# Philippa's Gold

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**Molly Gorman**

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# Chapter One

*The Philadelphia Inquirer, June 28, 1847*

Miss Philippa Stuart, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Roland Philip Stuart, the well-known ship-building magnate of Philadelphia, and Mr. Martin Sutter, son of Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Sutter, celebrated their wedding nuptials at St. Mary's Church on Saturday the 25th of June. The Sutter family are owners of Sutter Farms, a 50,000-acre cattle ranch and country estate in Allegheny County in Western Pennsylvania.

The diminutive bride was unattended by bridesmaids and given away by her mother. Miss Stuart designed her unique wedding dress, a Chinoiserie-styled white silk gown with high Mandarin collar. The ankle-length hem was bound in red silk. Her headpiece, a wreath of red and white roses, did not include a veil. Carrying a single calla lily, she was escorted by her father down the long marble aisle. The bride and her father were preceded by three trumpeters and twelve members of the Philadelphia Choral Society, who sang "Ode to Joy."

Mr. and Mrs. Rolland Philip Stuart hosted 500 guests at the Philadelphia Town Club. Champagne and oysters were served by circulating waiters during a formal receiving line, as the newly married couple and their parents greeted their young friends, guests who traveled from Allegheny County, and hundreds of business associates of the father of the bride.

The lavish reception, rendered exceedingly festive with a six-course dinner, full orchestra and dancing, was festooned with an abundance of fragrant red and white roses. Two dozen heart-shaped bouquets of red and white roses, iris, daffodils, and cascades of Queen Anne's lace were suspended from the high mirrored ceiling above the heads of the guests. Attached to long fern vines, the

bouquets were set in swaying motion by members of the staff of the Philadelphia Town Club.

The bride is an honors graduate of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. She is the recipient of many prestigious art awards and studied last summer at the Sorbonne in Paris. Her current solo exhibition of oil and watercolor paintings mounted by the Academy, now in its fourth month, continues to attract enthusiastic crowds. The exhibition is a retrospective of the artist's work from age eight to twenty-five. She is hailed by art critics of major Eastern Seaboard newspapers as a prodigy.

The happy couple embarked by steamer from New York on June 26. Instead of the usual wedding trip of a grand tour of Europe, they will undertake a pioneering adventure to California. They will trek across the Isthmus of Panama to Panama City in the company of native guides and continue north by ship to San Francisco Bay. They will make their home for one year with the groom's second cousin, John Sutter. In preparation for taking over the management of Sutter Farms, young Martin Sutter will study ranching from John Sutter, who is the founder of a vast agricultural colony and military stronghold in the northern California interior known as Sutter's Fort.

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Tumultuous waters of the Gulf of Mexico thrashed against the iron hull of The Maryland. The ship pitched precariously as spray from towering waves tossed onto the deck. Philippa

Sutter was determined to finish the oil painting lashed to the easel she'd set up by the railing. Beneath the white caps the water billowed in shades from lime green to turquoise, peacock blue to blueberry, colors she was eager to capture on canvas. She stepped closer to the railing. A wave surged and broke, spraying her as the deck suddenly dropped and rose, propelling her forward, then backward against a coil of rope. She gagged on the salty taste of seawater in her mouth. Her palette flew out of her hand. Greens, reds, and yellows speckled her cheeks and splashed over the bodice and skirt of her white linen gown. "Martin!" she cried. Her husband rushed forward and steadied her. He lead her inside out of the wind and down the corridor to their cabin.

Philippa could not take her eyes off the vibrant colors pooled on the fabric of her dress. The random patterns of stains fascinated her. In their stateroom, Martin pulled her roughly into his arms. 'You could have been swept over the railing," he said, burying his face in her hair. Philippa broke away to stare out the porthole over their bunk. "I've never seen water this color," she said. "The blues and greens are luminescent." Martin knelt behind her, kissing the back of her neck where wisps of her blond hair escaped from their pins. Their bodies swayed with the movement of the ship.

"Don't you want to change your gown?"

Philippa turned and gazed at her husband for a moment. "I'd rather you take your clothes off and pose for me." He smiled and unbuttoned his shirt. He'd been through this many times before and knew what would happen next.

She scraped a chair forward and sat sketching, covering the paper with charcoal lines and shading, both elbows pointed, pivoting from her waist. The oil paint drying on her gown made the fabric stiffen and pull. She shrugged out of her dress and kicked it along the floor. He stared at her, holding the look she wanted, knowing her drawing was prelude to the urgent lovemaking that had escalated in passion and pulsed through them since the day they met and knew they would be lovers for life.

"Martin, that's it! I want that hint of a smirk from the male of the species." She hastily committed it to the sketch before letting the sketchbook fall to the floor. Her charcoal sticks rolled back and forth along the pitching floor boards. She unrolled her stockings and drew her silk petticoat over her head. Martin took her hand and pulled her to him on the bunk. She straddled him, kissing his eyes, his chest, her lips moving fast along his torso, savoring the smells and tastes of him. It happened each time she drew him naked. They awoke at dusk. The wind had died down to a fresh breeze sweeping through the open porthole. Philippa thought of the day she'd met Martin at the Whalermeyer's home, a boy two years her junior, the son of a Swiss beef rancher from southwest Pennsylvania. Sweaty and hot, she'd left the tennis lawn and came upon him in the music room. Sunlight from the open windows fell on his head as he sat at the piano playing a Beethoven sonata. He played with such authority, assured musicality and strength, she was deeply moved to see a man so absorbed by his art.

While he was still at the keyboard she took up the sketchbook she always carried. She drew Martin at the piano, purposeful and elegant. When he looked up from the keyboard into her eyes, the whiteness of his wide smile and luminous brown eyes dazzled her. She saw the light in Martin she'd endeavored for years to depict in sunlight and movement in her paintings, and here it was in the eyes of this young man.

Martin now stretched his legs along their bunk, rubbed his face and laughed. "I was thinking," he said, "of when we met and how bold you were sketching me at the piano. And later at the picnic table. You shoved aside jars of jam and potato salad and knocked over a pitcher of lemonade to sketch my portrait."

"My parents didn't care. They were delighted I was interested in you. They were so afraid I would reach my twenty-fifth birthday without a marriage proposal."

"Your friends told me you were discourteous to suitors," he said.

She sighed. "They were tedious, like inconsequential correspondence. The pie-eating contest was the moment I fell in love with you. You raised your face from the pie plate, peaches dripping from your chin and cream thickening your mustache. I wanted to lick it off."

He laughed. "I wish you had."

"Yes, you laughed just like that. A deep rumble rising up." She escaped from his embrace and knelt on the bunk, gazing out the porthole, watching the water's colors change as the waves roiled against each other. "We're really on our way," she said. "Tell me more about John Sutter and where we're going."

"He's my father's cousin. The Spanish Governor in California gave him a large land grant on two rivers in the Sacramento Valley. He's established a farming, ranching and manufacturing empire."

"Sounds like a European nation."

"It's vast. Forty-eight thousand acres. He invited Father to make the trip, but he's having trouble with his heart. He didn't feel up to it."

She linked her arm in his. "So you volunteered."

"I'm eager to go," he said, pushing up against her. "By working with Sutter I'll learn everything there is to know about ranching before taking over our family's ranch."

"But who lives at Sutter's Fort?"

"We'll have plenty of company. Sutter's trying to make it into a Swiss colony, but he'll settle for any pioneer family and craftsman willing to stay and work for him."

Suddenly she shivered and turned back to look at Martin. "What kind of man is John Sutter to abandon his wife and children in Switzerland for years and settle in the empty American west?"

"We'll soon know."

"My guess is he's a man on the run."

"In any case we'll be safe. He's built a fortress with eighteen-foot high adobe walls guarded by canons."

"Who is he keeping out?" she asked.

"I suspect hostile Indians." He nuzzled her neck. "I know you would rather have spent this year studying at the Sorbonne. Thank you for making the journey."

She looked into his eyes. "You're welcome. I can draw and paint wherever I am, but a year without being with you is unthinkable."

He kissed her paint-stained hands. "I promise that as soon as we get back from California we sail to Europe. We won't even unpack our trunks. We'll go

to Paris and you'll show those old academicians what you can do." He smiled and lay back against the pillows with a self-satisfied expression.

The Maryland bobbed in greeny waters off the Bay of Chagres. Phillippa leaned against the railing, balancing her sketchbook as they awaited their turn to disembark. A bit of sharp-edged charcoal would have worked nearly as well as a quill for this sketch, but she wanted the sharp definition of ink. The vial slid back and forth on a barrel head, threatening to spill. The waves, whipped up by a tearing wind, careened one after the other and buffeted the hull.

"We are to be ferried to shore in lighters," Martin shouted over the wind. "We have a choice of either wading to the beach or being carried by natives, baggage and all."

"Where is the wharf?" Philippa demanded.

He shrugged. "The river flows into the ocean here. Maybe the waters are too turbulent to support one."

Philippa leaned over the railing and saw a barge filled with uniformed health examiners. "Are we all to be inspected like sheep for cholera, palms up, tongues out?"

"You can be sure anyone who is sick will be quarantined," Martin said.

Across the lime-colored water squatted a low village drab as sand. Cloud shadows played over the ruins of a formidable Spanish fort perched atop a high cliff. Sunlight glinted off cannons that trained their round eyes on them like binoculars. Out on the water several dugouts and small barges bobbed in the swells, awaiting their turn to offload passengers. She turned to a clean page and sketched the upturned faces of the health inspectors fending off seabirds as their boat knocked against the Maryland's hull.

They walked down an unpaved muddy road through the fetid town. Martin, loose limbed and tall, loomed as a giant over the compact, dark-skinned natives. She stood eye to eye with a Panamanian in her path before he shifted left and darted around her. Free Negroes, slightly huskier, mingled freely with the Panamanians.

The Chagres Hotel was a one-story ramshackle bamboo hut, faced with plank wood walls. Insects flew in and out of an unevenly set window with half a pane of glass. Their quarters for the night consisted of two cots cordoned off by a muslin curtain from a dozen other canvas bunks.

"This is abysmal," she said.

"You're right, but look at this." He showed her the transit company's written confirmation. They both laughed at the florid description of the Chagres Hotel built in the new part of the city. She glanced out the window

where men and women gathered, sitting on their haunches in the road around a kettle spewing fire. Their wanton laughter, as foreign as their language, made Philippa uneasy. She felt as if she was standing on a landbridge, a crossroads of the world where two oceans and two great continents joined.

Martin moved his cot about six inches away so he could lie on the sagging canvas without kicking her. His feet hung over the edge and his head poked against the muslin curtain of the next cubical which they'd engaged for another eight dollars to store their luggage. She longed to wrap herself in his arms, but the stale air was too sultry to be close. Buzzing and stinging insects tortured her. She sought out the hotel keeper and asked for netting.

"Mosquito netting is very scarce. It will cost you twenty dollars for the night," he told her. Rather than deplete their cash, she traded the faux ruby brooch she kept pinned to the collar of her jacket for just such an occasion.

Martin mumbled in his sleep. Stretching out his leg, he brushed the sole of his foot against her back, slick with sweat. She couldn't sleep, repulsed by the exotic smells of this strange place and surrounded by sounds of wild men bleating in the dark.

The next morning Philippa stood in the hotel doorway watching Martin in a drenching rain arguing toe to toe with a uniformed official.

"I tell you during the night our luggage was taken from the cubical next to us," he explained. "Two trunks, a leather bag, and my wife's painting set."

The official nodded. "And how can you prove this, sir?"

"We have a receipt for the eight dollars for the cubicle we engaged to store our trunks," Philippa said. She stood in the pouring rain and handed him a sodden scrap of paper.

The official eyed it and shrugged. A smile played across his lips. "How do I know you did not use this cubicle for sleeping separately?"

"We've been robbed," Martin shouted. "We are Americans on our way to California."

"Take it up with the police."

"I have already spent two hours in the shack that passes for your city hall. The police tell me the Isthmus is controlled by the Republic of New Granada, so we must deal with you. Philippa, get out of the rain!" He placed his hand on her back and shoved her toward the doorway.

Philippa wondered how could she have missed the scuttling of little men, darker than devils, wrestling with their heavy bags just behind a filmy muslin curtain? Thank God she and Martin had strapped their money belts to their waists. She watched Martin, bent against the rain, his hair plastered against his ears, shaking his finger at the official. She didn't care about her clothes. She was desperate to have her painting set back.

"Martin," she said, pulling him aside. "He wants a bribe. Give him the money he wants so we can take the boat upriver."

An hour later, the luggage restored, a squall hit with a ferocious force. Rain lashed and wind blew as natives helped her from the rotted dock into a shallow boat. She sat in the middle of the bungo, a rough canoe carved out of a mahogany log about eighteen feet long and no more than two feet wide. On her lap she held her portmanteau stuffed with a change of underclothes and a riding habit. Her right hand was cramped from clasping the leather handle of her painting set. Two Panamanians started to load the luggage. She hung on tightly to the sides of the narrow boat as a fierce blast of wind lifted the native boys and blew them and the bags and trunks into the water. Instantly the luggage became waterlogged, bobbed in the torrent and sank. The Panamanians were carried downstream, whirling and shrieking in the rapid current.

"Martin," she shouted over the wind. "We must bribe them to dive for our luggage."

Another hour passed. The storm raged. No amount of pleading or money could induce the Indians to dive for their trunks. They spent a second night at the Chagres Hotel.

Early the next morning, they hired a guide and traveled upriver with two Indians stationed fore and aft of the bungo, sinking their wooden poles into the water and bracing them against the river bottom's sludge. The natives talked to each other in their guttural language. Shoeless and, shirtless, wearing only loincloths, they were as dark-skinned as black olives. Sweat coated them like oil. She took up her sketchbook and began drawing, trying to capture them on paper. Martin slouched deeper into the canoe, unnaturally quiet. She felt his forehead. "You're hot," she said. "I hope it's not a fever."

His mustache was wet from perspiration on his upper lip. The sweat beads on his forehead glistened down his temples. "I'll rally."

As they rounded a bend in the river at noon, five large alligators twitched their heads and slithered down a shallow bank and into the water with a series of bubbling splashes. They swam up to the bungo log, their leathery backs slick in the glaring sun, and backed away only when the Indians shouted at them and spanked the river's surface with their poles.

She cried out in alarm. Martin stood briefly, setting the boat into a frightening rock, before he quickly slumped back to his seat. "Don't let the alligators scare you. The boys know how to handle them." Through the fabric of her blouse she could feel a feverish heat rising from his skin. He gulped water from a gourd, soaked his hat with water, and lay back with his hat over his face.

Each bend of the river brought a new panorama. While he slept she sketched the tall canes, the mango tree with its thick trunk, the ceiba and cocoa

trees, labeling what she could with the Latin names she recalled from botany class. The various hues of green were fiercely rich. She wanted to paint the shrill, ecstatic cries of the birds and the clouds of butterflies winging over the water.

They camped on the outskirts of a village on the sodden shore of the muddy Chagres. The cookfire was momentarily inviting, but neither of them could eat what smelled like the rancid flesh of a small animal, perhaps iguana, burned to a crisp and served on a palm frond. In the waning light shrieking parrots darted among the tangled vines. Small chittering monkeys swung by their tails from branch to branch.

Martin sat in a state of languor that frightened her. She put her hand to his forehead. "I'm going to find help." She pleaded wordlessly to the guide. He beckoned her to follow him along a path. They stopped at a smoky clearing where she was examined by natives emerging from their huts. Pigs circled her. A black-haired Panamanian, who appeared to be part European, stepped out of the doorway of a bamboo hut thatched in palm leaves. He was dressed in work pants and a cotton shirt. "Please help me, she said. "My husband is sick with fever."

He nodded and vanished into his dwelling. He emerged with a knapsack. "I have a few quinine pills and bottled water. You are at the Chagres?"

"Yes. That river camp is not acceptable. I want you tell our guide we wish to sleep here in your village." She drew out dollars from her money belt.

He had a word with the guide. "He says you were welcome to stay in the village, but did not ask, Senora. I have a guest hut you may stay in. Fifteen dollars." He bowed. "My name is Luis."

When she returned to the river camp with Luis she saw Martin pacing along the bank. She noticed his gait was more of a shamble.

He squinted up at her. "Where have you been? I have a splitting headache and pain in every joint."

"This is Luis. He has a quinine drug for anti-malaria, but only a few pills. Take two now." She handed him Luis's bottle of water.

"I will give you fifty dollars for more quinine." Martin's voice sounded like a croak.

Luis shook the vial of pills. "Only four left. Madame has already paid for them. This is all we have in the village. We've had much sickness."

Weaving slightly, Martin said, "We're going to Panama City. Can you guide us there?"

"You will pay me one hundred dollars," Luis said.

Martin closed his eyes and nodded.

Luis brightened and rubbed his hands. He spoke rapidly to their hapless guide who shrugged and sauntered off toward the village.

Philippa smiled at Martin. "I suspect this routine has been played out before."

The rain hit as they bedded down in Luis's dilapidated guest hut, grateful for a roof, even though it leaked. She held her hands over her ears at the hissing and staccato drumming of water pounding down through the leaves of the trees onto the bamboo. In a dry corner, she spread the earthen floor with prickly cow hides. She gave two more quinine pills. As he slept she listened to his lungs pump. She soaked her petticoat with rainwater and applied compresses to his face and arms, stomach and legs, to keep him cool. His pulse was weak. Luis appeared with a bottle of brandy and a packet of laudanum. "He must drink the brandy, then I will rub his skin with it. The alcohol will cool it," Luis said.

She reached for her money belt.

"I will let you know the cost in the morning," Luis said. "You sleep."

She awoke at dawn with a start knowing Martin was worse. The cow hides were soaked with his sweat. Cramps, vomiting, diarrhea. The sultry air stagnated with foul odors. Luis was earning his pay. "Missus, your husband has yellow fever from mosquito or it's the cholera."

Her heart lurched to hear him speak what was on her mind-- infectious, fatal cholera. Martin, his voice barely a whisper, reached for her hand. "Back to Chagres. Quinine."

"No, Martin. There is nothing there for you. We go on. We take the boat to the village of Gorgona and find a doctor. Then we're only twenty-two miles from Panama City."

Luis shook his head. "Better to take boat back to Chagres than to walk the jungle to Panama City."

Martin raised his head off the cow hides high enough to nod his consent.

She turned her back to Luis and held Martin's hot hand between hers. He'd lost weight and had a gaunt, aged look around the eyes. "No, Martin, it's quicker to go on. We've arranged for mules to transport us from Gorgona to Panama City." She envisioned a hard-packed trail leading through forests and fields to the Pacific Ocean. "If we push we can make it in one long day."

Luis threw up his hands.

Martin moaned. "No mules. I want to sleep in the boat." His once lustrous eyes, now blood-shot and narrowed to slits, pleaded with her to change her mind. She was adamant. She imagined a doctor in a white coat awaiting them in a clean airy clinic at the edge of the Pacific Ocean. "Please, Martin, we have to go on."

They got Martin into the bungo and set out up river. Luis opened his knapsack and pulled out two sticks of bamboo and a length of woven cloth and strung it up at the front of the boat as an awning. She sponged Martin's body and lifted his head to bottled drink water. Above the sluggish river the sun slithered on its belly, stretching its arms forward and feet backward across the sky.

All Gorgona had to offer was a sleepless night in another pitiful village. No doctor. No medicines. She gave him the last two quinine pills.

The morning shimmered in intense heat. Philippa was frantic at Luis's lack of urgency. Martin lay in a hammock on the ground waiting for the boys to pick him up. She paced restlessly listening to Luis haggle with a mule driver and his two assistants. "Luis, get these men moving!" she cried out. "Surely you see how sick he is? He could die. Every minute counts!"

"They say they want to be compensated for risk in carrying an infectious man," Luis said.

She dug into her purse and pulled out more money. "Here, give it all to them. Let's go!"

Luis brightened.

With Luis's help she mounted a mule, fitting her legs behind panniers of water and sacks holding their few belongings. Two of the Indians carried the hammock between them with Martin slung precariously low in the netting. They panted like dogs in the moist heat. The mule driver, who would relieve them every half hour, walked apace with Martin, giving him sips of brandy from a bottle. He removed wet rags from Martin's feverish forehead and applied other rags laid over the rumps of the mules to dry.

The trail constricted and they walked single file through a tunnel of rampant forest growth. The footing changed from mud, to dirt, to rock. They entered a deep, impossibly narrow gorge which threaded around corners angled so sharply, the first native carrying the hammock was out of view of his partner as he rounded the rock walls. Martin moaned as he was jostled. The jingling of harness on the mules echoed off the expanse of stone. Philippa dismounted to rearrange the panniers on her mule so she could navigate the trail without scraping her legs against rock.

Suddenly another party of mules and three men appeared from the opposite direction. The leader demanded to pass.

"There is no place to go!" Philippa said.

"Move aside!" Their voices ricocheted off the clay walls like thrown stones.

"Missus, we must back up," Luis said.

"No, they will back up. We go forward. Tell them we carry a man sick with cholera. If they don't leave this gorge they will die of his disease."

Luis delivered her message. In haste the three men dismounted and led their heavily-laden mules backward, striking them with whips. Pitiful braying echoed off the walls. Further down the ravine where there was space to pass the party, they pressed their bodies against their mules, holding bandannas to their faces. One eyed her with a dark-eyed, unreadable expression. "Gracias," she said, ever the well-mannered lady, even in the bush.

They came out into jungle, a tangle of vines sheltering them. Philippa didn't notice at first that heavy rain was falling. In the late afternoon Luis ordered the convoy to rest.

The boys placed Martin under a thick-rooted tree that smelled of all living things in a state of rot. He pulled himself into a sitting position. She crouched in front of him and kissed his forehead. He was cooler to her touch. Relieved, she kissed his lips.

"We must move along quickly, " Luis said.

"He's better," she cried. "It's the brandy. The alcohol has worked magic."

Luis gazed at the darkening sky. "Then put him on a mule or we camp on the trail."

Martin rode slumped on the strongest of the mules named Two Kick. She rode behind, watching his head bob. She called to him. "Almost there, darling."

He raised his right arm laconically. A little later he asked, "What day is it?" His words were slurred from alcohol and weakness.

"July 20th. Won't be long now."

Luis pulled his mule along side her's. "Missus, dusk is upon us. We have eight miles to go. This we cannot do in the dark."

"No, we must not stop. Light torches."

Luis wagged his head. In the dusky light his sad brown eyes sagged deeper into their sockets. "There is a halfway house ahead. One room. Eight dollars per person, including food."

"Tell them only that we have a man who fell and injured his leg."

Luis rode ahead to deal with the proprietor.

Martin's fever had escalated. Under the hut's scanty cover of palm leaves she sponged his flaming face, neck and arms with brandy and tipped the water gourd to his lips. She sang nursery songs to him. "Bring our meal to the hut, Luis. I don't want them to see Martin."

Luis returned with dried beef, cooked plantain and an English ale. Martin gave her a trace of a smile as he swallowed the beer, wetting his cracked lips with it.

"Close your eyes. Missus. I will see to him."

"Thank you, Luis." She spread a mule blanket over the dirt floor and curled up next to Martin. She fell asleep instantly and dreamed of gale winds over the Pacific.

She awoke with a start in bright moonlight leaking through the palm fronds overhead. Quickly, she ran her fingertips over Martin's skin, leaning over to hear his breathing. His skin was cool, his breath was not labored. "Luis, wake up. He is better now. Let's move."

"No, Senora. Trail very dangerous at night, many rocks, steep cliffs."

"The moon will light our way. Wake the others. Light torches. We go now!"

They moved along the trail in and out of patches of moonlight flickering through the forbidding foliage overhead. Using thick vines, Luis lashed Martin to Two Kick. Philippa rode behind him and the Indian boys walked. Luis improvised torches and their lights cast eerie shadows. The Indians spoke to each other in querulous tones. "What are they saying, Luis? "

She heard him suck his lips. "They are afraid of the cholera."

"I can't worry about it. They're being well-paid."

On the path the stones underfoot became rocks, then boulders. The mules brayed in protest, then stumbled with every other step, tossing their riders precariously from left to right. At Luis's suggestion, they dismounted, except for Martin, and led the animals. Along the less narrow parts of the trail the Indians walked on each side of Martin, their shoulders pressed against him to keep him upright. "Gracias, gracias," she said.

Moving forward through the torchlight, Philippa listened to the jingling harness and the panting mules, as the trail began to wind downhill. Luis raised his torch in a signal. The group stopped. Luis led them off the trail and into the narrow strip of brush alongside. He spoke rapidly to the native boys who crouched down on their haunches. He turned to Philippa. "We rest here until dawn."

"There is no time!" she said angrily.

"Trail down too steep in the dark." He held up his hand, slanted it down.

She closed her eyes in frustration. " Tell me, Luis, have the mules walked this trail before?"

"Oh yes, many times."

"Would you say the beasts are sure-footed on the trail?"

"Si, Senora."

"The mules do not look down at every footing. They follow the one ahead. "

Luis nodded, a wary expression on his sad face.

"Then let us place the most experienced mule in the lead and continue." In the flickering torchlight the Indians eyed one another. At Luis's signal, they moved forward.

The trail wound around the cliff. The moon was so bright it illuminated the nearly perpendicular ledge carved in its rocky face. The escarpment dropped a hundred feet or more down a ravine of bushes clinging to rocks and sharp boulders. The mules picked their way down cut-out stairs in lurching movements, hooves clattering. Two Kick, carrying Martin, walked in the middle of the train. She leaned forward and called to him. "Are you all right?" No answer. The natives were uncommonly quiet. No chatter or singing. An occasional sucking in of breath. Down, down. Philippa's heart thudded. Beyond the tops of trees silvered in the moonlight she could see an enormous plain spread out below.

Suddenly she heard a wild screech as Martin's mule disturbed some creature crossing the path. Two Kick bolted and veered left. There was an instant of silence, a whooshing, then a thud of something heavy falling. An earsplitting noise erupted as men and animals screamed and brayed. Philippa's heart stopped in terror. She rushed to Luis's side. He held his torch out over the crevice, but the shallow light illuminated nothing below. The moon sailed out from under a cloud and lit the ghoulish scene some thirty feet below. Martin's mule had skidded down the cliff and landed on its back on a wide ledge, its legs upright like a turned-over table. Tangled in the loosened vines that had tied him to the mule, Martin lay sprawled on a rocky shelf with his head thrown back.

Philippa screamed. Luis gasped. The Indians crooned and crossed themselves.

"I must go down." She looked wildly down into the gorge and up the cliff. "Get me a rope. Make one!"

"He is dead," Luis said. His voice echoed, bouncing off the cliff.

She clasped her hands over her ears. "No! We must bring him up."

Two of the Indians climbed to the top of the cliff to cut vines. Luis lashed himself about the waist and started down, tugging on the vine to test its strength. The lighter of the two boys followed him down. The other two formed a human anchor, securing the ends of the twisted vines. They leaned

back against the cliff, grunting from the strain. The moon vanished and it began to rain.

She stood against the stony cliff, legs trembling. She pressed her hand against her mouth, jaw aching from grinding her teeth. Luis sent the rope up. The Indians found a board for her to use as a seat and lowered her over the precipitous cliff. She grasped the moist vines, leaning forward to try to see Martin. She jumped onto the slate shelf and crouched over him, putting a finger to the pulse point at his broken neck. Rain poured down, drenching her. Gently she closed the staring eyes, then threw herself onto him, pressed her length against him.

Luis lifted her off the corpse. Rain spiked the coarse black hair over his forehead as he turned her head, forcing her to look at him. "We will bury him here because of the cholera."

"No, we must take him with us."

Luis shook his head. Then he leaned over the body lifting the sodden shirt, lowering the suspenders.

"Leave him alone!"

