up on the table knocking the guns off and yelled, “*we have a warrant for the arrest of Sava Yurievich. We also have the right to search this compound for evidence in the disappearance of two little girls.*” Alexandrov said, “*two girls, that greedy bastard.*” Off in the distance, Joleen saw a light reflect off a mirror then she saw Sava looking out from a window. She said, “*Trap.*” The gates closed and the members of the family that were hidden around the outside climbed up onto the walls and took aim.

About an hour into the trek, Rosie woke up to find herself tied and gagged. She was being held by the man that killed her family. Ernest saw she was awake and said, “*don't worry about a thing. I plan on making*

you something special. A work of art for the ages.”

Rosie started to struggle, and he tossed her in the back like a sack of potatoes. As she landed, she saw Jenny hiding under the buckboard seat. Rosie’s face started to swell after hitting the floor of the wagon then she passed out. Jenny watched as the lifeless body of this girl that she saw as a sister bounce with every bump. She felt for her gun again, but she knew that she would have to wait for the perfect shot. They came to a box canyon deep in the countryside. They were in the Hopi’s territory. The canyon was cleared of brush, and a fire pit was dug. Ernest got out of the wagon and went back for Rosie. As he reached for her, he turned his head just missing Jenny.

Ernest gently put Rosie on the ground then he turned her over onto her back and mounted her sitting on her knees. Rosie brought up her arms in a defensive posture knowing what it meant when men sat on women like this. Ernest said, *“don’t worry my dear. I don’t mess with children, and I definitely don’t mess with my art.”* He pulled out a knife and cut her shirt away then her skirt running his hands down her bare skin. With every touch, she felt like screaming. Ernest said, *“first I will make a cut here and.”* A gunshot interrupted him. Then another shot. He seemed to buckle over at an awkward position falling to the side. Jenny shot him in the back in the lower vertebrae.

Rosie got up trying to cover herself with what was left of her clothing. Jenny took aim at him but hesitated. Ernest said, “*I can’t feel my legs. What have you done to me.*” Allen and Samuel came over the ridge just in time to see Jenny empty the rest of her shots into his head. Rosie stood there watching it with a smile on her face.

Laying faced down in handcuffs, Alexandrov Anatolievich said, “*The family is gone and won’t return until you are all dead.*” Wednesday kicked over the table then shot Alexandrov in the head saying, “*shut up.*” The men on the walls started to fire in as the marshals, and the police fired back. Soon the compound was awash in gun smoke. From the outside, they could hear more gunfire as men on the wall started to fall. The turkey shoot became a real fight. Some of the men started to jump off the wall into the compound while others caught in a moment incisivness was shot down. Joleen looked over and saw that Wednesday was hit in the left arm and upper shoulder, but he was still in the fight. Up near the house, she saw Trip. He and three of her new officers were behind some turned over furniture firing at the walls. That was when a thump hit her back knocking her down. She didn’t see who shot, but she felt the round hit her. Off in the distance, Sava lowered his

rifle and left the room on his way to her office and the ranch.

Joleen rolled over just in time to see the gate explode inward and four people run in firing. Among them were marshal Jacob and a person Joleen met on her first day as a deputy way back when. When the gate blew inward, the battle turned against Sava's men but true to their word they didn't surrender. The last one after seeing Joleen stand back up put his gun in his mouth and ended the gunfight. Angela Goodwin walked over to Joleen who was struggling to take off her vest. It was the one with the overlapping metal plates sown in. Angela showed Joleen that the vest stopped the bullet, but she still had a welt on her back the shape of the plates. Joleen said, "*thank you.*" Angela said, "*your welcome deputy bitch.*" Joleen said, "*that's Chief of Police Bitch.*" Jacob came over to Joleen. She asked, "*where the fuck have you been?*" Jacob said, "*I think you just answered your question. We moved into a hotel so they could rent out my house. We were in the room when I saw the gunfight break out.*" Jacob said he would go to the ranch and help in the search. Joleen wanted her namesake, so she went to her office.