Luis stood up and handed her Martin's money belt. He placed Martin's wedding ring in her palm, and she clenched her hand around it. Luis and the boy moved about the rock where Martin lay with his fine head askew. They yanked away branches of thorny bush and bent down to collect stones of all sizes. Luis placed three thick branches over Martin's body. The rain turned the soil to mud as they tossed the stones and handfuls of dirt over her beloved's face. She stood in the streaming rain, feeling as if they were killing him over and over again.

# Chapter Two

Philippa was shaking uncontrollably when they entered Panama City. Luis took charge, escorting her to a hotel where she was assigned to a cot in a room with seven other bunks, no muslin curtains separating them. Two cots at the end of the room were occupied by a Mexican woman and her young companion, who watched sidelong as she peeled off her soiled jacket. They had their hands inside an ornate iron cage, feeding their birds. Philippa turned her back against the smells of bird waste. The women chittered in the same tones as the chirps of their pets. Philippa fell asleep and awoke to bells clanging. She startled up, fearing an emergency. No, only church bells, like a shrill clarion of dread, ringing on the hour. She got up and walked around the plaza, increasing her pace, nearly running, allowing the storm of grief to rage, and returned physically spent. Tears stood in her eyes. She cried herself into a fretful sleep, knowing horror and guilt would be part of every breath she took for the rest of her days.

After a breakfast of tropical fruits and cocoa-scented coffee she ventured back to the plaza. By following the inside of the wall that surrounded the town she walked nearly two miles. She avoided the alleys and side courtyards because of their stench from lack of drainage. The pervasive aroma of tobacco did little to mask the animal and human smells. Brick and stone houses leaned together in stages of deterioration. Noisy crowds circled the vendors. The men whooped and laughed for no reason other than their natural exuberance. Ill

people leaned against the walls casting their dark shadows onto the cobbled pavement. She counted twelve churches, each more dilapidated than the next.

She could not stop crying. To ease a gnawing hunger she bought bread, mangoes, and chili peppers from street vendors and ate them as she sat on a wall in front of the cathedral in a patch of shade afforded by the tall towers. The gleaming spires appeared to be the only element of the structure that was not in a state of decay.

"Senora, you buy cigarillos?"

She shook her head. The street urchin smelled of dried urine and boyish sweat, but was blessed with white teeth and lustrous brown eyes. The audacious child lit a cigarette and blew fragrant smoke in her face. She took it out of his hand and inhaled it.

Philippa sat on the edge of a stiff-backed chair and answered the questions of the doctor from New Orleans. He was a French gentleman, petite of stature and balding, with a formidable set of waxed mustaches, coarse as rabbit whiskers, that extended to either side of his prim mouth. It was an affectation she found absurd.

"I have diarrhea," she said.

"Have you been exposed to cholera?"

She burst into tears. "My husband was burning with fever on our way here. He's dead."

The doctor examined her. His touch on her skin reminded her of Martin and she began to tremble. She felt anointed with the scent of his pungent cologne. "You show no sign of fever. I believe you are sick from eating tropical fruit in the square." He gave her a packet of remedy powders.

"I feel a fool." She drew a shuddered breath.

"You are suffering from a great shock, Mrs. Sutter. Rest yourself." He called to his servant who brought them cups of rosemary mint tea . "What are your plans?"

She stared down at the threadbare carpet . Tears were starting again. "With the help of a government interpreter I was able to procure passage to San Francisco Bay on a three-masted ship due to arrive from Valparaiso."

"Ah, you will get out of this stultifying heat. The smile in his voice pulled her head up like a magnet. "But why do you not go home?"

"What I do is none of your concern."

He nodded politely. "I quite agree, but you are tightly wound with grief. You need your family."

She sat in silence.

"Perhaps if you tell me what happened you will find some relief," he said.

For the past few days, as a maddened dog will turn its head to nip its tail, she had chased details of their ghoulish trek through the Panamanian jungle, as if by recreating the scenario she could change its outcome. "If I had agreed to turn back at Gorgona, Martin might have survived. If only I hadn't insisted we continue the journey at night. Martin's mule stumbled and bolted off the cliff. His death is my fault." For the first time she voiced what tortured her. She inhaled the medicinal smells of the French doctor's office and listened to the relentless ticking of a ship's clock on his desk.

"It appears to me, Madame, that if your husband was strong enough to ride a mule, you made the correct choice to go on to Panama City. He was the victim of an accident, an unfortunate one to be sure, but you should not blame yourself."

His kind words drifted weightless to her shoulders like feathers. Nothing could assuage her guilt.

"You are determined to sail on the ship from Valparaiso?"

"Yes."

"What will you do in northern California?"

"I'm going to Sutter's Fort on family business."

"Ah, yes. You are Mrs. Sutter. Intriguing." The doctor pressed his long fingers around his tea cup. "What is your training?"

"I draw and paint." She did not elaborate on the masters she'd studied or prizes won.

Suddenly he stood. "Please wait for a few minutes." He went to his desk cluttered with papers and open text books, took up quill and ink. He wrote a letter on vellum paper, so creamy and absorbent she craved a piece to draw on. He sealed his letter and called for the servant to deliver it. Pleased with himself he stood in front of her chair and looked at her carefully. She had not had her white linen suit laundered and had barely arranged her hair.

"On the hill outside the city are clustered mansions of families of great wealth and position," he said. "A young lady of your breeding will be welcomed by these families, many of whom I know well. I have written to a titled lady and her husband, good friends, who will send a carriage for you. They will take you into their home as a guest to recover from your ordeal. It is two weeks before the ship from Valparaiso arrives. You may change your mind by then. You may want to go home instead."

"Who would take in an unknown woman?"

"My dear, they will receive you on my recommendation. This family is British. They made their fortune with rubber plantations in Central America and now live quietly with servants in their large hacienda. They would delight in your company. Their sons and daughters are grown, married and living in other fine houses with children of their own."

She stared at him.

"Think of it as my prescription to ease your grief," he said heartily. "You will share stimulating conversation and visits to the consulate families in their splendid homes. Instead of the discomforts of your cramped hotel and the diversions of our rotting plaza, you will enjoy appetizing food, siestas in a hidden courtyard fragrant with tropical flowers, hot baths, sparkling wines, a good cry each night." Still standing, he looked down at her. "This is the sensible way, is it not, for a well-bred young lady to seek refuge until she is strong enough to face a long sea voyage home?"

She saw herself kneeling over Martin in the thrashing rain, her fingers examining the grotesque angle of his snapped neck, and understood for the first time Christian martyrs's craving for flagellation. She rose from the chair in the doctor's office, hurried down the corridor, out the door and into the square, running back to her hotel, darting in and out of glaring sunlight.

Philippa sat on her cot and took up a quill pen and paper. She thought of her mother. Tears filled her eyes. She began to sob and could not stop. She lay on the bed, knees pulled up to her chest. She cried until she was spent, depleted of all emotion and energy. Her mother's dear image filled the void. On the day of the sailing of The Maryland her mother had fastened her dark-fringed eyes on hers, as if to memorize every detail of her face. Their coloring and bone structure were identical, aristocratic enough to tone down the fullness of the lips and manic glitter of their blue-green eyes. Philippa had felt the silkiness of her mother's fingers running around the rims of her ears and straightening the wheat-colored hair that curled at her temples. Such a long journey to Panama, across the Isthmus then north on the Pacific Ocean to San Francisco Bay. When the ship's whistle blew, they clasped hands, looking like two bird-like buxom sisters, lost to each other, already worlds apart. But then she'd had Martin. Now she was totally alone.

*Panama City, August 11, 1847*

*Dearest Mother,*

*I have dreadful news: Martin is dead. He was sick with cholera. You know how I push when I am determined. Desperate to reach a doctor I forced the Panamanian boys to travel with him through the jungle at night. The mule he was riding bolted off a cliff. He fell with it and broke his neck. Because of the fever we left him huddled on a slab of rock in a chasm buried under branches. It is too horrible to describe. I cannot stop crying. When I am not stunned by shock, my grief builds like a storm, blown by violent winds of guilt.*

*When little brother succumbed to fever despite your hourly care for him, did you feel guilt as I do? Yes. We are linked inexorably. You were never yourself after he died. You know my heart has ruptured.*

*I enclose a letter to Martin's parents. Please see that it is delivered.*

*How I miss Martin! Light surrounded him like a halo. You raised me a fastidious and proper lady. I thought I had defied convention as an art student, but I knew nothing of real emotion. Our love deepened every moment of this journey. Now joy and peace of mind have gone dark.*

*Panama City is a hell hole of stench and raucous noises. I know you would prefer that I come home directly, but I feel that by completing Martin's mission to learn about ranching I can keep him close to me. How he looked forward to riding across Cousin's John's vast lands! He used to talk about rounding up cattle the way I talk about painting. I am determined to continue my journey to Captain Sutter. I will glean what information I can absorb in my artistic brain about bullock ranching, curing of hides and such. I may not return for the better part of a year. Passage around Cape Horn on the fastest of ships is four to six months. Under no circumstances will I ever again set foot in Panama.*

*I've just learned that a space is available on the freighter Fair Wind bound for San Francisco Bay. It is due to arrive from Talcahuano, Chile tomorrow. The captain of a swift ship, which passed close enough to the Fair Wind to allow the officers to converse through speaking trumpets, advised the Panama City dock master that the death of a passenger from cholera has freed up a berth. I can only hope that the poor unfortunate's effects were slipped into the sea with him and that his mattress has been aired.*

*Dearest Mother, I embrace you and kiss you. Write to me at Sutter's Fort on the Sacramento River and ask Father to include a packet of money. Bribes to these despicable natives have depleted my reserves. I will need $300 to purchase passage back to New York.*

*Your loving Daughter, Philippa*

Philippa sat on her hotel cot listening to the songless birds thump their wings against their cage at the end of the dormitory room. The Mexican lady and her companion lay back fully dressed, mouths open, snoring in differing registers. At her feet rested a leather satchel holding Martin's few possessions. She emptied it putting the contents in two piles, one to keep and one to sell.

She rubbed Martin's work shirt under her nose, sniffing greedily for his scent. Sweet sage mixed with the smell of his skin blossomed and a trace of his sweat, acrid from eating strange foods, had dried on the gingham chambray in the hot sun. Tears clogged her throat and stung her eyes.

Both guests and workers at the hotel knew from Luis of the violent death of her bridegroom. They muttered and sucked on their teeth, but kept a respectful distance from the delicate American widow, who sat on her cot, staring into space, crying continuously.

Enrico, the younger of the sons of the privileged family who ran the hotel, leaned against the doorjamb watching her as she sifted through Martin's things. More pompous boy than man, Enrico was dressed in a black linen shirt and pants decorated with red braid. He and his brother left the physical labor to native employees, who dropped into their hammocks in the back garden whenever one or the other of the senors turned his back.

She eyed him as he watched her. "Yes, there may be something here for you." She examined Martin's spyglass. "This was given to him by his father."

Enrico leaned forward in anticipation of receiving the prize.

"Come here, you can look through it."

The boy sauntered over to her. Dangling silver accessories attached to his trousers clinked and jingled as he approached. She could smell the pomade that stiffened his glossy black hair. He trained the spyglass on the women at the end of the room, crying out in alarm as their ugly open mouths jumped into close focus. He stepped back and looked at Philippa through the lens. She regarded him steadily as he gazed at her face and lowered the spy glass, admiring her physique as she sat on the cot. Cheeky boy.

She thought of how she had trained the glass on Martin one day at sea. She'd watched him turn and bow courteously to the lady passengers strolling by. His posture relaxed when he stepped over to talk with two sailors mending canvas. His threw his head back and laughed at a confidence one sailor shared, sky-blue eyes scrunched up in merriment. At one point he looked directly her way. Not expecting to see her, he didn't. She felt invisible and it frightened her.

She held her hand out to Enrico. "Give it to me. She slid the brass sections of the instrument apart and back with a click.

She picked up Martin's belt. She buckled it and circled her arms around it, remembering the press of her body against his. She had memorized his musculature, how his calves bunched when he bounced on his toes in impatience.

"Is good leather," Enrico said.

"Yes, quite supple." She ran it through her fingers. If she kept the belt she could climb on the chair, hook it over the beam above, slip the it under her chin and then drop, as if over a cliff in the rain. She could snap her neck. She tossed the belt on the floor, sliding it across the planks toward Enrico.

That afternoon she lay on her cot, eyes closed, listening to sounds through the open window. She heard the monotonous singsong of hawkers, flamboyant guitar music and twittering laughter of girls drawing water from a well. Children shrieked in delight, then fell quarreling. An officer's loud order directly outside startled her as troupes on horses galloped around the corner,

followed by rattling wagons. She rose, laced up her boots and walked into the square where she purchased a calico dress and underclothes from a ladies' shop.

Holding the packages under her arm she watched two house painters who struggled down the crumbling church steps, swearing at one another as they balanced their pots of paint and ladder. She followed them down a narrow side street and through an alley reeking with garbage and fresh plops of animal and human waste. With her handkerchief to her nose she rounded a corner to see the painters entering a building by a side door.

She gazed over a wall at the shop's patio crammed with desks, tables, mismatched chairs, and Persian carpets draped over wooden boards. She stepped inside. The musky smell of antiques permeated the close air.

"Greetings, Senora." A balding shopkeeper bowed her into a cluttered space crammed with furnishings. "You are English?"

"American."

"I have mahogany bedrooms from New England." He steered her by her elbow. "Crystal chandeliers from France."

"I am interested only in artists' paints." Not understanding, he led her to his display of house paints, varnishes, and rolls of paper hangings. She looked around, picked up an English landscape, propped it on chair arms, and mimicked painting it, standing close, standing back, wielding a phantom paint brush like a wand.

She heard a chuckle from the patio. The two workmen she'd followed sat on dining room chairs, entertained by her performance.

"Ah!" The shopkeeper slapped his forehead with the flat of his hand. From a drawer of a chest he slid out a bulky leather case and set it on the dusty top. She smelled his garlicky breath as he licked his thick lips. Flexing his fingers to heighten the suspense, the shopkeeper spread his hands across the artist's case before springing the two locks with his thumbs.

The palette was clogged with dried paint, not well mixed–the artist was an amateur--but she could replace it easily enough with a polished board. Two crocks of rabbit-skin glue for sealing canvas were still intact. She swept the hair of the sable brushes across her fingers. The pigments, mixed with oil, were so old they were stored in bulging pig bladders. She'd been using oils in metal tubes for four years. She squeezed out a bit of blue, finding it acrid, but supple. The released aroma touched her at a deep sensory level. Tears sprang to her eyes. She was hungry to paint.

"How much?"

The shopkeeper stared at her, shrugging his shoulders.

The younger of the two painters watching from the patio strolled through the crowded showroom and approached her.

He was a handsome stud with his brown eyes flashing up at her under dark brows. "The boss doesn't speak English."

"How much is the artist case?" she asked.

The painter crossed his arms across his chest and leaned against a table. "Forty dollars."

"I will pay twenty."

"You will pay thirty-five. It's from Chile."

She regarded him. "You look like a shrewd businessman. I will leave unless we settle on twenty-five."

"What does it mean, shrewd?"

"Smart, clever."

"Yes, I am smart!" the boy said leaning forward. "But I only know how to paint the side of house. You teach me how to be an artist and you can have the case for free." His sibilant voice was breathy, his tongue wide and very pink as he flicked a glance at her bosom. She laughed at his impudence. She took bills from her purse and counted out twenty-five dollars. "I am unable to teach you to paint pictures, but since you are smart, perhaps you can learn on your own. Do you know where I can find canvas?"

"If you give me a generous tip I will go to the shipyard and find lengths of canvas."

"Good. I also want you to go also to the newspaper office and buy sheets of paper, ink and lead pencils." She estimated what would be needed and handed him a bill and several coins. Do you know what charcoal is?" she asked him.

He nodded. "Burnt wood from cooking fires. You want small sticks to fit in the hand. I will get them for you."

Looking into his lustrous eyes, she took a deep breath, relaxing her shoulders for the first time in days. She would liked to have painted him. "What is your name?"

"Joe."

She laughed. "Such an American name!"

He ducked his head, embarrassed. "Here we say Jose."

"Please bring the supplies to my hotel by the big fountain and you will receive three dollars."

The next morning Philippa stood as instructed on shore, the breeze in her face, her portmanteau at her feet and the painting case slung over her shoulder

by a leather strap. With her hand leveled above her eyes to cut the glare, she stared out to sea, puzzled. The Fair Wind was nowhere in view. She saw only small boats bobbing in the waves. The wind was so loud she did not hear footsteps in the sand behind her. Suddenly she was rudely shouldered by a seaman who lifted her onto his back. The spray of wind-whipped breakers soaked her boots and the hem of her calico dress as they plunged into the water. She was heaved into a rickety boat, derriere first, and no sooner had righted herself on a splintery plank when the oarsmen shouted to each other and they set out. Around the headland, she saw the Fair Wind, a clumsy ship rolling in the surf, her thick anchor rope tugging like the arm of a child anxious to be off.

She climbed up loose netting, slimy from brine. A giant of a sailor lifted her at the waist over the bulwark and set her down on the deck, leering as he brushed his huge hands across her chest, squeezing her breasts. The memory of Martin's gentle touch flashed. She cried out, slapped the seaman's face, and was rewarded as he stumbled back, awed to be struck so forcibly by such a diminutive person.

Once in her room, she lit an oil lamp and set it on a plank under the eves. The upper berth was not ideal, but when the lady died at sea a month ago, the resident of this berth assumed her more desirable place below. No matter. When the sea sloshed along the gangway and leaked into the cabins, she would be above the water line. All was quiet for the moment except for the tedious music of a fiddler and banjo player, fellow passengers in the next cabin. She slept though barbaric melodies twanging in her ears. When she awoke the ship was underway. Weighing on her mind was the knowledge a fellow passenger had shared that the tons of coal rolling in the hold below could combust at any moment and set the ship afire.

For two days gales of wind whipped up the waves into a seething froth. The freighter pitched and lurched, plunging beneath one behemoth swell, then barely righting before scaling the next. Philippa stood braced against the bulwark and imagined Martin lifting his face to the storm, eyes shut, smiling, until memories, chilling her more than the cold rain, drove her from deck. She huddled in her bunk in a state of teeth-chattering numbness. The stark cold was all the more severe after Panama's intense heat. The noise of the storm, a fitful, savage roar even with a pillow pulled around her ear, penetrated with the ache of a throbbing tooth. She listened to its mournful cry all night and sobbed for Martin.

The Panama squall spent itself and they were becalmed beneath a relentless sun on an ocean still as a shellacked seascape. She sat on deck, sketching and pushed her bonnet back to let the hot sun play about her face and hair. Mrs. Emmeline York, her cabin mate, approached her. "A fair wind is one commodity the Fair Wind lacks," she said.

Mrs. York was a tiny, dour individual from upstate New York traveling to her husband, a Captain stationed at the presidio in San Francisco. She took to

knocking her umbrella against the bedpost whenever Philippa grew panicky and cried out in fear from the wind. Philippa Sutter, the widow who cried at night, was a new set of ears for the passengers after four months at sea, but she preferred to keep to herself, which was a torment to Mrs. York, starved for conversation. "People who are wrapped up in themselves make small packages," she'd announced one morning.

Philippa gave her a small smile. "I have not been good company. I apologize." She forced herself to think of something to say. "I imagine the cow and crates of chickens Captain Jackson took on at Panama City suffered greatly during the storm. I hope the cook coaxed the cow to bend its knees."

Mrs. York laughed. Philippa joined her at the railing. "Look how the seabirds skitter along the tops of the waves. Their stick-like legs pump furiously, as if they are trying to keep up with the vessel."

The birds dropped to the deck seeking morsels of food, one winging up with a terrible squawk just before a sailor grabbed its feet. "Will you kill and roast it?" Philippa asked.

"Aye, Miss," he answered. She'd not been troubled again by the rude seaman who lifted her onboard. The sailors interested her. They went about their tasks with the practiced rhythm and purpose she admired among all laborers.

As she sketched Mr. Bates and Mr. McKinley spreadeagled on narrow spars high above the deck against their billowing sails, she called up to them, "What is San Francisco Bay like?"

"Beautiful as a woman," Bates said.

"But the town, Yerba Buena, is ugly, built on a mudflat and enshrouded in fog," McKinley answered.

Mrs. York scolded her. "'T'isn't seemly," she said, lips puckered. "Common sailors are vulgar and a woman is judged by the company she keeps."

"Do you find me vulgar?" Philippa asked.

Mrs. York started to say 'yes,' and then she shrugged, threw her head back and roared as if the absurdity of custom that would forbid a lady from speaking with two courteous, hard-working young men had just occurred to her. She laughed for the first time in a long while. Mrs. York took her arm. "How good it is to see you without your long face. Forgive me for being curt these past days. If I would have a friend, I must be one."

They sailed more westerly than northwesterly, twenty degrees latitude, until they were more than halfway from Panama to San Francisco. One warm evening as the sun dipped behind the horizon Philippa stood at the railing, letting the salt breeze rake her long, loose hair. In the quiet moments as the colors of the sky flamed and folded into the sea she felt Martin's presence.

How odd that she could not recall one sunset from their journey south to Panama. She smiled realizing they'd spent nearly every moment wrapped in each other's arms in their bunk. She thought about what lay ahead. When the Fair Wind finally sailed into San Francisco Bay, she would disembark and board a steamer upriver to Sutter's Fort. Then what? Cousin John was expecting an experienced rancher to spend months apprenticing with him, not a girl who rode English saddle to the hounds. If he sent her away, where would she go? She had very little money left. It would be months before her father sent money for her long journey home. She shivered with anxiety. She looked at the churning waves and felt herself sinking beneath them. The only thing she had to sell was her diamond and sapphire wedding ring, but who living in a mud flat town would have the resources to buy it?

That night she was awakened by moaning from her cabin mate. Mrs. York was in great pain from headache and stomach upset. The ship's doctor diagnosed bilious fever, an ailment of the liver, but Philippa could read his thoughts that cholera had struck again.

Emmeline York shifted in her bunk, wrestling with great pain. Philippa knelt on the wood floor, placing wet towels over her forehead. "I fear death is hovering over me," Emmeline said. "The angel in the night is brushing my face with his wings."

Philippa leaned across her in her bunk and dusted away a hanging cobweb.

Emmeline squeezed her hand. Her small beady eyes, the shape of black buttons, were red-rimmed and soulful. She whispered "Go and see my husband when we arrive, for I will surely die here."

"Would you like me to paint your portrait to bring to him?"

Emmeline nodded before drawing her knees up in another spasm of pain.

When the doctor pressed his splayed hands over Mrs. York's stomach and hips she shrieked.

"What is it?" Philippa asked.

"I suspect inflammation of the appendix, but I will wait to be sure. She is old and frail. If I operate she may die. However, if I don't and she does has appendicitis, the organ will rupture, spreading its venom, and she will surely die."

The crisis brought Martin's last hours vividly to Philippa's mind. She consoled herself by focusing on the portrait. In the airless cabin she set up a makeshift easel, sticks of pine nailed hastily together by the ship's carpenter. She tacked a piece of canvas on a board, sealed it with rabbit glue, and set the board on the easel. She sketched Emmeline York's figure against a background of the ocean. She drew details of the face from memory and imagination as Captain York would not want to gaze upon the face of his wife contorted in

suffering. When she mixed and applied paints she moved out to the companionway so that the fumes of oil and turpentine would not disturb the sick woman.

Emmeline York lay quietly in her bunk, considerably anaesthetized by her twice-daily dose of laudanum. Without the drug she would be screaming from stomach pain. "Show me your drawings of your husband," she whispered.

Philippa tucked the nude drawings under the stack, but Emmeline caught her. Her long finger slid out from under the coverlet and struck her hand with surprising strength. "Show me those."

Emmeline pushed her shoulders up on the pillows, her graying hair dry and lifeless as dead leaves, and reached for her eyeglasses. Philippa handed her the first drawing, the paper crackling as she spread it out across the bony drawn-up knees. Emmeline leaned forward and blew away powered bits of dried charcoal, examining the drawing and crooked her fingers impatiently for the next. Philippa skipped an intimate pose and Emmeline rapped her knuckles against the bunk. "Do you think I have not seen a man naked before? I birthed six sons. Your Martin has a beautiful body, as perfectly proportioned as your marriage. His member is superb."

Philippa hooted from embarrassment. The spasm of surprise sent her into sobs. Emmeline stroked her bent head. "Tell me about him," she said.

Philippa sat on the side of the narrow bunk. "He believed in my vision. My exhibitions were successful. But no matter how well painted, I felt my portraits and landscapes remained inanimate. I wanted to make my work spring to life. Then Martin came. The very light surrounding him inspired me. I began to experiment with lighter colors applied in a rougher, more tactile technique. The results were jarring, but Martin saw what I was after. He made me go on. He freed me from restraints of tradition."

"I want you to paint my portrait in this new style. Be bold. Don't disappoint him."

Philippa lit two lamps and returned to her easel.

"Captain York first kissed me at a promenade at his Virginia military academy."

"What were you wearing that day?"

"A white satin gown, the high-waist wrapped with a demur pink ribbon and a bold decolletage showing my fine bosom."

The doctor returned. When Emmeline's evening dose of laudanum and brandy were in full strength, inhibitions slid off her glistening body. "Show me Martin's nude sketches again." When the drug wore off she thrashed and moaned on the sheets, cursing. Philippa held her hot hands until the doctor sent her up on deck for air. He decided to operate in the morning.

That evening Philippa worked with her oil paints in the companionway. Inspired by the mandate to create a bold portrait, she painted Miss Emmeline in middle age, but dressed in the white gown she'd worn at the promenade. The white dress and healthy countenance contrasted against a turbulent sea of blue white-capped waves breaking into green foam. The frothy greens and deep blues appeared to vibrate, creating a feeling of well-being, as if Emmeline was enjoying the arduous voyage to reach her husband. Philippa wanted the work to evoke fond memories. She worked in a trance, pursuing the play of light. "It's what Martin wants of me," she said aloud.

At dawn Emmeline saw the finished portrait and clasped her hand in gratitude. "Martin freed you to paint like this. Now free yourself from his death. You are not to blame."

The doctor operated. She died. The sailors buried her at sea, or attempted to. The sea ran high, then dipped as if emptying into yawning pits. Rain fell in sheets as seven passengers and crew stood shivering at the railing to witness the burial at sea. Three seaman shouldered Emmeline York's hastily-assembled pine box into the deep. But the ship wobbled in a sudden lurch and the fickle ocean tossed the casket back at them.

Alone in her pitching cabin, Philippa tried repeatedly to draw Martin's face, but could not remember it. When she looked upon the drawings she made of him, a self-loathing penetrated her senses as violently as the roaring winds drove cliff-high waves across the sodden decks. The ship swayed like a big-hipped whore. Her possessions skidded from their shelves to the floor. In the wind the door banged open and shut, open and shut. She lay exhausted from sour seasickness in Emmeline's vacated bunk and watched as ocean water sloshing down the corridor seeped into the cabin, soaking her clothes.

The ship approached San Francisco Bay and for three days was held off shore by blinding fog.

Persistent knocking against the ship and mens' shouts awakened her before dawn. She threw on a shawl and clamored up the narrow stairway to the main deck. Just as she clasped her hands on the railing, a sailor scaling a rope ladder from below swung himself over. "Welcome to Californie, Ma'am." She smelled the freshness of the morning air on his wool coat. He wore a heavy black hat pulled down over his ears. His blue eyes bore into hers with an intensity that thrilled her. At last she had arrived. His beard held drops of moisture that sparkled in the first rays of light streaking the eastern sky. Looking over the railing, she saw the pilot boat that would escort the ship through the treacherous narrows.

Philippa stood at the bulwark of the Fair Wind awaiting Major York. An out-of-breath messenger, who must have run all the way from the Presidio, told her that the major was detained. All the other passengers had disembarked and

she was eager to begin her journey upriver to Sutter's Fort. With Martin's spyglass she studied the bleak town of Yerba Buena tucked in a cove. Wood-framed mercantiles and festering commercial enterprises to serve sailors and traders were lined up at the water's edge like birds on a branch. Behind these facades lay a crude plaza. Dirt lanes marched up hills where frame houses, adobe residences and more humble dwellings clung precariously. Barely a tree grew, save for dwarf oaks and, off to the west, a cluster of greenery surrounding the Presidio. As might be expected, the United States regiment had snatched the most scenic spot for its military post.

Through the lens of the spyglass she was able to pick out two hotels, a warehouse and a ramshackle building with tasteless six-foot high lettering on the side promoting the occupant's expertise at shoeing horses. Cows herded along the shore moved sluggishly through sticky mud. A number of ruddy-faced men, who look to be Indians and Spaniards, milled aimlessly around the main road. As the sun beat down on her shoulders, the smell of brine and dead fish rose. How could a port this dilapidated be new? She'd heard the sailors say that even the Hudson Bay Company had ceased trading here. Clearly this village had no future. If the scene before her were a watercolor, she would have picked up her thickest brush and painted it out.

Suddenly the image of Major James Kenneth York in dress uniform hurrying up the gangplank filled the lens. He'd waited five years to embrace his loved wife. Philippa, knowing the grief that awaited him, must deliver the bad news.

He looked at her, through her, past her for his wife. She was succinct with her explanation. He threw his head back and moaned, plunged his fist into his open palm. He kicked wooden water buckets clattering across the deck and punched at the un-reefed, slack sails. He whirled back to her, his whiskered face still flush from his swift ride from the Presidio, his eyes bulging. "Tell me she isn't dead!" he cried, beseeching her to admit she was mistaken.

Captain Jackson and the first mate interrupted their inventory and dispatching of cargo to escort the trembling Major York below deck. Philippa insisted he rest in her cabin and ordered a cup of tea to be brought to him. The Major sat on the lower bunk, slumped over, his long arms slung nearly to the floor. He asked her to describe his dear wife's mood during her last days. As she talked she pressed a handkerchief to her nose, acutely aware of the confined space's rank smell after the fresh air on deck. Finally she unrolled Emmeline's portrait, allowing her art to speak for her. He gazed at the face, startled by the accuracy of the image. Then he leaned forward to study the painting. His voice was hoarse when he spoke. "It is fanciful, yet it is truly Emmeline's spirit." He moaned and dropped his face into his large hands. "She shouldn't have come."

"Her appendix could have flared when she was picking apples alone on your farm," Philippa said gently.

"Ah, no!" He kneaded his forehead with the heels of his palms. "I should not have insisted she make the long journey. But I've been so lonely here."

Her heart leapt to him. "My husband died in Panama. He fell off a cliff."

He looked at her out of sorrowful eyes.

"Emmeline wanted me to believe it was an accident," she said.

They stared at each other, their eyes brimming with tears. "And do you?" he asked.

Her effort had been to comfort him, not herself, but there was to be no comfort for either of them. "Yes, an accident. But I am responsible."

In the afternoon Philippa boarded a river sloop which ferried passengers between Yerba Buena and John Sutter's colony of New Helvetia. From the bits of conversation she heard around her on the tar-smelling deck, most of her fellow passengers--a collection of rough-looking men redolent with body odors–were on their way to conduct business with Sutter or seek employment. One young man, dressed in a deerskin coat that smelled as if the buck was still sharing it with him, stood close to her, cleaning his fingernails with his knife and flicking glances at her face. By turning her head just so, her features were hidden by the stiff sides of Emmeline's wool bonnet that Major York insisted she wear. Buckman shifted his position to get a better look. She turned her head, enjoying the game. He asked where she was going and why. Was she traveling alone? She couldn't shake him off. She judged him to be harmless, if tedious. He lamented there were no decent single women in California. A man worth his salt wouldn't deign to look at an Indian squaw. Nor would he approach a Spanish senorita, who was guarded by her pistol-toting brothers and duennas employed by the rich ranchero families.

They began the journey by steaming north across the expansive San Francisco Bay, where green islands lay in shifting sunlight and shadow as clouds moved across the sky. Buckman sat next to her on a bench and pulled out a map, showing her the series of waterways they would traverse before entering the Sacramento River. "Folks think Yerba Buena is closer to Sacramento than it is," he said. "But it do take two days to git there."

Standing against the railing, feeling the ship pulse beneath her feet, Philippa felt as if she were dancing a graceful minuet compared to the wild fandango of her ocean voyage. She held her face up, closing her eyes against the sun breaking through the clouds, relishing the warmth on her cheeks. A lightness of spirit wafted over her she recognized as harmony. Yet she was afraid to trust the feeling. Winds chased over the water's surface, ruffling waves to a shimmering gold. They passed a river sloop headed south, the jovial captains ringing bells and shouting to one another with a good deal of booming laughter. They sounded like boys on the schoolhouse field. If Panama City,

with its sinuous heat and soft air, its church bells and sensuous guitar music after dark was a woman's town, California was men's territory.

After a simple stew pot meal, the passengers gathered on the decks and eased into their bed rolls. She was assigned an inside cabin with a sturdy door and shiny new padlock. She was alarmed by singing and raucous laughing on deck as the captain handed her the key. "They won't bother you, Miss. I've posted one of my crew members as a guard outside your door. He'll cost you an extra five dollars."

"What do you know about New Helvetia?" Buckman asked her as she leaned against the sloop's railing the next morning. She shivered from a dense fog hovering over the water and decided to walk the deck to warm herself.

"Only that it's better known as Sutter's Fort," she said. "But I have a feeling you're going to tell me more."

He laughed, keeping pace with her stride. "Talking comes naturally to me. I was a school teacher in St. Louis before I came west. This territory is a recent acquisition, a prize for the United States for having won the Mexican-American War. John Sutter received his property in a land grant from the Spanish. He's built a fortress, planted crops, and let loose herds of cattle across more than seventy-square miles. He's colonized local Indians and a smattering of Spaniards."

"I hear his hospitality is boundless," she said.

"Yes, but in exchange for food and board he puts one and all to work. He's given refuge to many immigrants who've found their way to the fort from overland trails. He still houses some members of a party of settlers commanded by George and Jacob Donner. Do you know the Donner story?"

Buckman's dramatic, hushed tone intrigued her. "Please tell me."

"Last year in May about one hundred farmers set out from Independence, Missouri. A group took a disastrous short cut and were marooned in the High Sierras in the winter. They were ill, their animals dying. They ate rodents and sticks and finally, as their own numbers succumbed to the harsh conditions of bedding down in snow and ice, they ate the remains of the dead."

"Great heavens! " Philippa shouted. "Cannibalism?"

Buckman nodded solemnly.

She was silent for a turn around the deck. What kind of stygian realm was she entering?

Philippa was the first passenger off the river sloop. She wanted to reach Sutter's Fort before all the other petitioning passengers. She carried her needlepoint portmanteau, which held a change of underclothes, her riding habit,

a calico dress, a silver hairbrush and hand mirror her mother gave her upon her departure from Philadelphia, now tarnished by salt air, and several of Martin's possessions including his spy glass. Over her shoulder she carried the painting kit she'd purchased in Panama City packed in its leather case. She was astonished how heavy these objects became as she walked down the main dirt-road of the river port town. The shoulder strap dug through her suit jacket into her skin, and her left hand ached from holding the handles of the heavy bag. She approached a wagon driver halted at a crossroads and negotiated a ride up to the fort.

Seated on a rough side bench of the wagon, her possessions scattered at her feet, she drew a breath of relief. They rumbled past well-tilled bean fields tended by Indians, Spaniards, or perhaps Mexicans. She could not distinguish one from the other at the distance as they lifted and hacked at the earth with their long hoes in a regular rhythm, leaning down to pull away at weeds which they stuffed in canvas bags tied to their waist. On a far hill dozens of cows crowded together, some standing, others reclining under the wide, lacy shade of oak trees. At the top of the rise the fortress stood gleaming as the morning sun bathed its tall white-washed walls in light. She longed to paint the texture of the slabs of white adobe. A scattering of military tents mushroomed on the grass outside the walls. Breakfast cookfires appeared to be unattended. She felt a wave of anticipation sweep over her.

The wagon driver halted among the tents and helped her down. As she approached Cousin John Sutter's massive front gate and knocked at the double wooden doors, she was struck by the clever design of the brands burned into the wood, one on each door, a small J and A tucked into a flamboyant S. While tracing the letters with her forefinger, the doors were suddenly pulled back by two uniformed sentries.

She stepped forward into a vast courtyard teeming with men calling to one another across an expanse of parrot-green grass. Children ran the length of dirt paths that crossed the lawns. Horses lapped from water troughs. Juicy smells of roasting beef made her stomach rumble, reminding her how hungry she was for hearty food. She heard the hammering and sawing of carpenters at work.

A steady drumbeat and trill of fife drew her glance to the far end of the yard where military troupes were being drilled. A trumpeter blasted a fanfare dismissing two-dozen soldiers, brown as Indians, in fact Indians. She stepped back towards the wall as they rushed toward the open gate where she stood. Suddenly a cannon, mounted on a platform above her head, boomed, pulled back from an embrasure in the wall and boomed again, shattering the last measure of her composure. She shrieked. A sentry pummeled the butt of his rifle to the ground and threw his shoulders back, shouting, "Welcome to Captain Sutter's Fort."

# Chapter Three

An aging woman, dressed in plain Mormon gray, greeted her and led her to an open air basin to drink and wash her face, and then to a trestle table set at the edge of well-worn, dirt paths that crossed. Another woman with a gap-toothed smile set down a tray of tea, hot buttered biscuits and a sliced apple. She hovered over Philippa, intrigued.

"Thank you," Philippa said. "I am here to see Captain John Sutter. I am his cousin's wife."

The women's eyes lit up. "He is due to return within the hour from his farm."

"He has another farm?" Philippa asked in surprise.

"Yes, Hock Farm thirty miles north."

Philippa sat in the warm sun feeling disoriented. For the first time in months she was not traveling. The bench did not pitch from side to side. Presently she heard soldiers throw open the massive front gate to horsemen. Captain John Sutter dismounted. Philippa stood to greet him. When he saw her, a stranger with her portmanteau at her side, he hurried over to her, a compact man, not much taller than herself, round and flushed, beaming like a beacon with robust health. With his shining blue eyes and greying side whiskers, he put her in mind of Father Christmas.

She stretched out her had to shake his. "I am Philippa Stuart Sutter, Martin's wife, arrived from Philadelphia."

"Ah, ha," he said in a Germanic rumble of a voice. "So our Martin married before he left. Aren't you the beauty?" He held her by her upper arms,

still with the reins in his gloved hand. She could feel the leather press against her skin as his horse tugged backward, seeking release. "My little cousin," Sutter says. Even as he kissed first one cheek, then the other, he looked past her the length of the yard. "And where is the lucky bridegroom?"

"She ducked her head, then forced herself to look him in the eye. "Cousin John, I must tell you that Martin is dead." Tears flooded her eyes.

Sutter's smile vanished. His body grew rigid.

"Cholera," she said shakily. "He was very sick. He wanted to return to Chagres, but I insisted we go on to Panama City to find a proper doctor." Her voice rose with hysteria. She couldn't stop herself. "His mule bolted over a cliff. He was getting better! I did my best," she said, daring Sutter to contradict her. In his eyes she read both sympathy and crushing disappointment. She took a shuddering breath and uttered a hoarse sob. Through a screen of tears she saw frightened children on benches looking at her from their school books. Sutter sighed and embraced her until she quieted. His voice was guttural, nearly a whisper. "This is a great tragedy."

A member of the Sutter family, Philippa was given one of the larger apartments. She feared she'd displaced an entire immigrant family who'd sought refuge from the overland trail and hostile Indians.

A carpet covered the stone floor of the white-washed room, a fireplace warmed the corner, and a rickety table held a porcelain pitcher and bowl for washing. An oil lamp provided light for reading and writing at a slant desk. Shelves hanging from the ceiling displayed a few books leaning together. The rope bed was fitted with a straw mattress covered in clean linen and brightly woven woolen blankets.

She slept for most of the day. At twilight, she washed, dressed her hair and put on a freshly laundered but faded blouse and skirt and wrapped her shoulders with a strawberry-colored rebozo, all requisitioned by the Mormon housekeepers. She set out across the courtyard and climbed the outside staircase of his Cousin John's two-story administration building in the center of the compound. Opening the door she stepped directly into a dining room. At the head of the table John Sutter stood to greet her, shoulders back. As commander of the northern frontiers of his land grant, he was dressed in a quasi-military uniform of a Captain in the Mexican Army. She smiled to see he wore the outfit with panache, swiveling the sword over his hip.

He introduced his staff. John Bidwell, clerk and manager, was an Iowa schoolteacher before coming west. He looked to be only a few more years older than she, but possessed the mature bearing of an older man. She missed hearing where the slender Doctor Bates was from. She was offended by the raw-boned blacksmith, who would not meet her eyes and wiped gravy from his

lips with the back of his ham-sized hand. She was attracted instantly to the chief vaquero, a dark, muscular horseman who greeted her in heavily Spanish-accented English. It would be from him that she would learn about ranching and hides.

The men passed around platters of juicy beef and steaming pewter bowls of roasted potatoes, and steamed broccoli, peas and carrots. She sipped a cup of fresh cow's milk, thick to the point of cloying and tasting of onion grass, then set it aside for a goblet of Bordeaux. At the conclusion of the meal she drew out of her pocket a yellowing letter, unfolded it and smoothed out the well-worn creases. She explained to the men around the table that Captain Sutter wrote it to her deceased husband's father two years ago. She handed it to Sutter who read it to himself, his thick lips moving.

"Yes, I well remember writing this inviting young Martin to apprentice with me and my California vaqueros," Sutter said. He sighed deeply. "I am in want of family at New Helvetia." Sutter regarded Philippa as she sat with her head down. He reached out and covered her hand with his. "I am glad you are here, my dear. You must gather your strength before you begin your journey back East."

"I wish to complete Martin's mission," she said. "I want to learn techniques of ranching and curing hides."

Sutter stared at her in wonder. "How will you accomplish this?"

"As Martin would have," she answered. "I'll ride with your ranchers and work with your tanners."

The men at the table snickered. John Sutter drank deeply from his wine goblet. "I count nearly two thousand head of Longhorn. Would you ride out on the plains with my Indians and Spaniards to rope the steers and brand the calves?"

"I'm an experienced horsewoman."

"Bah, experienced with thoroughbreds raised in eastern fields to jump white fences and sprint round a race course? Our horses are wild. Before my caballeros ride, they must first break their mounts in the corral. Can you do that, young lady?"

"My saddle weighs more than you do," the vaquero said. The men laughed.

Philippa sat up straighter in her chair. "I am determined to do this. I wrote to father-in-law promising that I will complete Martin's mission. When we returned Martin was to manage his father's ranch in western Pennsylvania. The least I can do is see that his father benefits from what you have to teach us."

Sutter shook his head vehemently. "Herding cattle is hard physical labor, dangerous work, man's work. If you were a senorita who grew up splitting rails to fence your father's rancho I would not allow it." He pounded the table with his fist. "Doesn't Frederick have other sons? Let them come to me."

She leaned closer to him. "I am Frederick Sutter's daughter-in-law and I am here now."

"This is not for you to do." Sutter pushed his chair back and walked a few paces, lighting a pipe. With a wave of his hand at the men, they stood and left, all except John Bidwell. "Cousin Philippa, you are lovely indeed, a rare and delicate flower, but this is wild territory and you are out of place. A freighter, Josephine, departs for New York Harbor in two weeks. You should be sufficiently rested by then. I will book passage for you."

"I cannot pay," she said. "I have no money. I've written to my parents, but it will be months before the bank notes they send arrive."

He regarded her, frowning. His mouth opened as if he were about to say something, then he changed his mind, saying instead, "Everyone who stays with me works for board and receives fifteen dollars a month."

"Yes," she said in strong voice. She didn't know about the fifteen dollars a month.

"Do you cook?"

She stared directly into Sutter's eyes. "I paint."

"With distinction?" he asked.

"Exhibitions of my landscapes and portraits have been held for the past four years at the Philadelphia Academy of the Fine Arts. I have earned numerous prizes."

"Just so," Sutter said. He packed his pipe with more tobacco and lit it, puffing sporadically, maddening in his deliberate movements. After a long silence he said, "You need not learn to break in our wild horses, Cousin Philippa. Mr. Bidwell will prepare a report for you about our ranching operation. He knows first hand about breed and feed, roundup and butchering, hide tanning, and even better than I, about what the market will bear."

John Bidwell stood with his hands pressed on the table. "I'm too busy now to prepare such a report. Besides, it's useless information. Of what value are our techniques to cattle farmers in western Pennsylvania?"

Sutter's voice boomed. "Sit down, Mr. Bidwell. You will write the report because my young cousin has promised it to her husband's family. You will not waste your time doing so. Your chronicle will have the additional value of serving as the definitive tract on ranching at the New Helvetia colony. I will circulate it to interested parties in California as well as traders in eastern states to further my hide traffic."

Bidwell acquiesced with practiced patience and sank back to his chair.

"Thank you," Philippa said.

Sutter paced then stopped and pointed a finger at Philippa. "The Mexican Government has requested a portrait of me. You will earn your fifteen dollars a month by painting it."

That night Philippa jerked awake, soaked in sweat, trying to make sense of a nightmare. She was in a meadow painting a landscape of cows chewing on long grasses. She felt exhilarated as she dabbed on the oils. The paints began to give off vibrations of color. They shook the canvas with such force the image was rearranged. Suddenly Martin appeared, spread eagled on the rock below the cliff in Panama. His light brown eyes were open, accusing her.

She spent the next day exploring the fort, looking for a suitable background for Sutter's portrait. She climbed the southeast bastion where Cousin John kept one of his cannons in case of new clashes between the Mexicans, the conquering Yankees, or the hot-headed Indians in the region. Truly, he saw himself as the medieval lord of his castle. She sat cross-legged in the embrasure cut into the adobe wall and sketched the gentle valleys studded with clusters of live oaks where cattle grazed.

She crossed the courtyard and climbed the staircase leading to the northwest bastion. Far in the distance the sight of a whisper of the Sierras foothills massed on the horizon intrigued her. How high were the snowy Sierras? She climbed out the open window and looked up, then down. Suddenly the grassy field beneath the window fell away to reveal the gorge in Panama. She saw the wraith-like whiteness of Martin's face on the rocky cliff, his head turned like a three-quarter moon, neck snapped. He stared up at her with an angry expression as Luis threw dirt over him. She convulsed forward, pierced with pain. Martin's death and her role it in were intertwined in a collusion of constant misery. She stepped back quickly and held onto the wheel of the cannon for support. Her arms and legs felt numb. She stood there trembling until normalcy returned. She heard her mother's voice. "You'll be all right, Philippa, just breathe deeply and be patient with yourself."

After a light lunch she continued her tour, considering where to pose Cousin John for his portrait. He housed dozens of employees in his fields, kitchens, animal pens, and what he called manufacturies. The craft workshops, built into the walls around the courtyard, were an important aspect to his prestige as the most famed merchant of the Sacramento Valley. She stopped at the cooper's shop and asked if she could sketch his him.

"How many barrels will you make from all those staves?" she asked. She'd learned to keep the subject of a portrait talking so he would remain animated.

This middle-aged craftsman had journeyed to California from Cornwall by way of Boston. His youthful apprentice, from a Missouri family, sawed lumber and tossed pieces into a corner with such gusto she had to shout to be heard.

"Captain Sutter, he do want one thousand flour barrels," the cooper said. He picked a half dozen pieces of cut and shaped pine from the cask where they soaked and bought them to a wide jig frame where he set them for bending. "They be dry barrels, not tight like the buckets and casks we make for water."

"And whiskey!" the assistant shouted.

"Only ale for you, boy." The cooper pushed at the soaking staves bobbing in the deep cask.

"I take it that Captain Sutter grinds his wheat into flour, barrels it and sells it down river for a sizable profit."

"Aye. More ships are coming in and out of San Francisco Bay from Panama, 'round South America, and from the Sandwich Islands, Russia, even Chile. They all do need flour. We also sell them new barrels to catch their rainwater on deck."

The apprentice interrupted. "Did you see them poorly group of immigrants what came in yesterday? The Captain boss is gonna set them up in a new manufactury to make water. Ha , Ha." The cooper swatted the boy's buttocks with a wet stave.

"Does Captain Sutter make a profit from his other products?" she asked.

The copper laughed. "No, Missus, everyone knows of his arrears. He was behind in his accounts in Switzerland, which is why he immigrated."

She was stunned. Cousin John on the run? "I didn't realize he is burdened by debt."

"Aye, it's a generous man he is, but a great spender."

At dinner that night Cousin Sutter told her he would be at the fort for two weeks and available for sittings. She decided to pose him in military uniform in his office against a map of the northern territories, his prized domain.

For the next two weeks she worked twelve hours a day, with and without Sutter standing restlessly, more often pacing as he briefed members of his staff. At night she rocked before her fireplace and wept for Martin and herself. She cleaned her sable brushes and took them to bed with her to run their silky hairs over her skin.

One morning she joined a group of Mormon women at a trestle table in the courtyard. She asked about their travails overland, and they talked animatedly about how wagons fell over during steep descents, maiming and

killing their husbands, how an ox stepped back, kicking the life out of a newborn baby. Cholera, thirst and more cholera.

Philippa stared in horror. "How do you tolerate the loss of those you loved?"

"Our faith in God sustains us," one says.

"But so many deaths! How can you sleep with death lacing your dreams in spider webs?"

"Our beloved children are with the angels," another woman said sadly. She went back to her knitting.

"You're resigned, all of you." Philippa said turning to take in the group. "You've relinquished your mourning. How did you do that?" Not one of the women met her troubled gaze.

The portrait was finished, framed by a carpenter and ready to hang. Rather than experiment with the fanciful technique she'd used with Emmeline's York, she portrayed Cousin John in a traditional style he would value, minimizing his diminutive stature by accentuating the gleam of gold braid, buttons and sword hilt of the Mexican uniform. She'd focused on his wide-set blue eyes and ruddy complexion. She captured his sense of enthusiasm by portraying his mouth slightly open as if he were about to share yet another idea on how to make his New Helvetia colony a greater beacon for immigrants.

He hung it on the wall behind his desk and they stepped back in his cluttered office to admire it. More than satisfied, he could barely mask his astonishment. "You are a woman of superb talents."

"Thank you," she said. He picked up a bulky envelope from his desk and handed it to her. "Mr. Bidwell has finished his ranching report."

She stared at it. It was time to leave California.

"What will you do now?" he asked.

"I haven't received the letter from my parents. I have only thirty-five dollars."

Sutter regarded her. "I am building a sawmill on the American River in Coloma. I want you to go there. My foreman James Marshall will accompany you upriver. I want you to help Jenny Wimmer. She cooks and launders for my crew of carpenters and diggers."

Philippa jerked back. "I am not experienced in domestic chores."

Sutter laid a hand on her arm. "Don't worry, Jenny will teach you." He paced importantly. I will pay you thirty dollars a month. That's twice what I

pay others. In eight months you will have earned enough for your passage home."

"But I expect to receive bank notes from my parents any week now," she said.

"I am offering you an alterative plan. In this wild terrain missives can go astray."

She caught her breath at the possibility of the letter from her parents lost and the money stolen. The reality was too bleak to contemplate.

"I imagine you will want to continue to paint in Coloma," Sutter said.

"Yes," she said. "I long to get started. I'm eager to paint the river in its many moods and the mountains in all kinds of weather. I'm working on a bold new style of landscape I think about constantly. But I am out of supplies."

"I saw that you've used up your painting supplies on the portrait, so I have procured at considerable expense a new set for you," Sutter said. He pulled up a case from the floor, set it on his desk at a list over sheaves of papers, and opened it with a flourish. One by one she removed and replaced oil paints in generously-sized tubes, brushes, not nearly as good as the sable ones from Panama, vials of turpentine, linseed oil–even clean cotton rags. At the bottom was a pack of vellum paper, twelve pieces of first rate, rolled canvas and a tolerable set of watercolors.

Tears of gratitude filled her eyes. She turned and embraced him and pressed her hands against his back until he pulled free.

"You make me miss my daughters." His blue eyes were awash with tears.

"Thank you, dear friend. I am so hungry to paint," she said, her voice thick with emotion. "Only my art can save me from desperation, now that Martin is gone and I am alone."

"You will have ample time on the river. I ask only that you assist Jenny and the Indian woman she's hired."

"I will do my job, Cousin John," Philippa said solemnly. "Will you see that the letter from my parents is brought to me?"

"I will ride up with it myself." He pulled her toward him and kissed her forehead.

Philippa set out on horseback with James Marshall the next day. She wore her split-skirted riding outfit and a leather coat given to her by one of the caballeros, whose son had outgrown it. Dark clouds heralded a storm blowing in from the ocean to the west. Elk grazed on greening pastures of luxuriant grasses, thickened by winter rains. A wedge of sun shone intermittently on the mountain peaks ahead. Then lightning flashed and thunder roared loud as

drumrolls. Sheets of cold rain came on thrashing pine boughs and dripping down her collar with icy fingers. She was so chilled, she could not stop shivering. Her upper body ached from shaking. When Mr. Marshall turned in his saddle to ask if she wanted to stop, she waved him on, feeling a perverse exhilaration in the midst of discomfort.

They stopped at a rough cabin on the trail, half way to their destination in the Sierras. Rain pinged off the small glass windows. James Marshall made a suitable travel companion, well-mannered and taciturn. He seemed to know she did was too weary for conversation.

The next day Jenny Wimmer, the wife of Peter, the foreman, welcomed her effusively. Having no other woman of her caliber with whom to wile away the time, she chattered incessantly. Her questions peppered Philippa like hailstones. Her young boys ran through the cabin shouting in high spirits. Mr. Marshall and the senior members of his crew bunked in one side of the cabin and the noisome Wimmer family occupied the other half. Philippa was given a cot in the smokey kitchen's alcove. She got up in the middle of the night to use the chamber pot and stumbled over a sharp-fanged cat. Her torment was complete.

During the next three weeks Philippa learned how to shell peas, roast a chicken, bake bread, peel and steam potatoes, soak pants in a tub, starch and iron a shirt. One afternoon, after hanging five sets of denim pants on the line strung between the back porch and a tree, a winter storm kicked up. Plops of rain pelted the windows. She ran outside and brought the trousers in, draping them over the kitchen fireplace screen.

Sleet and rain slanted past the window and the wind seeped in between the log walls. Dressed in a sheepskin vest, the pink rebozo wrapped around her shoulders, she still felt chilled. She sat across from Jenny Wimmer at the plank table, sipping a cup of tea and drawing a portrait of Jenny kneading dough.

Jenny was one of those frontier women who hunted and stored future conversations the way a squirrel hoards nuts. She had an agenda of topics she intended to cover. The need to talk burned in her eyes. She spoke in rhythms dictated by the regular movement of her arms and hands. She was so used to talking to herself, her lips move silently even as Philippa answered her questions.

Jenny has a good many stories, but her favorite is of the fateful misjudgment of the Donner Party. Weary of the disgusting story, Philippa half-listened to the inhuman account of how the survivors survived and glanced out the window. Snow blustered laterally across a landscape of black trees and pewter-colored slate cliffs. A man's hat blew by. In the split second it passed the window she saw it was a red hat. The bright color against a monochromatic palette excited her.