She went through the door only to have it slam behind her. She spun around just as Sava struck. He hit her in the gut than in the face. As she reeled from the blows, he grabbed her by the neck and said, *“when I am done with you bitch I’ll kill your children. That is the ones that my partner hasn’t already killed.”* Joleen looked at him. In a fair fight he would win so she had to fight unfairly. She tried to say “partner” to see if he will keep talking. Sava said, *“yes the one you call the barbwire killer. He is a gun for hire and wanted one of your little bitches. Something about her seeing his face, I just don’t know or care.”* He pushed her against the wall knocking off pictures and a shadow box. The glass broke, and her namesake came out. Joleen went for the gun, but Sava stepped on her hand and got it first. Joleen slid away from him to her desk. Sava said, *“goodbye Joleen.”* He pulled the hammer back, and it came down on an empty cylinder. He tried again, but the gun was empty. Joleen said, *“thanks for all the help.”* She stood up and fired the semiautomatic browning 1900 she had in a hidden holster on the bottom of her desk. She needed the time to get to the gun and knew he couldn’t resist her father’s gun. Sava stood there for a second like he wasn’t hit then he hit the floor dead.

Joleen and the others rode out to the ranch. They found everyone was safe. In the back of the

wagon was Ernest. His back was misshapen, and most of his forehead was gone, but it was him. Before she could ask what happened Rosie said, *“that man killed my mother. He sewed her to death while laughing.”* The enormity of what she just learned struck her like a closed fist. Allen said, *“what can I say, you have terrible taste in men.”* Joleen just looked at him then the children tackled her, all of them except John. Allen said, *“he’s inside with the doctor, it looks bad, but he should recover. Just don’t panic when you see him.”* Joleen went into the house. John was on a table with his shirt off and a doctor sewing what had to be twenty cuts up with stitches. The doctor said, *“it’s not nearly as bad as it looks.”* Joleen said, *“he’s alive, and that’s what matters.”*

Samuel and Allen took Ernest’s body out into the wilds and buried him in a place no one will ever find. Allen worried what shooting this man will do to Jenny. He also worried what his death will mean for Joleen. She took his betrayal hard. Before closing the hole, Allen opened his fly and pissed on the body. Allen said, *“this man abused everything I ever stood for while worming his way into our lives.”* When they searched his horse then his room back in town, they found detailed notes on all his art. How he would take jobs through the newspapers, then cover those jobs acting as a reporter. He also took detailed notes on

Joleen. He wrote more than once how he loved her and wanted to make art for her. Allen tossed the papers into the hole then a bottle of the strongest stuff the bar they stopped had on hand. It lit quickly, and the body burned for a good bit then they filled in the hole. Samuel said to Allen, *“I think it’s the only thing we can do.”*

Cindy and Jacob were on the train on their way to New York City. They both waited as long as they could, but it was a long trip, and the job wouldn’t wait. They didn’t know what would be waiting for them with his family. Jacob wired them saying how he was married, but there was no response. They also didn’t know that Cindy was carrying what would be the first of seven children they would have in their sixty years of marriage. Jacob came in as an employee and retired as a partner. He died at the age of eighty-three surrounded by family. Cindy would die a few years later in 1968. They spent all those years together on the upper west side of New York in an apartment that was worth a fortune when Cindy passed away. They never went back to Hope, but they did keep in touch with everyone and took the time every year to remember who they were and how they met.

Allen and Samuel helped Jacob and Cindy to the railyard and saw them off. While there Allen made plans as discretely as possible. Back at the ranch, they found Ruth burning down the shed with the children watching. She said, “*John was having nightmares about it, so I figured this would take care of that.*” Allen looked at the huge fire risk happening so close to the building filled with horses and came up with an idea. He and Samuel dug a shallow hole clearing any brush from around it. He then piled on some wood and kindling. When they were done, Allen said, “*tonight we will have a fire and burn the past away. Anything you don’t want to remember should go into the fire.*” Allen lit the fire, but no one did anything at first. Then Ruth tossed the dress she was wearing when her husband died. Joleen tossed the copper wire loop Ernest carried then a picture Sava left at the ranch of his mother and father. Rosie tossed the scraps of the shirt and skirt Ernest cut off her in, and Agnes tossed in the maids uniform she was forced to wear. Then Allen produced a thick envelope filled with papers. Joleen knew it was her story. He handed it to her and said, “*just let the past go.*” She tossed it in and watched as her memories burned away. Ruth tossed in a shirt that Hayden was wearing when they were rescued. He had already left for Chicago to live with his maternal grandparents.