Suddenly Jenny was telling a new tale about how John Fremont and his California Battalion took over the fort in defense of the warring Mexicans. Fremont's troops paraded in the courtyard, caroused in the barns with camp followers, shot off the big cannons from the bastions, and in general made life a misery for the New Helvetians. Philippa saw Martin's face. His eyes sparkled. Like her he was trying to hide a smile at Jenny's fervent telling of the drama of the California Battalion. Philippa took up a new sheet of paper and began to draw rapidly. She looked at her finished sketch on the flour-sprinkled table, amid the pans of rising dough, an effortless, perfect drawing of Martin's face. She stared at the smiling portrait and recognized a shift in her thinking: forgiveness. The tumor of guilt had withered away. Aloud she said with wonder, "I understand it now. Martin's death was not my fault."

Jenny's seven-year-old son Willie, reaching for a cookie on a plate on the table, said, "Good for you, Missus."

By the next day the storm had subsided. The sun emerged tentatively from beneath clouds. After seeing to the workers' noon meal, Philippa walked down to a grassy path to the river with her paints and an easel James Marshall had fashioned for her. She knew it was time to paint in a new way. She'd had an inkling of innovative techniques, but now a method came wholly and intuitively to her. She would release her art from its stiffness, blow away the dust, snap off the right angles. More than depart from artistic traditions, she would flout them. Brash ideas jumped in and out of her mind like circus tumblers. Excitement kept pace with her step, faster and faster until she walked into her own puffs of breath. She would do no less than disturb the order of art as she had practiced it. She would order a disorder of composition, technique, and most of all–color.

She opened her paint box and set in on a log stump. She breathed in clear, thin air. Two deer turned their heads to look at her, their henna coats shining. They leapt soundlessly out of sight. She saw a dart of dun tail as a bird squawked and skittered out of a bare-branched tree. She looked behind her and saw that her boots had left lavender footfalls in the wet grass, glittering with sleet. She was starved for color, longed to embrace it like a lover.

She drank cold water from her canteen and considered the color theory principles invented by the chemist Eugene Chevreal. The intensity of color was achieved not so much by pigmentation as by the hue of the color next to it. Colors had vivid impact, depending upon how they were placed. She thought of the painting she did in school when she brushed slabs of opposite colors adjacent to one another. In the studio she'd slabbed blood red next to green, orange next to blue, and yellow with purple. She'd worked these into a scene of a blockish mountain and ravine against a sunset. As viewed from a distance of five feet, what appeared as a jumble up close resolved itself into a well-composed landscape. The vibrating colors seemed to jump off the canvas. The

finished oil painting sorely offended her instructor. "What is this grotesque horror?"

"I call it a theoretical landscape," she'd told him.

"It's not a realistic rendering."

"That's the point. It is an abstraction of reality."

"How is one to respond to such an abomination?" her teacher had asked.

"Ah, but you have already have."

She looked up at the blue sky and heard Martin laughing with her. She turned her easel toward the fast-moving river and primed the canvas. She walked along the bank, peering below the water's surface, and examined how the wavelets, whipped by a light wind, changed color in the sunlight. She began to lay on colors, catching the water's movement, and did not stop until dusk. Shivering, she returned to Jenny Wimmer's log cabin kitchen with its delicious smells of baked bread and roasting meats.

As weeks passed and work on the mill progressed, more laborers arrived. A scruffy dour lot, they crowded into tents that mushroomed near the river. "Who are they?" Philippa asked.

" Mostly Mormons," Jenny answered. They're soldiers mustered out of the California Battalion. They're earning money so they can go home to Utah."

"I hear Mormons take several wives," Philippa said. "How odd it must be to miss the embraces of your various wives. Do you think a Mormon misses one wife at a time or all of them together?"

Jenny threw her head back in laughter. "Get to work on those potatoes."

Philippa was toughening up in the harsh climate. One morning she walked down to the mill site watching James Marshall climb and carefully lower himself on ladders within the wooden frame construction of the sawmill, where he conferred with his carpenters. The new men dug out the millrace. They worked the hardest, perspiring freely despite the cold, and were barely civil to one another. This diversion channel, which would carry the water, grew steadily deeper. The millwheel, which was designed to shoot water from under as opposed to over it, was to turn freely as the river rushed through. They built a dam at the far end of the mill to hold back most of the water's flow while they dug. Still it was a wet, cold business. Martin would have liked this bend on the American River. He would step into the icy water and think nothing of it. He would make up a sign language to communicate with the Indians, who squatted in the shadows, staring across the rushing water. He would inhale Coloma's clear air deeply and then make love to her until she ached from too much. She could feel his presence, his energy transmitted to her, challenging her to her innovative work.

On a Sunday morning at dawn she walked to the river carrying her easel and painting kit. Her boots crunched, breaking lacy ice formations in the grass. Weak sun rays sprayed between clouds over the pine ridges. Thin sheets of ice from a storm in the night coated branches of the trees. As the sun caught them in its broadening scope, the branches glittered like crystal.

She set up her easel, then walked a bit further when something caught her eye. Midway between the banks, where the rain-swelled river rushed toward the bend, the familiar sandbank had grown larger. The force of water had deposited large quantities of silt at its banks. She walked back and forth studying it. The sun inched across new rocks deposited in the sand, making them glitter. Quartz? Mica?

Wind blew across the river, knocking the ice-encased tree branches together with persistent clicks. Tap, tap. It sounded like a code. Relishing the charged atmosphere, she began to paint quickly before the sun moved. She did not bother with a charcoal sketch. After preparing the canvas with an undercoat, went to oils, setting the colors vibrating against each other. She dabbed pigment onto her palette–madder yellow, ocher, cerulean blue–and mixed them into a brilliant yellow-green to depict the sun nicking at the top branches of the tallest pine trees. She set the colors vibrating against each other. With deepening shades of mossy green and purpled blue, she painted the lower trees, still heavily laden with fingers of dark ice.

To describe the meadow across the river, shimmering opalescent in shadow with ice melting into the grass, she dabbed on a pale, bluish purple the color of hyacinth and lightened to lavender the expanse where it sparkled in sunlight. She worked quickly to paint a stand of sycamores in the foreground, their branches still encased in silver ice. She turned the canvas upside down and painted the morning sky, deepening in azure above the horizon of pines.

Nothing was more difficult than painting water. It existed in terms of its moving reflections. Painting principles resonated in her mind about reflections of objects in calm water, where they should be positioned, how they appear in disturbed water, how long the line, how short. "Oh, to hell with principles!" she shouted. "I will paint the river in an entirely new way." She walked to the river's edge to observe. The cold wind tore across her face, causing tears to blur her vision. She did not blink them away.

She layered in the shades of calmer water by the shore in long horizontal strokes of malachite, indigo, and white, and applied ultramarine and black in brisk strokes in the middle ground to suggest movement. She used dabs of white next to the brilliant color to make the light quiver. As the river churned over boulders it spit up foam and that she painted white, shaded with the warm blues of the sky it reflected. The sandbank she painted with slashes of yellow and gritty ochre, and beneath the fast-moving water where she saw a trail of reflecting light, probably more deposits of loose mica, she dashed on a mix of

yellows and reds in a shimmering gold. She stepped back and looked at her landscape-- –vibrant, dazzling bright and fresh. She was amazed.

That evening Philippa brought her sketch pad to the new mess cabin the carpenters and mechanics had built, where they could retreat during their off hours to play cards and spin yarns by the stone fireplace. At the far end of room there was a makeshift store operated by two enterprising brothers from Peking, who'd found their way across the Pacific and up the Sacramento River to sell boxes of biscuit and ginger ale.

Storytelling was a cherished pastime. Logs in the fireplace charred and smoked fragrantly, and half-a-dozen laborers were warming themselves after a weary day, some playing monte, when one of the carpenters, George B. Franklin, a farmer from Michigan, began to speak. When he introduced himself he always included the middle initial. His fellow workers decided it stood for blowhard.

Franklin sat in the reclining rocker he'd fashioned from scrap boards, bolstered with an old mattress wrapped in a woolen blanket. Each time he rocked forward he took a generous swig from a bottle of whiskey. The monte players went on slapping down their cards. Young Willie Wimmer ran in and sat cross-legged at Mr. Franklin's feet, eager to be entertained.

"Hello, sonny. How about a Michigan hunting story?" Franklin began, without waiting for an answer. He patted Willie's head condescendingly. "The wild animal that can frighten me does not exist. I'm a bowman. I refuse to use firearms. I've shot and killed foxes and wolverines with arrows at close range. Racks of deer antlers hang from the rafters of my Michigan barn. When I came to California and heard the night roar of a mountain lion, I knew I had to go after it. One day I set out to find a pride of lions said to dwell in a cave in a gully between two ridges. I hiked up there carrying my bow and arrows slung in a quiver over my shoulder.

At this point the card players abandoned their game and the Peking shopkeepers stopped stocking the shelves and turned to listen. Franklin described how he finally spotted the lions and positioned himself behind boulders to observe them. The male slept under a tree, the lioness paced in front of a cave where her cubs played in the sunlight. Franklin wanted the male lion. "I didn't move from my hiding place for fourteen hours. Then, the lion awoke. He stretched, roared, shook his mane and trotted off. I followed. When the moon rose, the lion leapt at a fox, crunched it between his jaws, and lay down in a meadow to eat. Soundlessly I approached the beast, keeping my eye on the lion's head. I whistled a cooing sound. The lion raised his head, the bloody fox dangling from his jaws. In quick succession I shot off three arrows. Hit in the chest, the lion jerked up. The next arrow struck him in the heart, and

the third arrow pierced the second, slicing the shaft in two pieces. The lion convulsed, moaned, then rolled over, dead."

Willie whistled in wonder.

Franklin continued. "I had the head, its mane stiff with dried blood, stuffed and mounted with my arrowheads. I posed for a daguerreotype. The picture, stuffed head and arrowheads are on display in the Detroit public library."

Willie spoke up. "Mr. Franklin, you say you're not afraid of any animal, no matter how wild or ferocious?"

"No critter breathing could scare me in the least."

"What would you do if a wolf walked through the cabin door?" Willie persisted.

Franklin took a long pull on his whiskey. "I'd look the bastard in the eye and wring its neck."

As Willie said goodbye and left, Philippa saw a sly expression on his face. She and the men sat there, each with their own thoughts, the card players back at it. The two Chinese store keepers locked their cabinet of products and went out to their tent. Franklin rocked in his chair, gazed at the fire and finished his bottle of whiskey.

Suddenly the door burst open and a huge gray wolf ran howling into the room. Everyone shouted at once. The wolf bounded from chair to table, turning its head to fasten glittering eyes on them, snarling. It stopped at Franklin's chair, sat back on its haunches and clacked its teeth together. Franklin froze with fear. The wolf leapt at him. Franklin tipped his rocker backwards, landed on his back, rolled on the earthen floor, heels over head. The wolf sniffed at him, nudging him in the buttocks with his nose. Franklin howled blood-curdling yells. He scrambled to his feet and ran across the room with the wolf nipping at his heels. He barricaded himself behind the store counter, shrieking hysterically.

One of the card players picked up the wolf by his belly and set him on the counter. The wolf lunged at Franklin, who fainted from fear. Then Willie threw off his wolf pelts and shouted in triumph.

Philippa threw her head back and laughed with the others until her sides ached. She snuggled an arm over Willie's shoulder and led him across the wet grass to his parents' cabin where he was supposed to be in bed. Dressed in his nightdress and dragging his wolf pelts, his dearness touched her heart with such fierce tenderness, tears filled her eyes, making the sharp stars swim.

One December afternoon when Philippa had finished her baking, she walked down to the river with her painting supplies. God, it was cold! She'd

cut finger holes in her woolen gloves so she could handle the brushes. She walked along the river, racing the fading light as the sun turned granite outcroppings purple against rising cliffs. Quickly she painted the ominous cliffs, contrasting the deep shadowed rocks with shimmers bouncing across the fast-moving water, burnished with golden light. She used every color on her palette, mixing them right on the canvas. The bright water leapt over boulders frothing into swirling eddies leading to quiet pools. She was pleased with the result. When twilight suffused her with a darkness she could not longer contend with, she picked up her easel, paints and painting and walked back to the cabin, feeling drained.

That night when everyone was asleep, she lit two lamps and lined up her two riverscapes against a wall in the kitchen. She stepped back to review them. She turned the first one over and wrote in charcoal, "Dawn on the American River," Philippa Stuart Sutter, December 1847. On the back of the second one she wrote her name and "Shadowed Light." She placed them on the floor near her cot and draped a flannel sheet over them. So bright and full of energy were they, she feared they would combust.

Several days later Philippa mounted the horse Cousin John had loaned her and set out with James Marshall to ride down to the fort. They had been summoned for Christmas dinner. She decided to give John her two experimental riverscapes. When they arrived Cousin John hustled across the stable yard. Trussed up in his greatcoat, he was round as a woodchuck.

"Has a letter arrived for me?" she asked as she greeted him.

"No, but I have a gift for you."

Her heart sank and she shivered from the cold.

He showed her to her spacious apartment and presented her with his gift, so eager to please, he opened it himself. Out of a long box shipped from Hong Kong he lifted out a slim red silk gown embroidered in gold threads and matching jacket with a Mandarin collar. As she held it up against her, he chuckled in delight. Father Christmas indeed.

Solemnly she handed him her two rolled canvases. "Perhaps your carpenter can make frames for them," she said.

Pushing aside a clay vase on the round table, he spread them out and examined first one, then the next. The lingering small of oil paint clung to them. He was silent for a long time. She held her breath. "What a stunningly innovative style. Looking at them excites me." He held her close to him. "My dear Philippa, they fill my heart with joy."

By a leaping fire on the hearth of her apartment, she luxuriated in hot sudsy water in an iron bathtub, easing the aches of riding in the snow for two days. She washed and arranged her hair, and when she tried on the gown, she saw that she'd gained a little weight, mostly muscle. The square cut bodice and

cap sleeves revealed more bosom than she was accustomed to showing. She decided to leave the jacket on.

Two hours later she climbed the outside steps and opened the door to the dining hall where eight of Sutter's staff sat around the table. As she entered the room rough male chatter and rumbling laughter ceased. She was surprised to see her two riverscapes had already been roughly framed and hung on the wall. Their thick painted surfaces shimmered in the candlelight. She felt protective of them, the same way she felt when she took young Willie back to bed after he'd frightened Mr. Franklin.

One by one, the men rose, shoved back their chairs, and greeted her, staring at her in the red Chinese dress. She walked around the table shaking each of their hands. They'd spruced up admirably in preparation for the Christmas Eve feast. Smithy Harker wore his hair parted down the middle. Black coarse strands were smoothed down each side until the uneven ends, groomed with a lemony tonic, disappear into his whiskers. John Bidwell and Dr. Bates sported vests and tweed coats, possibly purchased from the same San Francisco haberdasher, so alike were they in fabric and tailoring. A starched white shirt was visible beneath James Marshall's buckskin jacket.

Keeper of the gardens, Heinrich Lienhard, wore a black silk necktie elaborately tied around a high-necked white collar. Cousin John, his side whiskers trimmed, wore his brass-buttoned, gold-braided Captain's uniform and polished boots, heels ringing sharply on the board floor.

"You are looking might well tonight, if I may be allowed to say so," Marshall said to her.

"Mr. Marshall strikes a brisk pace on the trail," she said, addressing the others. "I had to ride like the wind to keep up, and I must have looked like a ruffian in sheepskin."

They laughed easily and sat down. Conversations resumed instantly. They discussed Indian uprisings and how much to charge for wheat when the new flour mill began operating. They discussed the Chinese laborers, who were arriving by the hundreds in the holds of ships sailing into the mud flats of Yerba Buena, now being called San Francisco. They talked over each other, deep voices rising. Eager to make their points, they were quick to argue, unlike her eastern acquaintances who would disagree and argue courteously.

She caught the eye of Quartermoon, the Indian woman who served table for Cousin John, and nodded a greeting, which she shyly returned. It was impossible to tell her age. She would always be beautiful.

For all his debts, Sutter had not spared on culinary delicacies. Quartermoon and a lovely Indian girl served oysters on the half-shell. Then a chile pepper and corn soup, followed by trout baked in a delicate herb cream sauce. This was followed by the main entree of roasted beef, potatoes, string

beans, and biscuits. With each course, a young waiter assisting Quartermoon brought out bottles wrapped in white linen and poured the robust and delicate wines into crystal glasses..

Except for Sutter, who presided elegantly as the grand old world host, the men ate with their elbows on the table, heads lowered into the soup. They drank heartily and looked sheepishly to her when an unexpected belch surfaced. Philippa waved away their apologies as if to say, don't perform a quadrille of good manners for my benefit. This is your territory. I love the freedom of it!

She ate sparingly, unaccustomed to rich food, and relaxed more with each sip of wine. She felt like a butterfly wriggling out of its carapace, one millimeter at a time. The delicious food and cigar smells mingled in the close air. She felt overheated and removed her Mandarin jacket. Quartermoon and the waiter brought in a bowl of fresh strawberries, sprinkled with powdered sugar. Where had these been shipped from, and at what cost?

Sutter stood and proposed a toast to her. "My dear Philippa. I have missed you while you were at Coloma. You bring me much comfort with my family so far away. I drink a toast to your return to New Helvetia."

She stood to respond. Overcome by the affection she saw in their upturned faces, she held up her wineglass. "To my California friends, gentlemen, cavaliers all. You are repairing my heart."

The door opened with a blast of cold air and a tall man of imposing presence walked in. She stared at him, astonished. He stood with uncommon stillness and studied her, the decolletage of her Chinese dress, the flush on her cheeks. His glance jumped to the wall above her where her paintings hung. He gazed at them in wonder.

"Bertrand!" John Sutter said. "Come in, come in. I didn't expect you until tomorrow. Would you like a plate of beef? Quickly Quartermoon, get Monsieur La Martine his supper." Sutter hurried around the table to usher him in. "You know everyone, except for Mrs. Philippa Sutter, my young cousin from Philadelphia. She is the artist I told you about." He nodded toward her riverscapes. "She has been up at Coloma painting."

"Madame Sutter," he said in a low baritone. He walked around to her. Out of habit and Philadelphia manners, she stood to greet him. He kissed the back of her hand. His features were arranged harmoniously in a ruggedly handsome face. If anything jarred, the dark eyes were too far apart.

He wore a buffalo cloak fastened with a leather strap and smelled of animal and the cold outdoors. When he threw off the cloak she saw he had on a red flannel shirt over a thicker wool shirt, buckskin pants, and well-worn boots. The collars of both shirts were spread open, despite the weather, and revealed the ruddy skin of his chest. He stood patiently behind Sutter's chair, looking at her intently. She realized he was waiting for her to be seated.

Quartermoon brought in another chair and set it to Sutter's right, where LaMartine spoke to him in low rapid tones. She sipped her wine and regarded the color of his hair and full beard, both badly in need of cutting. Charcoal black with a few strands of gray. She guessed him to be in his mid thirties.

"Excellent, Bertrand," Sutter said in a louder summing-up tone of voice. "You have struck a hard bargain. With the new cartage outfitters on payroll, we will be able to shorten our delivery time by two weeks."

Bertrand turned to the men. "Monsieur Bidwell and Marshall, have any of you heard about gold being dug up on the Feather River?"

Philippa thought of the mica and quartz shimmering beneath the American River.

"Where did you hear this rumor?" Sutter asks.

"While riding down country," La Martine said. "One of your hands ice fishing on your farm caught a gold nugget weighing about half an ounce."

"Just think if gold were found here!" Harker said. His eyes danced at the prospect.

"Gold would spell my ruin," Cousin John said glumly. "Not one man would stay at the fort if gold lay at our feet. I have six hundred men working at harvest time raising forty thousand bushels of wheat. I keep thirty plows and oxen at work. I have twelve thousand head of cattle and fifteen thousand sheep. Every farmhand, herdsman and weaver, baker, shoemaker, and carpenter would be off to dig gold faster than the sun sets. I would have no one to labor on what Philippa calls my Southern plantation."

Bertrand La Martine chuckled and caught her eye. He rubbed his chin and turned to Sutter. "I can get you good labor for no wages. A tribe of Indians has migrated from Lake Natoma. They've pitched their tents on the other side of the American River. They trade horses, but they want to learn agriculture."

Sutter bristled. "I have all the Indians in the region I need at my command."

"Yes, but you pay them and it's a considerable drain on your resources. The Natoma will work for seed and vegetables to learn farming."

"Thieves!" Leinhard says. "They've made off with a peck of potatoes and as many beets as they could dig up before I went after them with my hoe."

The men laughed.

Bertrand stared Leinhard down. "I've been talking with their leader, Twotree. They steal because they have no seed to plant."

"Bertrand is a linguist of considerable accomplishment," Cousin John said with pride, as if showing off a pupil. "What have you now, French, German, Spanish, California Indian dialects of several regions?"

"No more in number than the languages you command, sir," Bertrand says. "I will ask Twotree to bring a dozen of his scouts to your vegetable fields. Leinhard can teach them what they need to know, then assign them work."

"Do me the courtesy of asking my permission," Leinhard said with an edge to his voice. "New Helvetia is founded as a Swiss settlement, not a refuge for primitives."

"California is home to all nationalities," La Martine said. "Before this territory is settled you will see Chileans and Chinese, Yankees, Mexicans, and Kanakas from the Sandwich Islands, Mormons, Catholics and Jews. Why shouldn't we welcome native Californians? Is this not their land?"

Leinhard's mouth had an ugly twist to it. "Naked savages!"

"If I am in the fields to supervise they will not slit your throat as you bend over your parsnips."

Philippa shook her head and smiled. Cousin John clapped his hands and called for music. Quartermoon brought from the back hall a young man whom she introduced in her small, light voice, as her nephew, Velasquez. He sat on a hearth stool and began to strum his guitar. When he looked at Philippa he smiled broadly and she nodded, feasting on the first good music she'd heard in six months. The dance rhythms gave way to a romantic, infinitely sad Spanish melody. She felt tears starting. From the end of the table Bertrand La Martine stared at her. His black eyes shimmered, candlelight reflected in his obsidian gaze.

# Chapter Four

The next morning an insistent knock on Philippa's door awoke her. "Who is it?"

She opened the door and gratefully snatched a letter left on the stone stoop. She sat on the bed and slit the envelope open with a fruit knife. She shook it. No money fell out, and she drew in a fearful breath. She read her mother's words with a feeling of mounting dread.

*October 12, 1847*

*Dearest Philippa,*

*We read of your situation with such sadness. My heart breaks for you. Father and I want you to come home immediately. Although by now you are in Cousin John Sutter's household, and I'm sure, being well taken care of, it is no longer important that you gather information about ranching. We just want you to come home so we can hold you in our arms and comfort you.*

*We have been told that it is useless to send bank notes through the mail as they are sure to be detected and stolen. Father has made a special trip to New York and then on to Boston, visiting a number of steamship companies. At Harnden and Company's General Passage Offices in Boston he was able to procure a passage ticket, see enclosed, made out in your name for a First Class cabin from San Francisco to Boston on the ship Capitol, which they estimate will be departing on the tenth day of January, 1848. We will, of course, meet you when you arrive in Boston four or five months hence. (I feel as if you have sailed to the moon, you are so distanced by miles and time from us).*

Philippa examined the envelope again. Her steamship ticket had been stolen and the envelope resealed. She cried out in frustration. She pressed her hands to her face. She had only ninety dollars saved. Even if she purchased a

miserable third-cabin ship's passage it would cost her two hundred dollars, not including bedding and board. She would have to work for Sutter for months before she could go home. She took a shuddered breath and returned to her mother's letter.

*Martin's parents were terribly upset by the news of his death. His mother was inconsolable. They gave a funeral for him which we attended. I did not want to ride a swaying coach over rough roads all the way out to Western Pennsylvania, but Father felt we should put in an appearance, so we did.*

*The funeral was bizarre. I hope my narration doesn't upset you, but I feel you should know what transpired. The Sutters invited all their family and friends. I never saw so many German folk assembled in one place before, many of them recent immigrants and unable to speak English. The Sutters purchased a splendid oak coffin, and in the absence of a corpse, filled it with Martin's treasured possessions, such as his kicking balls, a wooden bat, a wool scarf, a watch and sheet music for Chopin nocturnes and Beethoven sonatas.*

*The evening before the funeral they had the viewing of these items. A portrait painted of him when he was twelve was the focal point of the viewing. Against the coffin they banked masses of flowers, mostly musky mountain laurel that made everyone sneeze. The next morning, after an interminable church service which did have singing of lovely German leider, we all walked somberly to the graveyard for the lowering of the, by now, closed coffin. Sobs, hysterical weeping. Martin was obviously greatly loved and has been properly mourned.*

*You must not harbor regrets, dear Philippa. He was already ill unto death and I know you did your best to get help for him in that Panamanian jungle. We have no control over the accidents that beset us in life. We are grateful that you survived and anxiously await your next letter.*

*I embrace you with love and kisses,*

*Mother*

Philippa fell back against her pillow, homesick and desolate. She stirred at mid-day disturbed by voices outside her door. She opened it find a tray of hot food and jugs of wine and water that had been left for her. She brought it inside, and without opening the curtains, or lighting the lamp, dined on remains of the roast beef, potatoes, and beans from Christmas Eve dinner. Only then did she realize that it was Christmas Day. She brought her fist to her cheek, imagining her mother and father entertaining family at their traditional roast duck dinner. At one end of the table her mother would reign as hostess, deftly shifting the conversation among the aunts and cousins. Before dessert they would have discussed the latest books, theater performances and tidbits of political gossip. At the far end of the table Father would sit quietly, his napkin tucked into his starched collar, except when he jerked it free to swat at the noisy children seated at the little table behind him. In the parlor the Christmas tree

would sparkle with dozens of lit candles. She could remember clearly the pungent cinnamon smell of Aunt Christina's apple pie warming in the oven.

Philippa sat in the rocking chair in the dark and took a long drink from the jug of wine. Her head lolled against the back of the chair. Behind closed eyes she saw Martin's kicking balls and sheet music in his casket.

*December 26, 1847*

*Dear Mother,*

*I am in receipt of your letter but unfortunately, the steamship ticket was stolen from the envelope. Therefore I am not able sail on the Capitol. As I have so little money, I must earn more. I've accepted Cousin John's offer of a position at his sawmill camp assisting the wife of the foreman with household chores. We have thirty carpenters and diggers living in tents, and each must be fed three times a day. I also help with laundry. For these services Cousin John pays me $30 a month, twice what he pays his other employees.*

*I imagine you are shocked by having your educated offspring join the working class, but I like it. For the first time in my life I am earning a salary.*

*I have a report on John Sutter's ranching and hide operation at New Helvetia. Because of the dangers involved with rogue steers, Cousin John was adamant about not allowing me to ride out with the rancheros to herd and rope. Therefore John Bidwell, who is the ranching expert on his staff, has prepared the report. Rather than post it to you and have it stolen, I will bring it with me when I sail. I will take a coach to visit Martin's parents and deliver the report. I hope you will come with me.*

*It will take me months to earn even a second class ship ticket. Do not expect to see me for the better part of a year. Do not worry about me. I am well. My sketching and painting sustain me. The fare at the sawmill camp is simple, but the food and wines at Cousin John's table, including imported fruits and vegetables from South America, are superb. I send you warm embraces and our special kiss on both cheeks. Please give my love to Father.*

*Philippa*

The next morning Quartermoon came to her apartment with pitchers of hot water for washing. Time and Cousin John's excellent Bordeaux had brightened Philippa's frame of mind. She was resigned to going back to Coloma to work with Jenny Wimmer until she'd earned enough for her voyage. She decided to get some exercise by walking around the compound to see what changes Cousin John had made since she'd left in October. Out of habit she brought along her sketch pad.

She opened an iron-trellised gate into the vegetable garden and was surprised to see dozens of Indian men and women huddled along the gravel path. Their long, thick hair was matted with trinkets and small polished bones. The men, short legged, muscular and brown, wore pantaloons and went bare-

chested. Some of them squatted against the trees, regarding her suspiciously. Their stocky women, shifting their weight from hip to hip, wore loose-fitting blouses that looked to be recently issued to them and well-worn skirts woven from water reeds. Clustered together, their bodies emanated a distinctive odor that reflected a fish diet, and something else. Acorns? Bertrand La Martine walked down the path with chief gardner Heinrich Leinhard, the only other Swiss immigrant at New Helvetia. She winced, remembering Leinhard's prejudice against the Natoma Indians. They were about to begin the experiment of free labor for seed and vegetables. She was curious to see if the Frenchman could coach these "thieving primitives" into productive field hands.

When Bertrand saw her at the gate he raised an arm to wave her in. "Do not be alarmed, Madame Sutter. The Natoma are a civilized a tribe." She found his French accented voice pleasing amid the high-pitched babble of the Indians. He started half of the men hoeing and digging up weeds in the cabbage and turnip rows under the ministrations of Leinhard. He loaded up the rest of the men and some of the squaws in a wagon drawn by two horses. The remaining women gathered in a clearing with bowls of food to begin the noon meal. "Do you want to come with us to the bean field?" he called to Philippa. She walked to the wagon. He leaned down to give her a lift up to the seat next to the drivers' seat.

She looked over her shoulder. The squaws stared at her, muttering. "Why do they scowl at me?"

"They don't approve of your riding outfit. A woman should wear a skirt, preferably made of reeds."

"This is a skirt, but it's split so I can stride a horse."

Bertrand shook his head. "Won't do."

"At least I don't wear chicken bones in my hair!"

The Natoma laborers dispersed throughout the expansive bean track and Bertrand walked up and down the rows demonstrating to them how to cultivate the soil without disturbing the young plants. Philippa sat on a tree stump and began to sketch the scene before her. She'd braided her hair into a single tail and secured it with a leather tie. After the harsh climate up in Coloma, the hot sun of the Sacramento Valley felt welcome on her neck. She heard her mother's voice. "Be patient with yourself. You will achieve your goals. It's just going to take more time than you planned." Philippa envisioned herself living in her old room at home, teaching her new painting method to a graduate class at Pennsylvania Academy. Her life would begin again.

Bertrand's shadow fell across her pad.

"You're blocking my light," she said without looking up. She rubbed out a section of the foreground, unsatisfied by the perspective. The heel of her hand was black with charcoal.

"It's time for nooning," he said. He helped her back onto the wagon seat. He whistled to the field hands and they sauntered down the rows toward the wagon, carrying hoes over their shoulders.

"How did they do?" she asked Bertrand.

"They've made a beginning."

In the clearing where the women were stirring acorn meal in coiled baskets, Philippa stood to the side as the Indians squatted around the fire. With a tong-like tool, one of the women added hot stones from the fire to keep the mush at a boil. Over another fire two squaws fried flat pieces of bread in a large iron pan. A group of young girls knelt on woven blankets spread over the loose dirt. They pummeled the acorn nuts into meal that would be eaten by the women after the boiling mush had been served to their men.

Bertrand motioned to Philippa to join him as he sat on a log a short distance from the cookfires. Chief Twotree's first wife handed them wooden bowls of fried bread and acorn mush. Bertrand ate his with his fingers. She hesitated. "Go on," he said.

She dipped her fingers into the bowl and brought them to her lips. Her tongue extended tentatively toward the gruel. "Like this?"

He nodded.

The Natoma men clustered to one side, eating as a group out of a large basket. The women settled down to their joint basket in the shade of a trio of tall pines. "The squaws are observing you," Bertrand said after a short silence.

"What do they see?"

"A woman, dressed in pants and red coat with leather buttons, who sits next to a man at a meal flaunts taboos of their culture."

"They must find me ill-mannered--common, as my mother would say."

Bertrand put down his bowl and began to speak to the Natoma, gesturing to Philippa. His remarks drew smiles and appreciative cooing. Some shifted forward to get a better look at her. The daughters whispered together until their mother's shushed them. She found it a sibilant language, probably not too difficult to master.

"What did you tell them?"

"The beautiful lady with the blue-green eyes is from the East. She doesn't know how to eviscerate a deer carcass, or fish for trout, or cook, or gather berries. All she can do is draw pictures on paper. So let us humor her. She is harmless. She doesn't even have enough sense to wear a dress."

"How rude of you to tell them that."

He laughed. "I also told them their visit to Sutter's Fort was a privilege. That they had better work hard if they wanted to be invited back to learn how to plant seeds."

She put her bowl aside and began to sketch Twotree as he leaned against a pine tree. He had one hand on the shoulder of a young son at his feet, drawing with a stick in the dirt. The expression on Twotree's face chilled her. The sad brown eyes and sagging mouth revealed resignation. He'd been pushed around by the Spanish rancheros as well as the mission padres. Here was a man humiliated by having his land taken away from him by Sutter's extensive land grant, a hunter forced to learn farming so his people could survive. She worked quickly and got down what she wanted.

Bertrand peered rudely over her shoulder. "You've captured him as surely as if you'd thrown a net around him."

"This man is a significant Californian. He's been betrayed."

"You're right," Bertrand said. "And this is only the beginning."

She put her pad aside. "What is it you do for Cousin John?" she asked.

He leaned back and looked at the pine boughs overhead. "John and I are partners. He raises and slaughters cattle and tans hides. I cart the hides and beef to market."

"Who are your customers?"

"Every ship sailing in and out of San Francisco Bay," he said.

"Don't you compete with the Spanish rancheros? Collectively they raise more cattle."

"Our cartage service is faster and we adjust prices to get the business. We also supply ships with wheat and flour, fruits and vegetables, blankets, soap, many of the tools and furnishings made by the smithy and carpenters at the fort. As soon as John has the sawmill working and logs swirling downriver, I will sell his lumber."

"Has this always been your line of work?"

"I was born in France. I left Bordeaux when I was nineteen and came to Canada. I worked along the rivers trapping fox and beaver. Hunters paid me to guide their parties through the back country. Then I struck ut west, selling hides to the Russians and started my own packing outfit."

"With each enterprise you've increased your business acumen," she said, impressed.

"And wealth. I never look back. I have four cartage teams working for me and a half-interest in a river sloop. That's how I came to Sutter's attention."

"You say you sell his products. Do you purchase goods for him as well?"

"I buy whatever food he does not raise here and supplies he needs for his manufacturies."

"I see that you are New Helvetia's merchant, carter, exporter, and importer," she said.

"Yes."

"Then why is my cousin in debt?"

"Simple economics--he buys more than he sells."

"Sounds to me as if you are the one who buys more than you sell. Perhaps you should use more discretion in your dealings for him."

He eyed her with brows raised. Challenged, his voice lowered, his French accent became more pronounced. "John Sutter has always been in debt. It is his method of conducting business."

"He cannot run a deficit indefinitely. That's irresponsible. As his representative you do him a disservice."

"He has many hot irons in the fire."

"Like our friend Smithy Will Harker," she said, eyeing him warily.

An awkward pause ensued.

"Yet, I can see John trusts you." She turned and stared into Bertrand's black eyes. "My cousin is kind, a true gentleman. I beg you not to abuse that trust," she said.

Bertrand held her gaze and nodded. "Do you plan to return East soon?"

"As soon as I can earn enough money for my passage. My parents mailed me a letter with a steamship ticket inclosed, even inscribed with my name, but it was stolen along the way."

He laughed. "Did they really expect it to arrive intact? How naive you are. Philippa Sutter you will not survive out here unless you toughen up. Your should expect the worst of people."

"You're too harsh, Monsieur La Martine."

"No, life here is a battle. Learn to stand your ground," he said sharply.

"I can't leave California soon enough," she said.

She saw the Natoma watched their heated exchange and was relieved when he lowered his voice. "I've seen your portrait of John Sutter hanging in the Custom House in Portsmouth Square. It is superb. Did he pay you?"

"Yes, for two months in room and board."

"It's worth ten times that! What fools we are. You paint his portrait. I train Indians to raise his beans and potatoes. It is interesting, is it not, that we both do favors for the man when we would rather be about our own desires."

"Favor? Is he not paying you for your work with the Indians?"

"Sutter's funds are limited. The task is little enough for all he has done for me."

"What desire would you rather be about?" she asked.

"Making a great deal of money."

She was intrigued by his bluntness. "For what purpose?"

"I left France penniless. Within the next few years California will come into its own. I will own property and businesses. I intend to exert great influence over powerful men. As soon as a treaty is signed with Mexico and this territory officially belongs to the United States, President Polk will make California a state. Then I will run for and win political office."

She gave him an astonished look.

"Mrs. Sutter, why are you astonished by my vision? Is it any less ambitious than your own?"

The next day Philippa rode out of the fort's gates with James Marshall and returned upriver to the barren landscape of mountains and rivers, ice, snow, and querulous men who worked twelve hours a day. She resumed her baking, cooking and laundering duties with Jenny Wimmer. More laborers had been hired to dig out the mill's tailrace, and she worked longer hours. Often she couldn't find time to paint until late in the day, when darkness and cold precluded any work at the river. She set up her easel in the mess cabin, where the Pekinese shopkeepers watched her warily. The carpenters, chilled from working on the mill all day, huddled by the fire, complaining about the turpentine smell. She finished her painting of Chief Twotree and set it in a folder. If California evolved as Bertrand La Martine predicted, many native peoples would be displaced. More foreigners, like the Pekinese shopkeepers and Chilean fruit sellers would arrive and be subjected to prejudice as they tried to assimilate. She decided to do a series of portraits of native Indians and foreigners revealing their harsh experiences.

A week later she decided to set up her easel outside. James Marshall walked along the river bank calling over the wind to his diggers to go deeper. He waded through the mill's lower channel, suddenly leaned over and picked something up. He walked over and showed it to her.

"Mica?" she asked.

"It's too heavy."

"At art school we made our own colors from mineral deposits. Maybe its copper–or gold."

Marshall looked around, spotted a flat rock, placed the nugget on it, and struck it with another rock. It didn't crack or shatter. He laughed, as eerie a sound as she'd ever heard.

The next day he gathered more flakes and nuggets. She watched him stir the flakes in his palm with his fingers and chomp on the nuggets with his back teeth. "Mrs. Sutter, I plan to ride down to the fort in the morning. Do you care to accompany me?"

"Yes," she said. She was nearly out of supplies and hoped the tubes of paint and vials of turpentine she'd ask Sutter to order had arrived.

They rode through a severe storm, overnighting in the half-way cabin, and setting out the next day, riding through more rain. When they arrived at the fort she was surprised to see Bertrand La Martine in the stable yard. He helped her from her horse. "Is Sutter here?" Marshall asked.

"In his office. We've just finished a meeting. The heavy rains have clogged the trails with mud. Our pack mules and wagons are stalled in the foothills."

"Come with us," Marshall said. The three of them clattered up the stairs to Sutter's office.

Inside she scooped off her sodden felt hat.

"Philippa, what a surprise! My dear, you're shivering," Sutter said. He placed a blanket from the back of his chair over her and rubbed her shoulders vigorously.

James Marshall shook himself like a dog and smiled in a completely uncharacteristic, hectic way, baring his yellowing teeth. "Lock the door," he said. He had a feverish look to his eyes.

Bewildered, Sutter glanced at Bertrand and did so.

Philippa shrugged off the blanket. From a satchel she wore slung over her shoulder she pulled out her sketchbook and charcoal.

"Look at what I found in the water of the mill's tailrace," Marshall said, unwrapping a handkerchief he pulled from his pocket. He held the open cloth close to an oil lamp.

Bertrand watched as Sutter stared at the granules of bright metal. Sutter picked up several flakes on the tip of his finger. His lips tightened as he looked at Marshall. "Have you found gold, my friend?"

"We must test it," Marshall said urgently. "If it's some other metal, I've been skinned out of my eyeteeth."

Sutter sighed deeply. In the silence the four of them stared at one another. They waited for Sutter to speak. "Bertrand, you're experienced in these things. How can we determine if it's gold?"

Bertrand examined the granules and tried to bend several flakes between his thumb and forefinger. "I'll need aqua fortis from the apothecary shop. Also scales and some silver to test the weight."

Sutter opened the door, leaned around and spoke rapidly to a clerk. While they waited, Sutter leafed through his volumes of Encyclopedia Americana. As he read aloud in his deep guttural voice about the properties of gold, Bertrand looked at Philippa. Her cheeks were flushed from excitement and exertion of the ride. Wet strands of hair lay against the back of her neck, fallen from the knot she had wound up hastily that morning. She sensed Bertrand's stare and glanced up. Unnerved, she lowered her eyes and replaced the wool blanket over her shoulders.

"You look like a Natoma squaw, Mrs. Sutter," Bertrand said.

She smiled.

The clerk returned with a vial of aqua fortis. Bertrand poured the liquid in a bowl and rinsed the granules. Philippa coughed, choking from the caustic aroma. "This acid has a powerful oxidizing effect on metals," Bertrand explained. They waited tensely. At length he lifted out the tiny nuggets and flakes and dried them with Marshall's handkerchief. Far from dissolving or discoloring in the ammoniac chemical, they were unchanged, if anything, glittering more brilliantly after their immersion. He placed them on the scale, adding a similar amount of silver. The plate holding the silver rose gently. "It's gold, all right," he said.

Before Marshall's exultant smile had faded, Sutter took hold of his arm and Bertrand's. He held Philippa with his eyes. "Tell no one!"

She took Sutter's hand. "You can't keep gold a secret."she said.

Drops of rain spattered, then drenched the courtyard the next morning. Philippa ran to the barn and led her palomino out of its stall. She threw her saddle over the flanks of the horse. A Spanish stable boy sauntered forward and offered to tighten the cinch and put on the bridle. Head down against the rain, she ran up the outside staircase to Sutter's office, boots clattering on the wooded planks.

"You have the eager look of departure about you," Cousin John said.

"Mr. Marshall is waiting for me."

Sutter glanced out the window and shook his head. "Everlasting rain." He stepped from behind his desk. "Will you dig for gold?"

"I do have a mind to go prospecting," she said. "I've come to know two very fine Mormon gentlemen at the saw mill camp and I am forming a plan. I want to earn my passage back East as fast as possible."

"Philippa, you are entrusted onto my care. You can't just go off with Mormon carpenters to dig for gold. There will be greedy men all along the river possessed by a madness for free gold. You won't be safe. We must discuss this."

"Yes, Cousin John."

On her way out through the dining room she was startled to see Bertrand La Martine studying at her two paintings hanging on the wall.

"What do you title this?" he asked her. He pointed to her favorite of the two riverscapes, the one she'd painted hastily at twilight when the last of the sun, trapped behind purple cliffs, had glistened on the fast-moving river.

"Shadowed Light," she answered.

The buckskin vest he wore over his blue flannel shirt was speckled with raindrops. He frowned. "Frankly I don't like either of the paintings."

She experienced a stinging sensation of rejection. "Why?"

"I can't tell what they are supposed to represent. I don't understand what you are trying to accomplish by painting in this style. Certainly you are capable of painting a river that looks like a river. Which do you value more, light or shadow?"

"There cannot be one without the other."

"Darkness suits me," he said. "I'm like a bat. I see clearly at night."

"I am drawn to the light," she said.

After a silence she asked, "Will you dig for gold? Surely a man obsessed by making money is attracted by accessible deposits of gold."

He laughed at her jibe. "I'm going to San Francisco to buy real estate in Portsmouth Square. It's emerging as the heart of town. The land will jump two to three times its value. Marshall's nuggets are only the beginning. Sutter's secret will be shouted from rooftops within days, and the American River will be crowded with prospectors."

"You are a futurist?"

"I am a shrewd businessman. What about you, Mrs. Sutter? Will you dig for gold?"

"I am thinking about joining two Mormon carpenters I've come to know, who are preparing to go to Mormon Island. They say it's rich with placer gold."

Bertrand was stunned. "Digging for gold is hard manual work. You're being foolhardy!"

"A woman like me lacks the stamina is what you mean," she said. "You can rest easy. I won't be panning on the river. I will provide provisions, cook and do laundry for Mr. Luke Blacker and Mr. Edmund Rose. In exchange, they will prospect for me two hours a day."

"Good God, what a terrible risk! What do you know about them?"

"They are good men. I trust them."

Bertrand shook his head in despair.

"Think what you like," she said sharply. "I must make money to buy my sailing ticket back East and get out of this hostile country. This is the fastest, surest way I know."

"And when you are safely home with mother and father," he said dubiously, "then what?"

"I will paint and I will lecture at the Pennsylvania Academy on the techniques of my new style, which you find so offensive. I am determined to bring this innovation into being. When I have support for my theories, I will go to Paris and present my ideas to the Sorbonne."

Bertrand regarded her closely. "The academic approach to art has satisfied the eye and human spirit for hundreds of years. Why change it now?"

"Because it is stale and repetitious."

"The last great changes to art were developed during the Renaissance," he said. "Do you intend to improve on Michelangelo?"

"I have a different approach. European and American museums and galleries are stuffed with art of Biblical subjects. Worthy, but pompous figures reminding us of their great deeds and our moral duties. I want to bring art into the natural world. I want to paint real people as they live a normal life, such as women sitting on chairs, gossiping in the sunlight, children rolling hoops, herders leading their goats across San Francisco's sandy hillsides. I'm not talking about the vapid watercolors you see down by the harbor. My paintings will reveal emotion, the excitement of living in our times."

"A noble idea, but your strange style of paint layered over paint precludes the viewer from making out what the scene is about," Bertrand said in exasperation. "What's the point of that?"

She was silent, assimilating his criticism.

"Mrs. Sutter, you are an extremely talented portrait artist," he said. "I own property in San Francisco. I can set you up in a portrait studio, rent-free, and help you to get commissions. If you work hard you can earn your fare home in

half the time it will take your Mormon friends to dig up enough gold to buy a first class sailing ship ticket East."

She cocked her head. "You would do that for me?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"You are a beautiful, vulnerable woman, and I worry about you."

She smiled. "You are very French, Monsieur. I always work hard, but I do not intend to spend this time on portraits."

"I'm warning you: Do not go out on the river! Do you think because you are related to John Sutter that you will not be molested by some drunken fool?"

"I'm willing to take the risk."

"You are the most naive, stubborn woman I've ever met."

"No, I am independent. I realize the situation I am about to embark on is not ideal. I know I'm putting myself in a hazardous situation even with Mr. Blacker's and Mr. Rose's protection."

"I fear for your life," he said. "You are a creature of the urban world. You know nothing of living rough out in the open."

"Don't worry, Monsieur. I am strong. I'm tough. I'm not afraid. I expect to have enough gold in one or two months to be away at last. I believe in my dream. I can see it accomplished and this is what drives me."

"I cannot change your mind?"

"No."

"Well, at least you will need painting supplies to accomplish your dream," he said reaching for a sack slung over the back of a dining chair. He emptied the bag on the table.

"I thought all shipments were delayed with the mule wagons mired in mud," she said.

"I brought these with me," he said.

There were eight tubes of paint, several jars of oils, sealer and vials of distilled turpentine. She unraveled a thick roll of canvas. "These are wonderful supplies. How much do I owe you?"

"They are my gift to you," he said. "The canvas is excess tenting, rather coarse, I'm afraid."

"Thank you," she said. She was struck anew by what a good-looking man he was, especially when he smiled, but how quickly the smile faded. She sensed a menace stirring in him. It did not surprise her that darkness suited him.

"May I see you if I ride up to the sawmill?" he asked.

"Of course. We're very informal. People come and go."

Before she sensed what was happening he stepped forward and took her hands in his. "I see you feel the attraction between us. What we have is irresistible." His frank sexuality and her unmistakable response to it shook her to the core. Her cheeks flared in embarrassment. She opened the door and went out into the rain.

# Chapter Five

The word was out and gold gripped the sawmill camp like a raging fever. John Sutter rode up from the fort at least once a week with geologists and bankers. He walked smartly up and down the river bank in army uniform, his sword knocking against his thigh. His guests were dressed for business in their black tailcoats. They stuck professional poses, but could barely contain their excitement. Heightened anticipation in the mill camp made the chilled air quiver. Edgy with excitement, the carpenters and laborers knew the river and its streams further up in the foothills held gold for the taking. Many had secreted away bags-full of nuggets and flakes gathered during their time off. They said they were going hunting, but nary a rabbit returned with them. Sutter offered them double wages to remain on the job until the mill was finished, and most of them stayed at the camp through the winter months.

By March Philippa was able to set up her easel and paint on the river bank for longer periods of time as daylight lengthened and the weather turned warmer. The balmy air buzzed with the riotous songs of birds, timber being cut in the forest, and the whine of the giant saw, suspended from the roof of the mill, slicing through logs. She was painting a series of riverscapes, working at capturing light in her new way. She frequently changed positions along the river bank so that sunlight did not glare off the shine of the paint. Once the sun disappeared behind the ridge and the wind whipped at her easel, it was a bad business, trying to paint out of doors.

Ever since the wolf caper, Willie Wimmer had become a loyal friend. When she grew hungry, he brought her a cup of hot tea and a plate of meat, cheese and bread, then lingered close by, skipping stones into the river and asking questions until she was too absorbed with her painting to answer. In the evenings by oil lamp she stretched tent canvas over simple frames the

carpenters made and covered the surfaces with layers of lead white and linseed oil. She experimented with how much turpentine to use to thin the coating. At first she deplored the look of coarse canvas weave visible through colors. Her pictures appeared to have been hastily painted, but she was intrigued by an unexpected spontaneity created by white spaces. She tried using egg yolk as a binder. For pigments she mixed field poppies, nasturtium and bits of gold flakes she found drifting in a gulch eddy. The pigments took time to grind and dry, but made glorious colors, the gold lending an uncommon shine.

"I heard you crying last night," Jenny Wimmer said. She kneaded dough on the pastry board, her thick fingers splayed as she worked it. She had a way of putting her considerable weight behind her kneading, as if she were pummeling a foe.

Philippa sat at the kitchen table peeling potatoes. "I get sad from time to time," she said. "I miss Martin."

Jenny gazed at Philippa's blue-green eyes. "That's understandable. But I advise you not to dwell on it." She picked up the dough and shaped it gently with her stubby fingers, eying Philippa. "Soon you'll be craving a new man."

Philippa thought about Bertrand La Martine. 'I see you feel the attraction between us. What we have is irresistible,' he'd said. She would have ignored the remark as bold impertinence if she hadn't responded to his strong sexual presence. Beside that, she liked Bertrand. He was a bright and ambitious man, and he intrigued her. She opened the kitchen door to the back porch and inhaled the fresh forest spring air. "It's too soon," she said to Jenny.

Jenny slapped down the wad of dough. "It's not a matter of time," she said. "No one is counting months or weeks. Why should you? In your heart, you will know when you're ready."

On a Sunday in mid-March Philippa walked upriver to a canyon with Edmund Rose and Luke Blacker. She had a landscape in mind as background to close-up figures. It was a technique she hadn't tried before. Edmund Rose was tall and lanky with the cold, light eyes of a zealot. His black hair, parted in the middle lay plastered across both sides of the dome of his oval head. Luke Blacker was a smaller man, rounder and younger. He was compact, efficient and energetic. Warmth emanated from his coloring of taffy-brown eyes and reddish hair. The two men had struck up a strong friendship at the sawmill camp, and she admired how they were planning their future together. She sketched them as they waded in the river, chipping and scraping bits of rock embedded with gold from boulders with their skinning knives. Now that the mill was close to being completed, they were torn. Should they stay and dig for

gold or drive a mule wagon over the Sierras home to Salt Lake? She sketched, listening to their conversation over the constant rush of the leaping river.

"I say we try prospecting for two months," Luke said. Excitement pulsed in his voice. His brown eyes sparkled.

"The elders expect us back." Edmund argued. "They'll know why we're delayed. It ain't seemly to be digging up another man's gold. The land belongs to Sutter."

"The river flows from the top of the mountains," Luke answered. "Sutter doesn't own the river." Despite the chilled air, he was perspiring from exertion.

She accompanied them the following day, and the afternoon after that. They were getting to know one another, like inmates selecting a fellow with whom to break out of prison. Nothing was holding her to the camp. Their chores had been so reduced Jenny Wimmer and her Indian girls could handle them.

Luke approached her at her easel on the side of the riverbank. He waited while she filled in background of a cliff, dabbing blobs of purple, black, and various shades of blue from her palette onto a small area of the canvas. When she raised her brush, he said, "Mrs. Sutter, Mr. Rose and I would like to speak to you."

"Yes?"

"We have decided to go prospecting as soon as our job of splitting shingles for the mill is finished. Will you be ready to come with us in a week?"

"Yes, " she said.

"As we've discussed we'll go down river to a gravel bar near Sutter's flour mill. They call it Mormon Island. All the miners are Latter Day Saints. You will see to our provisions, cooking, and laundry. In exchange, each of us will spend one hour a day panning for gold for you."

"How much gold do you think you'll find at Mormon Island?" she asked.

"We hear they're panning big flakes, even some nuggets. In his Suttersville store Sam Brannan is paying sixteen dollars an ounce."

Philippa's hopes soared. If the two of them could dig up ten ounces for her in a month she could earn her passage back East.

She spent her last evening in the mess cabin, playing monte with Willie. Luke and Edmund, who did not approve of cards, watched. Philippa looked up from her fan of cards. Despite their rough country manners, Luke and Edmund were intelligent, practical gentlemen. She'd be in good hands. They knew how to pitch a tent, reset a wagon wheel and shoe a horse. They'd been unfailingly courteous to her. She trusted them. A week later the lumber mill was shingled and only days from completion. She did not start any new

paintings, but kept her belongings ready at hand because they could depart at any hour.

James Marshall was not surprised when Luke and Edmund announced they were leaving. So many men had already departed with their picks and pans. But Philippa was caught off guard by how much leaving the camp affected her. She shook Jenny's Wimmer's hand and gave Willie a kiss, which he wiped away in disgust with the back of his hand. This made Philippa laugh, but as she walked out the door, bags slung from straps over her shoulders, she heard Jenny Wimmer scolding her son for his bad manners. Greatly moved by the sounds of their familiar voices, she turned back inside and embraced them both until her cheeks were wet with tears.

Philippa mounted the palomino Cousin John had loaned to her. Luke and Edmund rode the mules they had purchased in Suttersville along with their tenting and mining supplies. They rode south from Coloma close to the river. In late afternoon they departed from the trail several times to search for the fabled gravel bar where the men building Cousin John's flour mill had found gold. At dusk they spotted it at the junction of the Middle Fork and North Forks of the American River. They fed and corralled their horse and mules in a makeshift animal pen and waded through the shallow river to the bar. Luke quickly staked out enough space to set up their tents while Edmund started a fire. Philippa had a tent to herself; the men slept and stored their gear in another, and they used the third as a cook tent. They were not alone. Smoke curled from half-a-dozen fires in fields close to the river bank. Still more tents were pitched under pines and cedars in a side-hill encampment. Lean-tos, made of nothing more than pine boughs stretched over wooden planks, providing shelter for a few stalwart souls.

Cooking for Luke and Edmund was easy compared to preparing meals for twenty-five men at the lumber camp. She had pans of hot cakes, bacon and a pot of coffee ready at first light, when they emerged from their tents scratching and yawning. She spent her day sketching the good Saints down on their haunches at the river's edge, brandishing their picks, gouging the soil with their shovels, swirling the dirt out of their iron fry pans.

She watched Luke and Edmund dip their pans into the sand and gravel, add water, swirl the pans about, scoop, swirl, spill, repeating the process. It looked like they were slogging through a tedious cooking recipe. Only instead of sifting flour for a cake, they sifted sand, stones, dirt, gold dust, flakes, grains and nuggets. When they picked out the flakes and bits of gold, they whooped and hollered. She felt as if they were all on holiday.

After three days Luke came to her holding a small, leather sack. "This is your poke, Mrs. Sutter. The gold will have to be cleaned free of the stones, but we figure you've got nearly two ounces so far. She thanked him. He turned back with a grin. "You are a good cook, Ma'am."