A few days later and Joleen came home to find Allen and Samuel gone. They also took Jenny with them. They left a note saying how they couldn't stay anymore and they felt that Jenny would be better off with them. By the time she made it to the train, it was gone. She wouldn't hear from them for two years. They went to New York City then on a long boat ride to Paris, France. In his note, Allen said how France should be safe. He wrote, "*what could possibly happen here in France at the beginning of the twentieth century.*" He then told her that she didn't burn her story. He had saved it and brought it with him. On the way, while in New York, he found a literary agent who would publish it. The book was published about a year later. It stirred up some controversy, but most of the people that knew Joleen weren't that surprised by what they read. The territory forced the town to relieve her of her position and on paper that was what they did.

The gunfight at the compound cost Mayor David Wednesday his left arm and won his reelection until his death at the age of fifty-five in 1917. When he died his wife, Tuesday was offered the position, but she refused. She said, "*we gave at the office.*" The remaining children she and David had never went into public service. David told Joleen as he was recovering how he owed his life to her father and his arm was just a down payment. About the time of David's death,

Joleen started to read the stories Allen was writing about the war in France. The one the papers were calling the war to end all wars. Allen was making a new name for himself reporting what he saw from the trenches. He sent a picture of the three of them. Jenny had grown into a beautiful woman. She would volunteer to work as a nurse during the war where she was exposed to a poisonous gas that scarred her lungs. She died a year later. Allen and Samuel would go on to win awards reporting on what they saw from the United States entering the war to the peace agreements. Allen died in 1921 and Samuel in 1923. They were buried in Paris near the makeshift hospital where Jenny died.

When Allen left the boys asked if they could move back into the old house. Joleen told Ruth, *“we are going to move into the old house, and I want you to keep this one as your own as long as you want it.”* Joleen knew that Ruth was planning to leave and just maybe having something that as her own would help her stay. Ruth took her up on the offer. About a year later, AJ moved in with her and her children. It was illegal for them to marry, but Ruth would say, *“I never needed a piece of paper to tell me how I feel.”* A year after that they had the first of two children. Jesse and Jane had two new brothers to torcher. Joleen hired AJ

to run the ranch as a business, and he made it successful even though he had to do it in secret.

It was Ruth that first caught the two in the stable together. As she predicted, Rosie was trouble, but instead of John, she was half naked with Eddie. It wouldn't be the last time they would be caught or go all the way without being caught. Both Ruth and Joleen couldn't see how two children could want to do that with what was a sibling in all but blood. Eventually, after some threats and bribes, they stopped seeing each other. That is, they got better at hiding seeing each other. John read the newspapers and followed the war. He couldn't see why they weren't in this fight. More than once Joleen was called to the train yard to pick up John as he tried to buy a ticket to New York so he could join the war. Every time he told Joleen, "*when I am old enough I am going, and you won't stop me.*" Joleen just hoped the war would be over before he turned eighteen.

Joleen stepped out of her office for the last time. She remained the secret police chief for two years, but she had enough of all the hiding. That day she went home with her typewriter and started to write. She started with what she knew then she started on fiction writing about the law from the view of a lawyer

and a sheriff. Six months later she had her second book. A piece of fiction about a circuit judge and his fight to keep the law while protecting the innocent. Western Justice became a series of books that helped her find a new career while not abandoning her principles. The story writing also helped her connect with her mother Candice who traveled to the town of Knuckle Smash all those years ago to sleep with Edward Warren, The Knuckle Smash Kid, her father. Also, to write his story.

Epilogue

Dear Mother,

By the time you are reading this, I will be on my way to New York and then the war. I will be eighteen when I arrive so you will have no legal grounds to stop me. I don't know what the army or the future will want of me all I know is that I can't stand by and watch what is happening and do nothing. I don't think you could have done that either. Please understand why I must do this and understand that I love you all and with the help of God I will come home after the world is a safer place. Until I see you again, please think about me in your heart and pray for victory.

Your son, John.

Joleen closed the letter and walked to John's room. Eddie was sitting in the corner staring at the empty bed that belonged to his twin brother. She thought about how she could stop him, but she knew all she could do was delay the inevitable. John had to see the war for himself.