One enterprising gent from San Francisco drove a mule team and wagon with food supplies into the camp. With their shared money she bought beef jerky, eggs, flour and a sack of dried fruit.

A carpenter sawed pine planks and hammered together a contraption he called a rocker. It looked like a baby's cradle, but was designed with riffles underneath to separate gold particles from dirt more efficiently than by the shallow pan method. He sold them as fast as he could complete them at one hundred dollars each.

Curled on a cot in her tent at night Philippa listened to raucous singing, curses and laughter. Anyone passing by would think the Saints of Mormon Island were outcasts of a crazed race. And these were only the beginning days. She knew Edmund and Luke were concerned for her safety. She suspected that before they left Coloma, James Marshall had counseled them sternly to look after her. John Sutter was revered throughout the valley as a deity. Indians and white men alike knew he doted on her like a daughter. The Mormons knew her as "Young Widder Sutter" and treated her with respect, but a few gold-mad strangers from San Francisco looked at her in a frightening way. More than once, men had swaggered past her tent laughing at the eccentric woman in an eastern riding habit. She thought of Bertrand La Martine's warnings, then dismissed them, refusing to allow herself to become afraid.

After two weeks Mormon Island grew too crowded. They packed up and rode through the trees toward a spot on the North Fork of the American River, where Luke said men were digging up gold worth a hundred dollars a day. Philippa laughed. "It's idle gossip, Mr. Blacker. Don't raise your hopes too high."

He pulled his mule up to her horse. "Please call me Luke, seeing as how we're traveling companions."

"And you must address me as Philippa. And you, too, Edmund."

"Yes, Ma'am, Philippa," Edmund Rose answered, looking unhappy. Informality made him nervous. He continued to hold himself aloof. At dusk she and Luke set up the tents and watched Edmund walk in his purposeful stride upriver holding the good book in his long-fingered hands. Conversing with Luke easily, she found his guileless country ways pleasing. The location they sought was also too crowded, so they continued to ride north.

As the weeks passed and the days grew warmer, they continued riding north. Whenever the men found a likely spot, usually at a sharp river bend, they discussed its suitability, then stepped into the icy stream to test it. They could pan for gold for hours without tiring.

One April night, by the light of an oil lamp, she dumped out on her cot the gold flakes and bits Luke and Edmund had gathered in her poke. She estimated seven ounces. She still had the ninety dollars she'd saved. In another few

weeks she would have enough to ride down to Sacramento City, where she would have her gold smelted, then take a sloop down river and across the bay to San Francisco. She would go directly to the wharf and purchase a ticket for the first steamship leaving for the East. With gold worth sixteen dollars an ounce, she might even have enough for a first class passage.

On and on they rode, climbing into the mountains. The men prospected for a day or two, then grew restless, convinced the next location would yield larger, cleaner nuggets. Philippa feared they would ride in a girdle around the earth. Luke and Edmund grew scruffy beards that served to age them. Their boots were nearly worn through from standing in melting snow water.

One morning she was startled by half-a-dozen Indians peering at her through the trees. Edmund signaled to the one who appeared to be the chief. They sat down in a circle. Edmund gave them two nuggets in exchange for a sack of acorns and a hock of venison. The Indians stood and disappeared soundlessly into the forest, and she breathed more easily.

They did not encounter many other miners this far north. From two men camped on a hillside, who'd found their way from the Feather River, she bought beef jerky and dried beans. She thought of Bertrand LaMartine as she pounded the acorns into meal and boiled the meal into mush. He would laugh to see her now, dressed in a muslin skirt and one of Luke's plaid flannel shirts, her arms sun-burned, her cheeks reddened from constant exposure to sun and wind. She felt robust, freer than ever before. As she squatted by the side of the river to rinse their tin plates, she barely resembled the fine Philadelphia lady who'd set sail for California months before.

Each day she walked along the riverbank sketching, but the constant traveling precluded her from painting, as there was not enough time to prepare canvas with proper groundings, or to allow finished paintings to dry sufficiently before she had to roll them up.

One morning in the second week of May, when they'd stopped at a gravel bar, Luke dipped his pan into the river and brought up three thumb-sized nuggets of gold. He jumped up and ran in circles whopping with joy. Edmund, who usually moved slowly, was by his side in a flash. They looked at her, eyes manic with excitement. "We stay here!" they said in unison, planting their shovels in the sand.

The upper North Fork of the American River thundered off a steep cliff in a deep fall, frothed its way over boulders, then rushed through a series of turns between narrow banks, spilling out into a wide mouth, which was clogged with sand and gravel bars. They set up their tents on the largest gravel island, which Luke and Edmund christened "Philippa's Bar."

Philippa used her last sketchbook page to draw Luke holding up the three nuggets. She worked swiftly trying to capture his feverish fervor, knowing he would not want to pose for long. Now she could paint! She set up her folding

easel, mounted a framed canvas, and assembled her tubes of oils. She did not take time to draw in charcoal, prime the canvas or block in color masses. She dabbed on colors directly, allowing the coarse linen weave to provide a gritty texture to Luke's countenance. Instead of mixing colors on her palette, she selected pure high-key colors and applied them in loose brushstrokes, one color fighting another. She worked quickly as noon rays of sun raked his eyes and gilded the nuggets he held. Rather than natural flesh and hair tones, she used reds and violets to detail his beard and ruddy complexion. She used a smoky white for the iris and citron green glints for the white part of his eyes. She painted him with his head slightly turned, the tension in his neck and shoulders speaking a frenzy to get back to the river. With sharply angled, broken strokes, she described the cliff shadows in amethyst. The river behind him leapt in flashes of silver.

Finally she released Luke and finished her painting without him. Later he stood behind her eating a sandwich and drinking a cup of boiled coffee. He smelled of sweat and river silt and beef that had been stewed just before it spoiled. Staring at the painting, he chewed vigorously. The manners of her companions had deteriorated over the weeks. Luke tilted his head and squinted. "Mighty colorful picure you got there, Missus. I reckon it will pass muster as a sketch."

"No sir, that is a finished portrait."

The next day the morning sun was hot. Philippa loosened the top buttons of her cambric blouse, and rolled up the sleeves. She took off her hat and shook out her hair so she could enjoy the sun on her face. With Luke and Edmund a good half-mile off around a river bend, she stripped down to her camisole.

Standing at her easel on the gravel bar she heard a horse splashing through the shallow water around the bend in the river. She looked up in fear. Now that Luke and Edmund had amassed several pouches-full of gold, the few strangers who intruded on them were met at pistol point. Aspen on the riverbank had burst into leaf and their twittering green leaves framed the rider as he came into view. He dismounted. He led his horse through the ankle-deep water in his purposeful stride. She stared in astonishment at Bertrand La Martine.

"I heard you were up here," he said.

She walked over to the edge of the bar. "How did you find us?" She felt exhilarated to see him.

Bertrand tossed his saddle bag onto the gravel. "The Chief of the Miwok tribe told me your men paid him gold for meat and acorns."

"That was weeks ago!"

"This is their forest ground. They are all about you."

She glanced around, alarmed. "Spying on us?"

"Tolerating your presence to be precise. They know that a donkey laden with gold is still a donkey."

"Will they attack us?" she asked in alarm.

He shook his head no. "So long as your Mormon friends keep harvesting nuggets you're too lucrative for prey. The Miwoks would rather trade venison for gold than collect scalps." He looked at her closely. "You're in need of a good meal." He placed a hand on her face, feeling for her cheekbone. At the touch of his fingers an electrical currant surged between them. She realized they were standing in icy water.

"We've run out of coffee. I'd give a year of my life for a cup," she said.

He pulled out a burlap sack from his pack and held it on his upturned palm. She grabbed for it, but he held it out of reach. "First you must promise to give me your year."

She laughed. "It's so good to see you, Monsieur La Martine."

"Please, call me Bertrand,," he said.

"Then you must call me Philippa."

"Will you make the coffee, Philippa, or should I?" He spoke her name for the first time with a French accent that made her think of gilt drawing rooms. She ground and brewed the Peruvian beans, and they sat on logs by the fire, savoring the rich smell and taste. He stared into middle distance the way a weary man will. His beard had grown back with a little more gray than before. He must have been prospecting in the hills for some time. "You are lost in thought," she said.

He leaned forward, elbows on his thighs, and turned his head, fastening his luminous obsidian gaze on her. "I am pondering how I will spend my year with you."

She was flustered. "What's the news? We've been on the move for two months and hopelessly deprived of contact with civilization."

"You remember Sam Brannan of the California Star."

"Oh yes."

"Gold has been found on half-a-dozen rivers. Earlier this month Brannan stocked his mercantile in San Francisco with mining equipment. Then he raced through the city yelling from street corners that gold had been found on the American River. Stirred the hornets right out of the nest. In hours he sold out his mining equipment. Shopkeepers, seaman, everyone with two legs and a sense of adventure took off for the hills."

"Just as you predicted. I'm surprised we've not seen more of these adventurers," she said.

He looked up at the cliffs towering over them. "You are remote up here. It took me days to find you."

She was surprised. Why was he searching for her? "Is Cousin John not well?"

His smile vanished like the sun beneath a wind-driven cloud. "His fear of gold was justified. His laborers have fled. There is a Celtic saying, 'The master's eye fattens the land.'"

"What does that mean?"

"The harvest will be successful to the degree the master looks after it. John has no one to help him look after all his enterprises. His fields now lie fallow. His cattle are being stolen. No products are being manufactured at the fort, so he has nothing to sell. The dairy and bakery are operated by the Mormon women. Woodcutters have abandoned the sawmill. There is no one to work it and send logs down river. The flour mill never did get finished."

"Would he not keep his employees if he paid them more?"

"He refuses to pay laborers sixteen dollars a day, which is what they claim they can pull from the rivers." Bertrand ran a hand through his curly hair. "I stayed on for a month, working with the Natoma. John will have a vegetable crop, but he will have to harvest it himself with his kitchen staff. Even the Natoma scouts and young squaws have left for diggings on the Feather River."

"You've been kind to him," she said.

"I have great affection for John, but my motives are not altruistic. He's my patron. For years he's been the most influential leader in the region. Everyone respects him. My fortunes rise or fall with his."

She stood up. "I must go back to him."

"No, Philippa. He is a stubborn old Swiss who will not listen to reason. I've tried. It's an impossible situation."

"What does he live on?"

"Brannan's opened a mercantile at the fort and pays him rent."

She walked to the edge of the sand bar, her boots crunching on gravel, and threw pebbles against the wind into the river, watching them sink. She drew in a ragged breath. Years of effort were lost, the cattle she and Martin came west to learn about, now stolen. She looked back at Bertrand. "If you did not come to tell me to go to him, why are you here?"

He walked to her side. "I missed you." He placed his hands on her face, gently smoothing her blowing hair back across her temples. He brushed his lips

across her forehead in a butterfly touch. She felt every nerve in her body vibrate, like her landscapes' jarring colors. His breath smelled of coffee and earth-baked sage. She wanted him desperately. She hadn't realized that after Martin there could be more.

The next morning Philippa did not hear Bertrand at first. She startled at the sight of his shadow distorted against the canvas of her tent and whirled her head around.

"Excuse me," he said. He smiled slowly. His eyes were in deep shadow, the morning light behind him. "We missed you at breakfast. Are you ill?" Bertrand asked.

"No, I've been working." He looked less hawk-headed, having shaved off his beard and mustache and trimmed his hair. He smiled, his teeth a little less white now that the dark beard was gone. "You may come in if you wish," she said.

He lowered his head and stepped into her tent, waiting a moment for his eyes to adjust from the sunlight. With his presence the space grew intimate. The smell of waxed tent canvas was more pungent. Intense desire for him washed over her like a flush of hot paint. His glance moved from the lacy shadow of swaying pine trees at the top of the tent toward a length of twine stretched between two poles. He fingered it. "What's this for?"

His voice resonated. She wondered if he had learned to sing as a boy. She took two clothes pins out of her pocket. "I hang up my paintings to dry."

"I would like to see your paintings."

She reached for several rolled canvases stored in a flour barrel. He brushed her hand and scooped the clothes pins from it. His fingers were cool in her palm. He fastened the first painting to the twine. She handed him more clothes pins. Together they hung up six paintings. Colors emanated from them, as riotous and cackling as parrots.

As he stepped in front of them to look, she smelled dried sweat on his flannel shirt. He was wiry and graceful for a big man. His silent scrutiny rattled her.

He raised the tent curtain she used as a doorway and secured it back. A dim light lit the interior space. He examined the paintings and then lowered the flap. ""May I bring them out into the sun?" Without waiting for an answer he carried out all eighteen of her landscapes and figures, half a year of work, and secured each one on the gravel, a light stone holding down each corner against a light breeze. Bertrand walked among them. He groaned in disapproval.

She looked at him. "What is it that offends you?"

"I feel as if I am looking at these paintings through two inches of water. The facial features and the objects on your landscapes are blurry. When you did the portrait John Sutter, you made him look exactly as he really does. It's uncanny how accurately you painted his expression. You'd be surprised–every time I go to the Custom House on Portsmouth Square, I look at it again. I've even told people that I know the artist as well as the subject of the portrait. You know how to be accurate. Why do you want to obscure that accuracy?"

"The viewer must decide for himself what he sees and how it affects him emotionally. I am not painting monumental moments in life. These are everyday experiences. They are not formal portraits; they are figures. There can be one or several people, or figures, in one painting. I want the viewer to relate it to his own life and come away with an emotional response."

"Such as?"

"The woman in that painting is very still and pensive as she is shelling peas. She is frowning. The viewer could say, 'I wonder what she is worried about. I've felt that way.' Or, 'I've seen sunlight on water just like that and it inspires me.' "

He shook his head. "The only emotional response I feel is frustration. Don't surprised if these don't sell. People are not used to being asked to give up accuracy in art. They are used to looking at –and will pay for – images that represent reality, not obscure it."

"Then let them buy daguerreotypes," she said.

Bertrand stopped in front of a canvas and swivelled to view it. "What is this?"

"One of my favorites. It's a woman taking a bath in a wash tub in the river. She is sponging her arms and breasts and the tub is swirling downstream, which makes her laugh."

"But you have a Miwok Scout in the trees watching her. That would never happen," he said. "Their manners prohibit spying on women." She could see he was offended.

"It's only a painting, Bertrand. Don't be so serious. Right now I am experimenting with new ideas."

He studied her paintings of Luke and Edmund. "Do you consider these figures or portraits?"

"These are portraits, she said.

"They are not realistic. You've caught their greed, but missed their suffering."

"Suffering? Luke and Edmund are euphoric at their success. They've stowed away thousands of dollars worth of gold."

"You are a rare woman in their presence," he said. "They honor you and show you their cheerful faces. Look more closely and notice their expressions. Their backs ache from the pickax, their hands are raw from callouses that continually open and bleed. They are homesick and despondent. Worse of all they live in terror of being robbed and returning home with nothing to show for their time stolen from the Mormon elders. You should be painting heartache and violence. Are you a stranger to such realities?"

She searched his eyes, her own cold.

"I know heartache, Monsieur."

He seized her by the shoulders. "Philippa, you are a serious artist. I wish you would select more worthy subjects to paint in a style that is clear and pleasing. You know how to do it. Let your passion feed you."

She followed him with her eyes as he walked away and disappeared around the bend in the river. Let her passion feed her, indeed. She was troubled by his criticism and had to remind herself that what she was experimenting with was peculiar. Not only was she ahead of her time, she was ahead of herself. Eventually a formula would reveal itself and she would find confidence to take her art to its new level.

She imagined Bertrand bathing in the cold water, his clothes spread on a boulder. She envisioned the shape of his body. She unpinned the braid she had just twined and shook out her hair, running her fingers through it. She examined her hands, turning them over. Traces of yellow pigment, red, blue. They smelled of turpentine. She took off her jacket and went to the river, kneeling down to wash, then sat back on her heels to let the sun dry her face.

In a trance of desire she walked upriver, following it around the bend. She saw Bertrand, shirt off, workpants rolled up to his calves, standing in a shallow pool at the edge of the river bank. He had his head down as he scraped his pen knife against the rocks. She watched for a time, listening to the steady rasping. He reached for a chisel and hammer and knocked once, twice, three times until a cascade of loosened rock fell into a bucket he held under it. As he dumped the bucket on the mossy shore, he caught sight of her approaching. "You're supposed to be working."

"I am." She sat down, legs crossed. "I'm practicing the art of looking."

He resumed picking at the rocks with his knife. Chink, chink. "What do you see?"

"I see what I want."

He glanced up at her and gave her a slow smile. A breeze lifted his dark curly hair, accentuating his lustrous dark eyes. He reached across the water for her hand. The unexpected pressure of his fingers threaded through hers took her breath away. "Come, " he said.

She took off her boots and stepped into the cool river.

He took her arm, easing her over slippery rocks underfoot. His hand went around her waist. He held his palm against the small of her back. Heat shot through her like lightning with no thunder to follow. He looked down at her, taking hold of her with his dark eyes. "Am I what you want?"

She took his face in her hands and kissed him as the water swirled around her knees, pressing, pressing.

"Philippa, you understand, once we start, there's no going back." He stared into her eyes as if he were trying to look past the flesh and bone into her soul. His fierce gaze caressed her face and throat like fingers.

"Yes," she said. She took his hand and let him guide her out of the river. They walked barefoot over the dry grasses into a wooded area. Leaves fallen from past seasons were moist under her toes. They embraced hungrily and laid down on the leaves. "I barely know you," she whispered.

"You know me as well as you know yourself," he said. She felt the warmth of his breath on her face as if it were her own breath. His deep voice rolled like a thundercloud across the afternoon sky.

As well and as incompletely as she knew herself, she thought. She drank his kisses deeply. She felt exhilaration, fear, desire and above all the immense power Bertrand La Martine exerted over her.

They shucked off their clothes. She lay across his body in a wave of heat, her hair spilling across his chest. She had not imagined him correctly. More than the giver or recipient of her desire, he was its source. She thrilled as he touched her, here, and just here. She rolled over onto her back. He lay over the length of her, pressing her against the earth. She heard ringing in her ears. She felt as if a dam had opened, unleashing torrents of desire. Colors thundered through the fissures of her body. Her mind fell away and she soared to a dizzying height that swooped her up and down in pulsing pleasures she had never known before. She lay awake, amazed, wanting it all back again. When he stirred she looked into his eyes. "I'm keeping you from prospecting," she said.

He smiled at her with the look of a man who had already found his gold.

That night she came to his tent. When he lit a candle, she snuffed it out. "I want it dark," she whispered. She stepped out of her skirt and underclothes and unbuttoned her blouse. A three-quartered moon shown with filtered light through the slanted tent roof. She reached for his cotton shirt he'd tossed over a chair and put it on. She climbed onto him, striding him, letting her breasts swing, tantalizing him. "Is this how your whores like to do it?"

"What?" He sat up.

She pushed him back down.

"So, you want it rough?" he said. He pulled her forward and slapped her buttocks. She punched his chest with fisted hands. When they kissed she felt the sharpness of his teeth on her tongue. She ran her hands down his back, raking his skin with her nails. He took hold of her upper arms and pinched the skin.

She cried out in pain. "Do you make your San Francisco whores cry?"

He stared at her in the feeble light. "What a question! I have one mistress. She is Chinese, very clean, smaller than you." He pushed her back. "This is wrong."

She rubbed her arms and smiled. "Don't stop."

He tried to get up from the cot, but she wrapped her arms around his neck. "Slap me, bite me, hurt me," she whispered. "It liberates me."

"From what?" He stared at her for a long time. When he spoke again his voice was hoarse. "You're still grieving, aren't you?"

Her head went down, then abruptly back. She blinked back tears.

"God almighty!" He sat on the edge of the cot. "We have to get past this. Tell me what happened. How did your husband die?""

"Martin had Chagres fever. I made the guides walk down the cliff at night to get to Panama City to a doctor. Martin's mule bolted and fell off the cliff. Martin broke his neck. I left him on a rock in the pouring rain."

"Do you feel his death was your fault?" he asked.

She was silent.

He shook her. "Get dressed and get out. I won't be a part of your punishing-yourself sex."

Philippa made her way back to her tent and cried herself to sleep. When she awoke she turned over and went back to sleep. At noon she heard Luke at her tent flap. "Excuse me, Ma'am, but Edmund and I want to know, if you aren't going to cook, then we aren't going to spend an hour panning for you."

"Where is Monsieur La Martine?" she asked.

"He rode his horse upriver. Said he was going to clean his gold with mercury where the fumes won't endanger us."

She sat up. "Will he'll be back?"

Luke glanced at Bertrand's tent. "He left his possessions here, everything except his gold."

She ran a hand through her hair. "I'm sorry Luke. I haven't been myself. I'll get up in a little while and make a potato pie."

Philippa, Edmund and Luke sat in low canvas chairs by the cookfire in silence. She searched their faces for the suffering Bertrand had spoken of, and to her chagrin saw it in Luke's mouth pulled down and Edmund's persistent frown as he rubbed the back of his neck. She heard the birds calling to one another and watched the sun sink behind the pines until the rosy sky turned shades of blue, then a silky violet, then black. Without a word Edmund and Luke stood up and ambled off to their tents, legs bent in weariness. Philippa searched the sky for the moon to rise, something to focus on other than herself. She heard a horse whinny and boots crunch across the gravel bar.

"Philippa, is that you?" Bertrand called.

Without answering, she picked up a stick and stirred the fire. Flames sprung up, leaping at dry wood.

Bertrand tied his horse in the grassy area where they tethered their animals and gave him water from a feed bag. He settled himself in Luke's camp chair and stared at the sky.

"What are you looking at?" she asked.

"The North Star. It's fixed, never moves."

"Martin was my North Star," she said. After a time she said, "I want to go home."

"Do you have enough money for your passage?" he asked.

She shrugged. "The poke Luke keeps for me is filled with gritty flakes and stones embedded with gold. I have no idea how much it's worth."

He was thoughtful. "Tomorrow I'll take your sack upriver, if you like. I have some mercury left. When I heat the gold, quicksilver separates the gold from the dirt and stones. Then I can wash and weigh it."

"Sounds like magic," she said.

"Just chemistry," he answered, "but dangerous because the fumes are poisonous."

She went to her tent, reached into a box where she had hidden her sack of gold, went back to the fire and gave it to him." Thank you for cleaning my gold," she said. "I have no idea what it's worth."

He held the sack in his palm. "I'd say six or seven hundred dollars."

"That much?" she said in surprise. Now she could go home. She wondered why the prospect of sailing did not excite her as much as it had before.

They sat in silence as the stars wheeled around the North Star. Bertrand leaned forward and stirred the fire. "Philippa, I know about cholera.. I've nursed men with it. Like you I've traveled with a man dying of it."

She breathed deeply.

"Did anyone give your husband quinine?"

"He had six pills in all. That's all there was. We made him drink alcohol."

"Did the Panamanian guides carry him?"

"In a hammock for a time," she said. "Then he revived slightly and we put him on a mule."

"Did they tie him on the mule?" Bertrand asked.

"Yes, they lashed his arms and legs with strong vines around the mule's neck and body," she answered.

"Did you converse with Martin?" Bertrand persisted.

"I asked him if he was all right, but he didn't answer."

"Would you say he was a good horseman?"

"The best," she said with pride. "He broke in bucking steers."

"If a small mule started to bolt on the trail, he would know how to control it."

She nodded.

"If he were alive, that is." Bertrand paused and stared at the stars. "What happened was that Martin died while riding his mule on the trail. If you'd waited for morning to travel he would have died before dawn. He'd been sick for four days. It's a wonder the cholera didn't take him sooner."

"But he said he was feeling better," she argued.

"Yes. He loved you. He wanted to relieve your fear. Just before death there is a surge of spirit. But it's short lived. Martin's death that night was inevitable." They were silent for a long while. When the fire flickered out and the air chilled, Bertrand stood up and walked to his tent. Philippa remained, head tilted toward the starlit sky, tears filming her eyes.

Rain lashed the sandbar the next morning. Philippa pulled her cot to the doorway of her tent, pushed back the curtain and sat staring into the silvered downpour. Luke and Edmund ran from the sheltered cookfire to their tents, hunched over against the torrent. Bertrand emerged from his tent, settled his tool pack in saddle bags, mounted his horse, and set off up river, bare headed. She listened to the rain spatter on the gravel surface, smelled its freshness on gusts of wind.

By early afternoon the rain had stopped, but the sky lay lowered, gray and menacing. She walked across the wet gravel and crossed the river, stepping carefully on the flat-topped boulders Luke and Edmund had lodged in the river.

She set up her easel in a shelter of two pine trees with low branches. Despite the jumble of thoughts distracting her, she forced herself to paint. She tried to understand the opaque darkness Bertrand brought out in her when she wanted to make love. He tantalized and infuriated her. How would he know if Martin had died while lashed to his mule?

She stood watching the clouds billow across the patch of sky. They swirled up from left to right, billowing in masses of gray and white, charcoal and granite, lilac and amethyst. She tried to capture the weight of the clouds, heaviest at their lower edges. The purple hues suggested buoyancy and movement, but it was not enough. She gazed at the painting, pursing her lips. She wanted to create a sense of dread, but the lighter tones dispelled the passion.

She stood back considering the paintings she had rolled up in the barrel in her tent. Even with the slashes of raw color she'd laid side by side, the landscapes and figures did not probe deep emotions. Like her portraits of Luke and Edmund, they depicted the triumph of man in nature. Was she to paint only sunny subjects?"

She picked up a paint brush, mixed green and yellow and dabbed on streaks of citron. She shaped the clouds with harsh strokes, darkening the undersides, outlining them with black. She bruised the clouds, slashed the sky with lightning. She understood that she would be a successful artist only when she allowed herself a freer hand and let more of her spirit take the brush. She still felt bound by the constraints of her formal training. She must make her passion, both its light and darkness, work for her.

# Chapter Six

Philippa gave Luke her list. "Probably supplies will be scarce in Sacramento City, but get what you can. Most important are flour, yeast, coffee. We must have dried fruit and any vegetables you can find. You can substitute molasses for sugar. I need tubes of paint, yellow, blue and red. I can mix most colors from these. And zinc for mixing white."

"What about paint thinner? Do you need turpentine?" Having watched her work for months, Luke was well acquainted with her process.

"Yes, I do."

Luke put her list in his shirt pocket, buckled the straps of his saddle bags and mounted his mule.

"You can take my palomino," she said.

"No. I love this here animal," Luke said, patting his neck. The mule tilted his head back, opened his mouth, and brayed with such abandon, they laughed.

Bertrand walked over to Philippa and dropped a sack into her open hand. "Just finished weighing it. Fifty-three ounces. At sixteen dollars an ounce, your gold is worth eight hundred and forty-eight dollars."

Her mouth dropped. "Good God, I had no idea it was so much! Luke, can you go to San Francisco and purchase a passage for me?" She counted out half of her gold, wrapped it in a handkerchief, and gave the sack to him. "I want a first class ticket on the fastest ship sailing around the Horn for Boston or New York at the end of July. Take six ounces for your trouble."

"Yes, Ma'am!" he said.

She watched Luke guide his mule through the stream and step sideways down the steep hill through the trees. At last she could make her plans. She'd be home by Christmas. Happiness swept over her. She threw her arms up and shouted for joy.

Bertrand saddled his horse and packed provisions. "I will be away for a few days," he said.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

He looked up at the high cliffs above them. "I'm going to hold a pow-wow with the Chief of the Miwoks. We have too many staked claims to work ourselves. I'm going to negotiate for at least half-a-dozen scouts. The digging will go twice as fast." With a tip of his wide-brimmed felt hat he was gone.

The next morning Philippa awoke before dawn and walked down river considering Bertrand's theory on Martin's death. Bertrand's presence had suddenly released the bounds she had inflicted on herself. It was past time to let go. By the time she had returned to the campsite and was stirring a pot of oatmeal, she felt more at ease. With both Luke and Bertrand gone there was no need to fry pancakes. When Edmund smelled the coffee he ambled over to the fire and sat with her, as usual, in silence.

After her breakfast duties, she reveled in the hot sun and splashed in the water, at last warm enough to swim in. She thought about color theory, remembering points by Eugene Cheveral: Color takes its intensity not so much from its own pigmentation as from the hue of the proximate object. When the eye sees two contiguous colors simultaneously, they appear dissimilar in tone and optical composition. She squeezed pure hues from her paint tubes onto canvas to make a color wheel. She held bold red next to grass green in direct sunlight and felt her eye vibrate. When she'd painted Emmeline York's portrait aboard the Fair Wind, she'd placed, side by side, strokes of unmixed blue, violet and green and the sea jumped as if in motion. This, then, was the color foundation of her new technique.

She pondered why her latest landscapes were lackluster. Her mistake was in priming the canvas. She didn't need to prepare it with a heavy underpainting. How difficult it was to throw off her traditional training. She took up a new canvas and applied a layer of pearly gray, thinned with turpentine. When it dried she painted a scene with brash brushstrokes. Bertrand would not have thought the subject significant, just Edmund Rose kneeling in the sand, slapping his dirty shirts over river rocks. Edmund loved to do laundry, and she was happy to turn over one of her tasks to him. She used sketchy lines to delineate his features. Close up, the strokes were careless blotches. When viewed from two yards away, they re-assembled clearly into his eyes, nose, mouth. She had even caught his rapt expression.

The next day she painted directly on canvas with no undercoat at all. With wide, blotchy brushstrokes, she jammed colors opposite each other on the color wheel next to one another on her canvas and was excited by the effect.

She decided to observe details in nature more closely. She sat on her camp stool and studied how river water washed over the boulders, now in shadow, now in sunlight as time passed, and how the scrub oaks clung by their roots to rocky cliffs. She watched the wind ruffle the pine boughs, discerning subtle variances in the shades of green as they moved in the breeze. She forced herself to look right into the sun, perforating her vision with a blast of light. Only then did she paint. Having absorbed the scene so thoroughly, she did not do a charcoal sketch. The image leapt right onto the canvas. She worked from dawn to last light for four days, completing several paintings. As she focused her concentration, she felt Martin's presence gently fade.

She was washing the tin supper plates and coffee pot in the river when Bertrand returned. He saw to his horse, stowed his gear in his tent, and came up to her. "Would you like to take a walk?" She fell into step with him as they crunched their way across the gravel. Crossing the river they walked along a grassy bank. They entered a grove where aspens grew in profusion, shaking their leaves in a sudden gust of wind. Intrigued by the motion, Philippa stopped to watch the trees. "I'm going to paint this tomorrow," she said, smiling up at him. She placed her hands on his face and kissed him. She threw her arms around his neck.

"What's different?" he asked.

How did she explain a resolution after months of struggling with grief and guilt? Its power was as mysterious as her creative energy.

He waited.

Behind him she saw quivering aspen leaves caught in the last of the light. "Martin's death was an accident. It wasn't his fault and it wasn't mine. I no longer blame myself."

He embraced her for a long time, then set her back to look at her with such tenderness, it brought tears to her eyes.

Bertrand kept a small shaving mirror tacked to the tent pole. Her face had lost its rounded contour. Her complexion has darkened to nut brown; her hair had lightened to a silvery flax. Even the blue-green of her eyes had blanched in color, so much expanse of sky had they taken in. She saw Bertrand's reflection as he came up behind her and embraced her. "That new shine in your hair is due to all the acorns you eat."

Her love affair with Bertrand had triggered a new development. She wanted him day and night. How could she leave him to go home? With Bertrand she shared her inner-most thoughts and secrets. She knew from his murmurs that he listened intently, and he encouraged her to follow her thoughts

and imaginings to lengths unknown to her before. His talk aroused her. Some of his French words were new, but their meanings were clear as he touched her. No sooner was she consumed by one desire than he introduced another. Their warm flesh opened to each other.

When Edmund finally stood up from the river long enough to look around, he saw that Bertrand had moved his tent, opened one of its sides and connected it to hers. Edmund scowled at Philippa during meals, lips compressed in anger, ready to take the bark off her.

One misty morning several Miwok scouts appeared soundlessly walking across the sandbar. Bertrand greeted them warmly in their language and took them upriver to his diggings. At noon Philippa whistled to Edmund to come to dinner. He lowered his long limbs into the camp chair and stared at her over his bowl of stew.

"Edmund, tell me what's on your mind. I've had enough of your fuming," she said.

He cleared his throat. "What you and Bertrand are doing. It ain't right."

"I'm sorry if we offend you," she said.

He took a small tract of Bible verses out of his pocket and held it up, shaking it at her. "You offend the Almighty."

She stirred the pot of stew and served herself a portion. She dipped a spoon into the bowl and savored the rich taste of beef, beans and gravy. "I don't believe God disapproves of lovers."

"God condemns fornication," he said. "I don't meddle in other people's business, but you and I are partners." He surprised her. It was the most she'd ever heard him speak at one time.

"You act like a wanton woman. You take Bertrand as a lover, but then decide to leave him to sail home."

She breathed deeply. Edmund, usually oblivious to other people, had put his finger on the insolvable problem she was wrestling with.

"What you're doing–it ain't rational," Edmund said. He tore off a piece of bread from the loaf and chewed it thoughtfully.

"You're right," she said. Luke would be back any day now with her steamship ticket and she would leave California in a few weeks. "It isn't rational to want to go home when I am in love with Bertrand La Martine."

Unable to resolve her conflict, Philippa concentrated on her painting. Each day she felt as it she were abandoning another art school lesson. The sun lingered in the sky too long. The moon rose so swiftly, they all but collided. One warm moonless night, when a breeze rinsed the sky clear of clouds, she brought Bertrand out to look at the sky. She stood in her nightdress. "If we

stare long enough the stars wheel away and rearrange themselves," she said. "I feel like an orbiting planet and you are a comet who has streaked into my force field and animated it with new energy. I expect nothing more than constant excitement."

Luke returned on the morning of the Fourth of July. From across the river he announced his arrival by setting off three firecrackers. Philippa ran to greet him. As he tied up his mule she held up the food bag and secured it around the mule's large ears.

"I'm sorry, Ma'am, but I couldn't buy your passage," Luke said. "No ships are scheduled to sail. They're dozens in the harbor. Some are being used as warehouses, but all the crews have deserted to the mining camps."

"The sailors have abandoned their ships?" The idea had never occurred to her.

Luke flicked a lock of hair off his forehead. "I talked with the captains of eight ships. The soonest they expect to sail is in the late fall when the bad weather sets in. By then most sailors will have either filled their pokes or given up."

Her trip was postponed. She would not have to leave Bertrand, but she would not see her mother for another year. She felt both a surge of relief and regret.

Luke handed her a sheet of paper with names carefully written in ink. "Here are the names of the captains, their ships and their steamship companies. You are first on their lists for a first class ticket East. They know they can reach you through Captain John Sutter." Luke handed her back her sack of money.

"You went to a lot of trouble for me. Did you take your six ounces?"

"No, Ma'am. I wasn't successful."

She reached into the bag and pinched out what she estimated to be six ounces of her gold.

"Thank you, Luke. No one could have done a better job."

Luke and Edmund took the day off to celebrate the birth of the country. They cut each other's hair, shaved and bathed in the river. Philippa listened to their jarring shouts as she stowed the new provisions of dried beef, carrots, beans and potatoes and two bottles of Burgundy wine. She cracked open three goose eggs nestled in sawdust, separated the white from the yolk and added pigment to make tempera. Bertrand returned from upriver with six Miwok scouts, who made camp across Philippa's Bar under the pines.

Luke sat by the campfire over a bottle of whiskey and grew giddy with excitement. Because it was a holiday Edmund permitted himself to have a glass of whiskey diluted with river water.

Bertrand poured Philippa a glass of wine. "Let's make a toast. I predict a year from now California will be a state." He kissed her temple. "Stay with me," he said in a husky voice. "I need you by my side. Paint in San Francisco, where life is throbbing with vitality."

Among the stones on the gravel bar Luke planted a dozen small rockets he'd brought up from Sacramento City. As soon as the moon rose, he lit a fire brand and set off the firecrackers, illuminating the sky with tracers of arching light. Philippa held out her hands as fragments of paper rockets and ash fell around her. Deafening pops and sizzles numbed her hearing. She had six months to decide whether she would stay or go.

Luke and Edmund spent the next morning assembling the gold rockers Luke had purchased in Sacramento City. By noon they pronounced them a great success. Bertrand walked up to Philippa while she was at her easel. "Two of the Miwok Indians have agreed to pose for you. They've been trained since boyhood to be still for hours. You'll have to bake them a blackberry pie."

The young scouts stood before her. Although diminutive, they had lustrous skin tones and superb physiques. She felt aroused just gazing at them. Both wore belts with gleaming knives. The black and white feathers of their headpieces moved in the breeze. She sketched them working in the river with the rockers. Bertrand glanced over her shoulder. "Move closer to them. Let them breathe on you."

"If I do a closeup portrait of one, I will not be able to fit the other into the frame," she answered.

"Then include only part of him," Bertrand said.

"That will make for a peculiar composition," she said.

"What of it? Everything about your painting is peculiar."

When she was finished several hours later, Edmund came up to her easel to take a look. She could tell by his puzzled expression that he didn't care for the jarring composition. He pressed his lips together and walked away. She turned to Luke, whose honesty she prized.

He blurted out: "Well I'll be damned if the Indian's shoulder isn't out of the picture. It don't sit right, with his arm being cut off and all."

"This composition gives an immediacy to the picture," she explained. "He is moving out of the frame toward something important. Aren't you curious where he is headed?"

"Shucks, no. Why do I care? He's turned so I can't even see his face."

Luke's comment stung. Not only had communication failed, she'd not aroused his curiosity. As usual Bertrand nodded at her finished canvas and said nothing.

One morning they were startled by two disheveled-looking men, who stood round-shouldered in ankle-deep water and asked questions about deposits of gold on the sand bar. "These claims and the ones up river are taken," Bertrand said. "You are free to mine down river."

"We like it here," one of the men said. He dug his shovel into the sand.

Bertrand put his fingers to his lips and whistled. Instantly four Miwok scouts appeared from around the bend in the river. Two drew knives from their belts. "I suggest you try digging down river," Bertrand said. The men looked at each other, turned and fled.

"I've been wondering when miners would find us," Bertrand said. "It's time to make rules." After breakfast Bertrand, Luke and Edmund held a meeting around the campfire and agreed to form a partnership. They would consolidate their claims, stake them out, each no larger than thirty-square feet. "All the best sites are becoming more crowded. This is how most miners are doing it," Bertrand explained. "We're fortunate that after three months the gravel bars along this stretch of river still yield so much gold."

"Edmund and I, we need help on our claims," Luke said.

"Yep," Edmund said. "I'm willing to pay some."

Bertrand said, " I'll meet with the Chief and negotiate for more Miwok scouts. I estimate with their help, we'll pick our claims clean by the time the rains come. Then it will be time to move on."

"How much have we taken out?" Luke asked.

"Thousands," Edmund said. "We need to get it to a bank."

"There are no banks in this God forsaken country," Luke lamented.

Bertrand was quiet, thinking. "After I pow-wow with the Chief, I will take our gold down to Sutter's Fort. I'll have all of it smelted into bullion and stored in John Sutter's safe."

"I don't like it," Edmund said, "Thieves will see you're carrying pouches of gold and follow you."

"I'm an experienced tracker," Bertrand said. "I know how to double back on trails and shake off anyone following me." Then he smiled. Philippa saw his eyes gleam like the knife blades of the Miwok Indians she'd painted. "I'll take two scouts with me," he said.

Bertrand rode up to the Miwok's summer camp in the high country and returned with six more scouts. The next day he, Luke and Edmund packed saddle bags with their gold in three separate sacks. He explained how he'd processed Philippa's gold up river with quicksilver, separating gold from the dirt and stones. After heating, the mercury evaporated, leaving pure gold. He, Luke

and Edmund had too large an amount of gold for him to process. He would bring it to Sutter's apothecary, who would separate out the dirt and rocks, place the gold in a charcoal furnace and smelt it into bars.

Philippa kissed him good-bye, fearful for his safety, despite the menacing scouts who rode with him. They'd be gone a week or more.

She painted. Her brushstrokes grew looser and looser, her colors clearer and more sensual–as if oscillating with a sexual force. She felt joyless without Bertrand. The air did not cool as it usually did in the evenings, nor did it stir. Trapped in the gold-rich earth, the heat rose up to stifle her with stunted desire. At last he returned. She heard his horse cantering through the stream shallows and ran to meet him. They were reunited, and reunited, and reunited.

Over coffee Bertrand told Luke his gold was worth twelve thousand and Edmund's, thirteen thousand. They whistled and hooted, amazed at the amount of pure gold they had amassed, "I had your gold amalgamated into fifty-and one-hundred dollar-bars. I stored them in locked strongboxes in Sutter's office safe. Here are the keys to your padlocks."

The men pocketed their keys, each labeled with his name. Luke jumped up and did an Indian dance around the campfire.

"How is Cousin John?" Philippa asked.

Bertrand shook his head with despair. "Restless and sullen. He's furious at his abrupt change in fortune. He climbs up to the bastion towers from time to time and fires off cannon to remind whoever is left in the territory of his presence."

As they walked arm in arm along the river Bertrand told her that he used his share of gold to purchase property. "I'm having a hotel built on Portsmouth Square," he said with pride.

She was dubious about the prospect of plowing river gravel assets into the mudflats of San Francisco.

As if reading her mind, he said, "The land is cheap now. When it triples in value, I'll sell it."

"I don't care about the property or the gold," she said. "I only want you."

She throbbed with need for his loving. She was a bundle of want. Desire burned in her body, flared up, blocking reason with its heat. No matter how often she was satisfied, the feeling drained and escalated to more desire.

As clouds changed the light in the sky from hour to hour, she saw in his eyes how his emotions rose and fell from delight, to mindless passion, to satiation. His mood shifted from a reckless need to make love, to a craving for sleep, to wanting to be up and about. Still she clung to him. She felt as if she had completed a metamorphosis, emerging from a cocoon of grief to a woman on fire with passion.

Lying in his arms on his cot, she kissed his face. Groggy with warmth and fatigue, he buried his face in her breast. She stroked his hair rhythmically. Her eyes darted along the canvas walls, searching for cracks of moonlight. Although his arms were clasped firmly around her, she felt as if she were floating without a tether. She imagined the topography of Bertrand's brain. Its engines were at full throttle, engaged in schemes to make money. Only one small corner of the machine shop was geared for love.

At the end of August Bertrand announced it was time to leave. "Come down to the fort with me," he said. "You need a hot bath and a Quartermoon-cooked dinner." She agreed, knowing what he meant was: You're smothering me. I have to get you off this gravel bar.

They did not converse much on the journey down to Sutter's Fort, listening to the jingling of harness and twitter of birds darting among the pines boughs. They heard voices of miners working in river gulches, but kept on the move.

Bertrand rode ahead of her on the arduous trail and turned in his saddle often to see if she was following him without difficulty. Even with his face shadowed by a broad-brimmed hat, she read a wariness in his expression. He knew the hazards better than she.

The first evening they pitched camp in a meadow. Bertrand boiled coffee while Philippa pared vegetables to drop in the stew pot. He took her hand and walked with her in the tall grass to stretch out their muscles. She began to sing "Oh Susanna," and broke into a little dance. He watched her intently. This tracker of Canadian wolves and linguist to Indian tribes shook his head, unable to fathom her. "Why are you acting antic?" he asked.

"I'm happy," she said. "Haven't you ever been silly?"

He gripped her with his strong hands, and she felt pain shoot through her shoulders. "Don't try to hold me," he said. "I will not be possessed."

She ran her finger around his face and across his lips. "Nor will I."

The weather was clear and they arrived at the fort gates by the third day.

John Sutter patted his ample stomach. "Superb dinner, Quartermoon." He had consumed a generous amount of red wine with his beef and reached for the brandy. The slender Indian woman serving coffee from a copper Russian urn acknowledged his compliment with a nod and disappeared down the outside steps to the kitchen.

Philippa relaxed in her chair. "It is so good to be here, Cousin John."

He basked in the glow of her contentment. "You are more beautiful than before," he said. "Life in the mountains has brought high color to your complexion. The sparkle in your eyes is due, I trust to the ministrations of our

friend here Monsieur Bertrand." He belched loudly, surprising himself, and they all laughed.

She looked at Sutter hesitantly. "Are you scandalized by us?"

Sutter shook his head. "In the chaos that surrounds us, I find the passion you two share to be a barometer of sanity. I have not seen my family for fifteen years. I will confess to you that I have taken a common law wife."

Philippa leaned forward. "Who?"

He waved her off, saying sternly, "You will never know."

During the ensuing awkward silence Bertrand caught Philippa's glance and waved his eyebrows.

She felt her heart sear with empathy. Sutter's cattle had scattered for lack of herders. No workmen toiled in his expensively outfitted manufacturies, now boarded up. The wheat withered unharvested. His fiefdom was rapidly going to seed. The only successful enterprise was Sam Brannan's mercantile.

As if reading her mind Bertrand asked, "How much has Brannan cleared?"

Sutter sipped his brandy. "From May, June and part of July, $36,000."

Philippa stared at him. "How much do you receive from him in rent?"

"Enough," Sutter said.

"Cousin John, can we not prevail upon you to hire hands and pay the going wage?" she asked. "Sonorans will come up to work your fields."

He shook his head fiercely. "I will not pay uneducated primitives sixteen dollars a day."

"But Bertrand will loan you the cash to get them started." She continued despite Bertrand's astonished stare. "Cousin John, you gave Bertrand his first big contracts. You have given shelter and hope to so many wayfarers over the years. We will help you now."

"No!" Sutter shouted.

"But, you will lose all you worked for!" she cried.

"New Helvetia is already lost. Come, come," he said, regaining his composure. "Let us talk of other things."

"Philippa and I will go on to San Francisco tomorrow," Bertrand said. "Philippa hopes some artists have settled in town. She is eager to discuss her new work."

Sutter appraised him. "No doubt you will make further real estate purchases. How long will you and your partners work your gravel bar?"

"Edmund Rose and Luke Blacker are still there, but I'm out of it," Bertrand said to Philippa's surprise." I've got my Miwok team helping them with the claims."

"And the Miwok take a percentage?" Sutter asked.

Bertrand nodded.

"How many claims are you operating now?" Sutter said.

"Some twenty-five. With the dry weather the water level has receded, revealing more sand, gravel and rock. We don't have to shovel more than four feet to find nuggets as well as flakes."

"I hear John Bidwell has struck success on the Feather River. You are not tempted to dig in new territory?" Sutter asked.

Bertrand smiled ruefully. "Every minute of every day I wish I were elsewhere, unearthing greater deposits of gold from more fertile ground."

Again Philippa was surprised. She had no idea he'd been so restless.

"However, it's been prudent for us to stay put," Bertrand added, sipping his brandy. "Philippa has been able to concentrate on her painting rather than to continuously pack up and tramp about the woods."

"I surely hope you've not held back your explorations on my account," she said. "I'll have one of your cigarillos, Cousin John." She smoked for a few minutes while the men talked of the mining camps springing up throughout the Sierra Nevada , trying to dispel the tension Bertrand had stirred. He was keyed up this evening. She had a feeling of foreboding.

Sutter sat back in his chair and eyed Bertrand. "I know you to be a man who profits from opportunity. What are your long-term plans?"

Bertrand leaned forward. His eyes sparkled with the ruthlessness of a pirate. "We've heard of gold strikes on the American, the Feather, the Yuba. I am convinced that millions of dollars of gold deposits lie in the Sierra Nevada. They are wedged in crevices of boulders, and coat the beds of dozens of river forks. When the Eastern cities learn of our bonanza, men will stream out here by the thousands. Let the likes of Sam Brannan sell them their picks and shovels, beans and bacon. I'm going a level higher." He focused his black eyes on Sutter, then Philippa. "I intend to finance the speculators."

Sutter squared his shoulders. "That will take substantial capital. A hundred thousand dollars."

"I am close to accumulating it."

Philippa stared at him in astonishment.

"I will be California's first millionaire," Bertrand said.

"Why is this so important to you?" she asked.

"Money, prestige, and power are my way to avenge the disgrace my father brought on our family." He glanced away from her puzzled stare.

John Sutter looked at Bertrand. "You have never spoken of your father."

Bertrand swirled the brandy snifter several times and drank deeply. "It is of no importance."

Philippa glanced from Sutter to Bertrand and back, waiting. The silence pulsed with tension.

"La Martine, Andre La Martine," Sutter whispered to himself. His head went up, his lips parting in a perfectly rounded O. "I remember now! A trial after the Battle of Waterloo. Newspapers all over Europe wrote of it. That was more than thirty years ago. Was that your father?"

Bertrand stood up. "I should not have spoken of it," he said, reaching for Philippa's hand. "Come, let's go to bed."

"No," she said. "I want to know what Cousin John refers to."

Bertrand seized her arm. She resisted. He tightened his grip, then let go with an elaborate shrug. "I'm going to bed." He pushed his chair back, opened the door to the outside staircase and disappeared into the night.

"What is all this about?" she asked John.

"I'll be damned." Sutter shook his head in disbelief. "His father was hanged as a traitor to France."

When?" she asked.

Sutter stared at his ballooned-shaped brandy glass. "It was in 1815. After the defeat at Waterloo, Bonaparte was forced to abdicate again and people were looking for scapegoats. Andre La Martine was accused of being a counterspy in Napoleon's army. It is said the defeat and slaughter at Waterloo–forty thousand men-- were the result of tactical information La Martine knew, but withheld because of a grudge. La Martines had been Aquitanian noblemen for centuries. Their land stretched for thousand of acres of vineyards, farms, villages and forests south of Bordeaux. The family was disgraced."

"Think of the shame Bertrand must feel," she said. "That must be why he left France when he was so young."

John sighed. "Now I understand his purpose. His father was a traitor and he feels compelled to amass a fortune and the power that goes with it to avenge his name."

"But California is a new land. No one will ever know his past," she said.

"That is of no consequence. It weighs on him. He has made it his destiny to reclaim his honor."

Bertrand stirred when she let herself into their room. "What did John tell you?"

"He said there was a trial," Philippa said softly.

He sat up, leaning against the headboard. "Public opinion was so vehemently against my father, his defense was barely mounted. My mother locked me in the nursery so I would not see the hanging. My brother, Francois, let me out and took me to the public square. He lifted me onto his shoulders so I could see over the heads of the crowd as the soldiers led my father to the scaffold. I was only three, but I remember it clearly. The sky was low with cloud. Francois said, 'Remember this hour, Bertrand.' They blindfolded my father and hanged him. He did not die right away. He dangled, legs thrashing. We heard him gasping."

He was silent for a long while, then continued in a husky voice. "I grew up as Bertrand, son of the traitor."

"Your father was accused, but was he guilty?" she asked.

"Yes. He was a clever spy who inserted himself into the Duke of Wellington's command. Napoleon said he would pay him handsomely for his information, but then reneged on his promise."

"Always money," she said to herself. She lay next to Bertrand on the bed. He is thirty-three, she thought. He looks older.

He turned to her. "We were a noble family, cruelly disgraced. Our very name was a cause for constant insult. You cannot know what it has done to me all these years." He was quiet for a time. "Will you think less of me now?"

"No," she whispered. "More important than family name are courage, conviction, honesty. These are the signs of noble rank."

He looked at her for a long while. He ran his fingers over her hips, caressed her thighs. "Tenderness, desire, love–only these are truly noble."

The wind blew fiercely and Philippa clapped her hand over her hat, astounded to see the changes in San Francisco. A three-masted sailing ship looked to be permanently docked at the wharf at Broadway, along with at least a dozen more of varying sizes. People went in and out of doors opening to the decks as if they were shops. As Luke had described, scores of abandoned ships were anchored in the bay. Wood-framed houses, tents and shanties lined dirt roads carved half way up the sand hills. Several paths zigzagged to the top of the highest mounts where the wild grass waved and flags flapped in the wind.

As Philippa stepped down the gang plank of the river sloop, she was assaulted by the smell of horse manure droppings in the street, layered with garbage baked by the September sun. Chinese porters hurried past a throng of

swarthy men. They slouched against warehouse plank walls, listlessly on the lookout for a way to pay for passage upriver to the gold camps.

A fish monger and his young apprentice, dressed in oilskins, approached her. The older man held a hapless crab by its shell in front of her face, wiggling it so its legs jiggled. She winced and stepped back, pressing a handkerchief to her nose. She turned her face away from the eyes staring at her, waiting for Bertrand to oversee the unloading of their baggage, including her rolled-up paintings and the three leather bags holding his gold bars. Bertrand hired horses for them to ride through San Francisco. "No carriage can negotiate these ruts," he said as he helped her into the saddle.

They passed clusters of tents set up around littered yards and side-by-side shanties constructed of boards and tin. Philippa turned to look over her shoulder and saw three Chinese men wheeling their baggage in crude carts that jostled over foul-smelling refuse in the road.

In between cheap beaneries and market stalls were shacks, some of them no larger than huts, displaying hand painted signs that indicated a lawyer's office and an apothecary. In one wooden house, unexpectedly white-washed, a sign proclaimed that two doctors had set up practices. Raucous music poured out the doors of two gambling houses, set side by side, the most actively patronized establishments on one block. In dismay Philippa looked for, but did not see a haberdashery shop where she could have clothes made. Following Bertrand around a corner, she entered a wide plaza set on a slope. Cows and sheep grazed on tall grasses of Portsmouth Square. Two men in business attire walked across the area on worn paths. They greeted one another and proceeded on their way, intent on their destinations across the square.

Bertrand halted his horse in front of two-story structure with a steep-peaked tin roof. The steps to the front porch were rough boards balanced on flat stones. She dismounted and was forced back to allow three men to rush by her. One of them carried a satchel that bumped her arm. So hurried was he on his errand, he did not stop to apologize. "Is this one of those temporary boarding houses?" she asked Bertrand.

"Most everything in this town is temporary," he said, taking her arm, "built for transients who will pay top dollar to stay as long as it takes to outfit themselves for the goldfields. But this house is permanent."

Inside, she looked around as her eyes accustomed to the cool light. Her boot heels echoed on the wide-planked floor as she walked across a large room off the main hallway. At one end were unmatched tables, captain chairs, and a long, higher table, apparently used as a bar, with a glass-fronted cabinet filled with liquor bottles behind it. She recognized the cabinet's intricately carved Chippendale detailing. Undoubtedly it had come off one of anchored ships in the harbor.

A man in a black frock coat and dusty work pants approached her and bowed. "Good afternoon, Mrs. Sutter. It is our great pleasure to welcome you to La Martine House."

She glanced at Bertrand. "This is your hotel?"

Bertrand nodded.

As she walked out of the bar she caught sight of a smaller room across the hall, divided by a curtain, hastily hung at an angle. She stretched her hand out to the wall of the corridor. The fabric rippled at her touch. It too was made of canvas. Oh, Lord, this wasn't much better than their tents lashed together on the gravel bar.

Their suite was at the rear of the building, and looked to be a separately built structure. Expecting to enter a room divided from the next guestroom only by a drape of muslin, Philippa was surprised to walk into a generous space with wide windows. She opened patio doors to a walled garden. Rose bushes had been planted against pink-washed walls. She turned back into the room, amazed. Thick oriental rugs were laid over the red- tiled floors. She ran her hand along the thick adobe surfaces, which kept the room cool. She opened a door to a tile-floored room with a bath tub. "Oh, glory," she exclaimed.

Bertrand stood in the center of the bedroom with his hands in his pockets. "I know how much you love hot baths."

The furnishings, including two tall armoires, were pure Eastern seaboard, much like that in her bedroom at home in Philadelphia, and were probably purchased from the same ship as the bar cabinet. She picked up a crystal vase. "Orchids?"

"From the Kanakas. Come here, Mrs. Sutter." He lifted her onto the four-poster and began to unbutton her jacket. "I am going to make love to you, my darling."

She ran her fingers through his hair and brought his face to hers, whispering, "I love it when you warn me."

As Philippa dressed her hair at the vanity table she looked at Bertrand's reflection in the mirror. He stood at the window and looked out at the harbor. "I've been meaning to ask you," she said. "What did you mean when you told Cousin John that you were close to accumulating a hundred thousand dollars?"

He glanced at her. The mirror's reversal of his smile she knew so well disconcerted her. "I'm worth ninety, but it multiplies by the hour," he said.

"No, Bertrand, that sum represents the partnership total. One-third of that belongs to Luke and Edmund."

"Oh, technically, you could say so. Fact is, most of it is in land right here in Portsmouth Square. Like this hotel. The sign goes up next week." He raised his arms and described the size of the sign. "La Martine House."

She turned to him, puzzled.

"I'm building San Francisco's first bank one block south of the square," he said. "It's only canvas and boards slapped together now, but in a month, two months at the most, I'll receive a shipment of lumber and marble and have my carpenters construct a more permanent structure."

She rose slowly and walked to him. "Are you saying you spent Luke and Edmund's gold?"

"I've invested it in property."

"Did you have their consent for this project?"

"They know nothing about it, and it's just as well," Bertrand said. "They think their gold slugs are sitting in John Sutter's safe collecting dust, when in fact, their money is about to triple in value."

She stood and faced him. "But you don't know that. How could you manipulate their earnings without telling them? It's unconscionable!"

He looked at her closely, an ironic smile playing across his lips. "You surprise me, Philippa. I thought you better understood how I conduct business. Let me explain." He put his hand on her waist to guide her to the window, but she flinched away from his touch. "Out there are twenty-three ships," he said. "More will put into port and unload crates of mining cargo including picks, shovels, boots, foodstuffs. The new merchandise will drive down the prices of everything for sale in this camp town."

"That has nothing to do with Luke and Edmund's gold," she said in a fury.

"You watch, within weeks several three-master sailing ships will drop anchor and deposit a thousand adventurers on dock, including the ship's crew. Ten percent will set up mercantiles to outfit the other ninety percent." He took her by the shoulders. "Don't you see? The value of real estate goes up, up, up. People will be mad to buy land to build stores, hotels, restaurants and saloons to cater to the thousands and thousands who are on their way here for gold. I'm already collecting nine hundred dollars a month for one of my twelve guestrooms upstairs, and they're only divided from one another by sailcloth. Even now gambling dens are going up at the rate of one a month. The lots I buy for five thousand dollars tomorrow morning will sell for ten thousand in thirty days, and fifteen in sixty days."

She searched his eyes, shook her head. "You are speculating with Luke and Edmund's money," she said. "That's not good enough. It's not yours."

He shrugged. "True there is risk involved, but no more than shoveling tons of gravel to find an ounce of gold. I'm willing to take the risk."

"But Luke and Edmund's risk is not yours to take." She clasped her hands over her ears and wheeled away from the window. "How much of their gold did you remove from John's safe?"

"Ten thousand from each."

She shook her head then stared at him, eyes hard. "How could you do this? These are friends who trust you! Here's what we will do. Tomorrow we take the steamer back to Sacramento City with twenty thousand dollars worth of your bars of gold. I know you've got at least that much sitting over there in those bags."

"Hold on," Bertrand said. "That gold is for the bank project."

She held up her hand to silence him. "We will go back to Sutter's Fort and you will return Luke's and Edmund's investment to their strongboxes. I am assuming you had copies made of their padlock keys."

His hand went automatically to his key chain. He paced. "Philippa, you don't understand the first thing about investing."

She stood to face him, seized his arm. "I understand that you are haunted by shame, that you are a determined, driven man. But none of that excuses you from what you have done. Listen to me, Bertrand La Martine, as long as I am with you, you will not steal to vindicate yourself."

# Chapter Seven

The next morning while she brushed her hair, wound and pinned it up, she watched Bertrand unload gold bars from cases, count them and place them in a leather satchel. "Since you're so keen on replacing this gold in Cousin John's safe, you can do it yourself," he said. "I have an important appointment today. I'll send a man in my employ to accompany you to Sutter's Fort."

She flinched at his tone. "Who?"

"Padraic O'Reilly, a seaman from County Cork."

"Do you trust him?"

"With my life." He looked at her, black eyes lustrous in the morning light. "And yours."

O'Reilly was a bull of a man with red hair and green eyes and a long-legged gait he had to curtail to walk next to her in the muddy streets leading to the wharf. He carried the heavy satchel of gold by a shoulder strap as if it were as light as a sack of strawberries. "We'll be getting to know one another mighty well, Missus," he said as the steamer backed from the pier. Puffs of black cloud fouled the air. "Monsieur La Martine wants me to accompany you wherever you venture in the city."

She leaned against the boat's railing and watched the ugly buildings of San Francisco drift further from view. "I don't want a bodyguard," she said.

"There's nothing for it," O'Reilly said, leaning back on his heals. "It's a barbarous town, where men, full of the drink, rampage in the middle of the day. Monsieur has to go about his business and cannot see to you. You need to be protected."

She sighed at the inevitable. At least it demonstrated Bertrand's concern for her. She turned to O'Reilly and extended her hand. "If we are to be a twosome, then let's be friendly. Please call me Philippa. Shall I call you Padraic?"

"Patrick, ma'am seeing as I'm now in California."

"Why did you leave Ireland?"

"I'm a seaman. It's me job to leave Ireland."

John Sutter stepped around from the desk in his office and greeted Philippa with a warm embrace. She introduced Patrick.

"Another visit so soon?" he exclaimed. "To what do I owe the honor?"

"Bertrand asked me bring this gold from his partners to store in your safe. Here are the keys to their padlocks." She dropped the keys on his desk.

Sutter stood with his hands in his pockets, regarding her. "Why didn't we stow it when you were here?"

She met his steady gaze. "The gold bars were in San Francisco."

Sutter put his head back and laughed. It sounded like a bleat. "More likely Bertrand used his partners' gold bars for an investment without telling them. You found out and you're making him replace them."

A sudden flush suffused her cheeks. She looked away. "Please, let's just put it back. The strongboxes are in the names of Luke Blacker and Edmund Rose. Ten thousand for each."

Sutter opened a set of oak-paneled double doors that concealed his massive safe. With his back to them he turned the dial right and left. O'Reilly helped him empty the satchel and fill the strongboxes. "Have a glass of wine with me, Philippa," he said. "I am starved for good company."

"But we just left you yesterday," she said.

"I get hungry fast," Sutter joked. His face lit up, reminding her of her first impression of him as Father Christmas.

O'Reilly let himself out the door, saying he'd wait for her in the courtyard.

She sat in one of the heavy dining room chairs, sipping Sutter's delicious white Bordeaux. "Bertrand's a common thief," she said.

Sutter shrugged. "He's an opportunist. He would have put back the gold bars eventually, but he needed the money and helped himself to it."

"It changes everything," she said. "How can I trust him?"

"You can't know what he'll do to be successful. He has an obsession to make money and imprint his name on San Francisco. But it is his business, not yours," Sutter said.

"I'm afraid he'll keep his business from me and grow secretive."

"Bertrand is a fur trapper, a mountain man. He does not know how to confide. Don't expect it. He's a good man, loyal, hardworking. He loves you."

She smiled. The flush returned to her face and neck. She sipped her wine.

Sutter laughed. "He is a good lover, no? Oh, he's had plenty of women, but of the rough sort, not like you. He is fascinated by your elegance and grace. You enhance him as a man. You make him more significant. He dearly wants you to stay in California, but knows that whether or not you go home must be your own decision."

"Of course it's my decision." She didn't like the idea of Bertrand trying to control her.

"And have you made it yet?" Sutter asked.

"No."

Several days later Philippa walked out to the patio off their bedroom where Bertrand was reading. She came up behind his straw chair and ran her fingers over his ears. "What are you reading?

" The Prince."

"Again? It seems you're always dipping into that battered copy. I should buy you a new one." She sat across from him. "Why does it interest you?"

Bertrand marked his place with his forefinger. "Machiavelli's comments on amassing wealth and power were written about Florence four hundred years ago, but they apply exactly to San Francisco today. Once again a small town will become the focus of western civilization because of the free flow of money. Only instead of papal revenues, San Francisco's wealth will come from the Sierra Nevadas. Now as then, merchant banking will be the key to shaping and taking control of the political structure."

"Cosimo de'Medici was the hero of Florence's drama," she said. "Do you see yourself as the Medici prince of California?" She hadn't meant to mock him, but she realized her voice held an amused tone.

Suddenly he grabbed her wrist and pressed his fingers around her fragile bones. "I will not be chastised by you about how I do business," he said.

"You're hurting me. Stop!" She jerked her arm up.

"The enterprises I have underway call for quick, bold maneuvering. I can't afford to miscalculate."

"Nor can you afford to cheat your partners out of their gold," she answered. With her other hand she swatted the book out of his hand onto the tiled floor. " I, too, have read The Prince. Machiavelli, who knew when to make concessions, said wisely that people are satisfied so long as they retain their property or honor. Without your honor, no one will trust you, Bertrand."

Philippa stepped down the stones outside La Martine House and into Washington Street. She had not gone ten paces before Patrick O'Reilly came up next to her and took her arm. "Where are we off to?" he asked.

"The dressmakers. I hope you've brought your newspaper. You will be bored."

They made their way through the mud to 26 Clay Street, where a wooden sign, swinging in a stiff breeze off the harbor, proclaimed Mademoiselle Courbet, the only French couturier in San Francisco, designed and sewed the latest European fashions. A tinkling bell rang as Philippa let herself inside the shop. She was immediately enveloped by the smell of lavender. A petite woman with fly-away ginger hair caught up in a bun at the top of her head, approached her with both hands extended. "Madame Sutter, I heard you have come to town. Welcome to my boutique. We will make several costumes for you, no?"

Outside, Patrick leaned against a post supporting a tin roof over the plank porch. He took a folded newspaper from his jacket pocket and shook it out.

Philippa fingered silk moire fabrics folded on the counter top. "I need several day costumes and something elegant for a reception my friend Monsieur La Martine has invited me to host with him."

"Ah yes, Monsieur La Martine. I hear he is building a bank and a new wharf, and that both will bear his name," Mademoiselle Courbet said. She sucked her teeth in admiration. "He is ambitious, that one."

Philippa nodded and forced a small smile. It embarrassed her to be known as his mistress. "I had in mind a white satin gown, white gloves and a hat with plumes."

Mademoiselle took her measurements.

"I also need three cotton smocks with large pockets."

"Surely you are not doing housework, Madam," Mademoiselle Courbet scolded.

Philippa laughed. "No, I am a landscape painter."

"San Francisco is in need of artists," Mademoiselle Courbet said enthusiastically.

"Let's walk down by the harbor for some fresh air, " Philippa said to Patrick when she came out of Mademoiselle Courbet's shop. I feel as if I've been trapped inside a perfume bottle."

They picked their way through the mud of Clay Street, passing the arcade shops of the City Hotel, and turned left on Montgomery. At the corner a man stood at an easel, painting. She signaled to Patrick to stop. She came up behind the artist and watched him. He was working swiftly in watercolor. Suddenly she said to him, "No, I wouldn't add that deep a blue. You've already captured the blue and green colors of the bay perfectly with the teal."

The man, tall, slight of build, but lithe, whirled around, offended. "Who are you to tell me which blue to select?"

She extended her hand with a smile. "A fellow artist."

"Oh," he said. "That does make a difference. You like the teal?" Remembering his manners, he bowed to her. "I am John Prendergast, from London. I was in Honolulu, in the Kanaka Islands, but when I heard about the gold strikes along the American River, I caught the first boat for San Francisco.

"Philippa Stuart Sutter," she said. "I'm from Philadelphia. And this is Patrick O'Reilly from County Cork. He looks after me when I go about the city."

"An important mission you have, sir, protecting this lovely lady," Prendergast said, shaking his hand. "Don't scowl on my account. I have no beef with the Irish. Indeed, my mother was born in Dublin."

Philippa eyed Prendergast. He was odd-looking with a prominent nose and bright blue eyes set too close together. "Do you often paint on street corners?" Philippa asked.

"When it's not too windy. I walk the muddy streets and scour the waterfront for new locations." He looked down at a wooden box half-filled with paintings propped against his easel. I sell these watercolors for twenty-five dollars, mostly to miners who want a souvenir of their adventure."

"Have you tried the gold panning for yourself?" Patrick asked him.

Prendergast shook his head. "Living in damp tents by icy rivers is not my style. I keep a residence and studio on Grant, a modest space, where I work on pen and ink drawings." He turned to Philippa. "I say, I'm delighted and quite surprised to meet a fellow artist. What kind of work do you do?"

"Landscapes, portraits, and figures in oil. I also sketch and work in watercolor."

He looked her over. "You are from Philadelphia? I'll wager you were schooled at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. I consider it the best in your country. "

Philippa nodded.

"I must ask you," Prendergast said, leaning forward, "are you related to the famous Captain John Sutter?"

"He is my late husband's cousin and my dear friend. May I join you sometime soon in painting en plein air?"

"Splendid!" Prendergast said. "Tomorrow at this time I plan to set up in front of the Custom House on the square. I'm intrigued by the view of the bay from the rise of that hill."

"We will meet you there," she said. "Patrick, you'll have to bring two newspapers to read."

Over the next week, Philippa met John Prendergast half-a-dozen times at various locations around San Francisco. Rather than paint, she sketched in charcoal, getting a feel for the town. In the evenings she continued to experiment with her new technique in oil painting. With the September rains, she moved her painting operation from the patio of their hotel suite into the bedroom. Bertrand quickly grew nauseous from the smells of turpentine and oils. She overheard him with one of his clerks ordering a load of lumber to be shipped from across the bay and hauled by mule to the plaza. "What are you building?" she asked him.

"A restaurant," he said. In eight days a structure was built on the empty lot next to La Martine House and connected to the hotel. Consumed by her work, she was oblivious to the noise and dust of the carpenters. Nor was she interested in the vendors who came and went with shipments of glass doors, windows and furnishings.

One morning she was aware of Bertrand watching her as she slipped on her painting smock. "I'm going up to Sacramento today," he said. He picked up his keys from the table. She saw the small iron keys to Luke and Edmund's strong boxes get scooped up with the others as he put them in his pocket. "I'm going to look at some waterfront property for sale."

"Will you see Cousin John?"

"Yes. I'll stay in your old apartment at the fort," he said. He took her in his arms and kissed her. Be sure to let Patrick O'Reilly know if you are going out. I worry about you."

She was painting at her easel when he returned three days later. He was restless while they sat down to tea in the muslin parlor, often going out into the hall and calling to workmen. He suddenly kissed the tip of her nose. "I have a surprise for you." He led her down the corridor to the rear of the hotel. He signaled to two workmen to remove a plywood panel between the hotel and the new restaurant. He led her into a sunlit room. She stared dumbfounded at the fourteen-foot ceiling, moving immediately to the French windows, three on

each side of a door that opened onto a porch and Portsmouth Square. She tapped lightly on the glass. "Where on earth did you find these?"

"Off a ship from New Orleans."

She wandered to the back of the spacious room where eight easels stood. "Easels?" she asked, puzzled.

"Instead of a restaurant, I've built you an art gallery when you can show your work to customers and a studio where you can paint."

"Bertrand, how wonderful!"

He reveled in her astonishment. He took her hand and led her around a corner to a space where shelves had been built against the walls. He explained that the porcelain vases full of paint brushes came from England, and the boxes of sleek tubes of oil paints, palettes, pencils, charcoal, pastels, and vials of binders came from New York and Buenos Aires. "I've had an agent procuring artist's supplies for months."

On a worktable she fingered yards of canvas, fine, coarse, some of it in rolls, some of it already stretched within pine frames. Several carved gilt frames leaned against the wall. She looked at him in awe.

"And now, direct light from the sky," he said, pulling the cord of a muslin curtain. The fabric shot up one wall and across the ceiling, revealing a wide window above their heads.

She stood on tiptoe and hugged him fiercely, kissed his lips, his eyes, clinging to him in joy. He led her to a space in the main room where two easy chairs were placed on either side of a mahogany table. They each took a seat. She bounced her forearms on the padded chair arms and beamed at him. "I am overwhelmed by your generosity," she said solemnly. They gazed at one another, inhaling one another's happiness. The ceremonial moment passed.

"How have you paid for this?" she asked.

"I used funds already allocated for the restaurant. We'll use the bar as a restaurant until I can build one in the spring." He reached forward and seized her hand. "You'll be content to work here?"

"Indeed!"

"I don't want you wandering around the city with John Prendergast," he said.

"But I enjoy sketching out of doors and will continue to do so on fine days," she said.

He frowned. "No, you'll work here. It's not proper for a lady to paint on a public street."

She caught her breath at his angry tone. Was lack of freedom the price she must pay for his extravagance? "I assure you that San Francisco observes no social niceties," she said. "I'm perfectly safe. Patrick never takes his fierce green eyes off me." She sauntered across the plank floor, lowering her arms like a monkey and made a face in imitation of O'Reilly. Bertrand's spontaneous laughter cleared the tension.

"When my bank is finished I will want your paintings to hang on the walls," he said.

"Are you offering me a commission?"

"I want vibrant scenes of San Francisco. Use those poppy reds and oranges."

"But there is nothing of color here to paint. All is dun," she said.

"That need not deter you."

She cocked her head. "Whether I paint or pull fish from the bay, you will encourage me." She leaned toward him and laced her fingers through his. "You are my patron, my Cosimo de'Medici."

She moved to the windows with her hands behind her back and gazed out of each one, taking deep breaths of pleasure. He stood close behind her with his hands on her hips. "Let's give our reception in this room. I've settled on a date of October 10th. You'll need a new gown. I'll have it made for you."

She eyed him, amused. "No need. I've already ordered it."

"I am inviting everyone of prominence in town--sea captains, doctors, lawyers, military officers from the Presidio. The Spanish rancheros around New Alamaden will come. I'll get Thomas Larkin up from Monterey. He used to be the U.S. Consul and knows everyone of influence."

"What does he do now?"

"He's an importer of Asian goods. He is superior even to Sam Brannan in matters of trade."

"Will you invite Brannan?" she asked.

"Yes, and all the other hawks circling the town, ready to pounce on the hapless populous."

"Why do you really want to gather these people together?" she asked.

"I'm looking for mining partners. The pickax digging takes too long," he said. "Sifting gold from sand with the pan and rocker is not efficient."

"But you've put all those Miwok boys on the job," she said.

"Mule work! We need to access flowing water to wash cubic yards of dirt and gravel."

"A waterfall?" she said.

"I'm thinking more of a sluice, a long trough drawing from a water source at the top and angled down. I want to use the Miwok to dig dirt and gravel, toss it down the sluice for men stationed on either side to wash."

"You will want to build a sluice for each claim?"

"Yup. And hire men to work them," he said.

"You will have to feed and pay the men, buy equipment. A very costly undertaking."

He wiped a hand over his face. The stubble of his beard made a rasping sound. "It's time to form a consortium."

"So we give a party to flush out potential financiers," She said.

"I need competent officers for my bank. I want honest clerks. I need pick and shovel men, but, God in heaven, right now, I want you!"

He wrapped her in his arms. She kissed him, her tongue seeking his hungrily, and whispered, "You smell of musk and ambition."

On the evening of October 10th, the new art gallery adjacent to La Martine House was warm and pungent with cigar smoke that curled up and hovered over the flames of dozens of candles in silver candelabra placed on a table in the center and in wall sconces. Bertrand and Philippa greeted their guests at the door. They didn't know most of them. Rather than issue invitations, they allowed word to spread and see what the prospect of free liquor and conversation flushed up. So far their guests were a hodgepodge of miners and speculators. All they had in common was enough self-regard to feel assured they would be welcomed by society. She whispered to him, "Machiavelli knew the importance of ingratiating oneself with the people. Popularity is irresistible."

"I like your new fragrance," he said.

"It's French from my dressmaker." She smoothed the skirt of the new white satin gown.

He laughed lightly. "Every time you move your head the plume on your hat tickles my cheek." As each arrival came through the door he introduced her as Mrs. Philippa Sutter. She shook hands with a smile, charming each guest with an apt bon mot.

"When it comes to being social, you're all business," he said into her ear.

She listened to fragments of conversation bobbing on the close air. One man thumped the lapel of a colleague with his forefinger and shouted over the

din of voices. "I'd advise you to put quicksilver at the bottom of your riffle bars. It serves to combine with the gold, but not sand and gravel."

"Don't I know that!" his colleague said. "I can't get any." He looked over at Philippa. "Quicksilver is as rare as a good-looking woman in these parts."

"I can get it for you," the man continued. "I just took over controlling interest in the mercury mine in New Almaden. Weatherall's the name."

Philippa made a mental note to advise Bertrand to have a conversation with Weatherall. Another man's voice rose above the others. "We've got a Virginia rocker up on the Feather. Cost me a thousand dollars and takes six men to operate, but God Almighty, if we aren't clearing three pounds of gold a day."

"I'm gonna build me a rocker bigger than your Virginia one," a short eager man said, "soon as I git some sheet metal worth its salt."

"I'm in a hell of a dither," a tall man in an ill-fitting coat said to a shorter man as they greeted Phillipa and passed into the gallery. "Got these heavy pokes full of gold. Don't know what to do with them."

"I been takin' mine to a smithy in Sacramento City what melts the dust down in a furnace and makes me gold bars," the shorter man said looking up from his beefy face. We are sore in need of a U.S. mint."

"California ain't even part of the U.S. yet, you fool."

Cigar smoke circled in the stuffy air. Clinking glasses and laughter filled the room. Bertrand turned to greet two more gentlemen who entered. One wore the uniform of a ship's captain. Bertrand engaged him in conversation. The other, who announced himself as Mr. Thomas Evans Walker. Elegantly dressed in frock coat and silk tie, he looked like a wealthy, Eastern manufacturer, possibly a candidate for Bertrand's consortium.

"Are you newly arrived in San Francisco, Mr. Walker?" Philippa asked.

"I am, Mrs. Sutter, from Boston."

"Do you intend to prospect for gold?"

"I intend to prospect successful investments," he said. "I shall entertain ideas for any and all ventures, whether they be for working claims or importing tools, building beaneries and brothels or mining quicksilver."

"How intriguing," she said. "I suggest you begin your entertainment of ideas with your host, Bertrand La Martine." She waited until Bertrand finished speaking, then said, "Mr. Thomas Evans Walker of Boston is looking for a worthy business venture. By chance, Monsieur La Martine, would you be able to assist him?" She took Bertrand's arm and whispered into his ear, "Do not neglect to make the acquaintance of Mr. Dougherty standing by the orchid

arrangement. He has just purchased controlling interest in a mine on the Yuba River. And be sure to speak to Mr. Weatherall, who is into quicksilver."

Soon a large throng of guests surged out of the gallery and milled throughout the first floor of the hotel, separating them. Philippa stood in the center of the hallway, buoyed by the energy pulsing around her. She felt like a skiff riding an incoming tide. Men dressed in frock coats, many still wearing their hats, were grouped in the corridor, the bar, even the kitchen, conducting business. Everyone was prospecting for one strike or another. Their tension and excitement thrilled her. In the muslin parlor the air smelled of alcohol, shirt starch, smoke and sweat.

The Chinese waiters Bertrand had hired passed around trays of hors d'oeuvres that might have been gold pieces, the way the guests picked them up and examined them with feverish eyes. A ship's cook he found had procured Sonoran beef, fruit and potatoes from Honolulu and wine from Monterey. Philippa managed to coax a Mexican guitar ensemble to stand outside on the porch to play Spanish ballads instead of their usual raucous repertoire.

The only sour note was that the wives of officers from the Presidio sent their regrets. They did not care to be received by La Martine's mistress, even if she was John Sutter's cousin.

Bertrand sought her out along the hallway and pressed both her hands in his. "I apologize for the rudeness of the female population of San Francisco."

"I don't miss making small talk with Army wives. I'm impressed you count so many important persons among your acquaintance," she said.

He asked, "Who would you like to talk with?"

"Colonel Mason. I should like to paint him with all those golden threads about the epaulettes and collar. His aide flirted with me, that emaciated man with the odd Indian middle name. He could do with a solid meal."

"Ah, yes. William Tecumseh Sherman. He's a fellow of grand aspirations. I've talked with Dougherty and Weatherall. Who else do you want to see?"

"Thomas Larkin."

"Yes, the former consul." Bertrand brought Larkin over to her. He had a pleasing face with a broad forehead and a congenial look to his deep-set eyes. "I congratulate you, Mrs. Sutter," Larkin said with a bow. "We are in need of social events of such high caliber. The outside world thinks us savages."

She laughed. "The outside world is correct, sir."

"San Francisco has a stunning future and will benefit from your presence."

She looked into his eyes. "Thank you for not judging me. The army wives think otherwise."

"Tell me, how is John Sutter?" Larkin said.

"Not well. He has retreated to Hock Farm in despair and would not even come to San Francisco for our reception. The fort is spoiling for want of labor. His wheat crop has rotted. We are unable to buy any garden vegetables from him."

Larkin nodded. "A tragedy. He is greatly revered among Californios, Indians and Sonorans alike. He offered employment and hospitality to hundreds and now he is being cheated out of his land and his dreams."

"We are frustrated that he won't agree to receive our financial help," Bertrand said.

Larkin smiled ruefully. "Always was stubborn as a donkey. Fortunately his son is arriving from Switzerland to help with his failing enterprises."

"That's a blessing," Philippa said. She thought about Sutter's common law wife and wondered how Cousin John would keep his secret from his son.

"I understand you are an artist," Larkin said to Philippa. He kept his eyes on her, mesmerized. "So is Etienne Godchaux of New Orleans. He is staying at a rooming house across the square. Have you met him?"

"No." She flushed with pleasure at the prospect of another artist in town.

"The Godchaux family are old acquaintances of mine. Young Etienne came out to visit, tempted by the tales of gold." He nodded to an overdressed slight figure they could see standing ill at ease in the parlor. "I took the liberty of bringing him here tonight."

"He is very welcome. What kind of artist is he?" Philippa asked.

"He draws birds and animals from nature, much like Audubon."

"All he'll find in San Francisco is gluttonous gulls and gooney birds," Bertrand said.

Larkin laughed. "He's off to tour the Sierra placers within the week." They walked into the parlor where Larkin introduced Godchaux. "Monsieur, may I present Mrs. Sutter and Monsieur La Martine?"

Godchaux shook Bertrand's hand, then bowed and kissed her hand, tickling it with his generous mustaches. "It is a great pleasure, Madame." He spoke in a southern drawl-enhanced French accent and raised his unusually large brown eyes to her's.

"I understand you draw from nature," she said.

He bowed. "Oui, en plein air."

Philippa wondered how long he would retain his old world elegance in this raucous town. "I should like to show you my new studio. Will you excuse us, Mr. Larkin? Ah, here comes John Prendergast."

"My God, the hotel is as bright and noisy as Independence Day," Prendergast said in a loud voice, elbowing his way past a throng of guests. "I could hear you all the way down the hill."

"Bertrand" she said, "you have not yet met Mr. Prendergast, with whom I have spent so many productive hours at my art." The two men shook hands. Excited by her introductions, she took Prendergast's arm and threaded their way through the crowd. She noticed that Bertrand hung back. When she looked at him. He held up his palm, indicating that he would leave her to her friends.

"Mr. Prendergast and I go about the city together," Philippa explained to Godchaux. "He paints and I sketch."

"I would like to see those drawings," Godchaux said.

She led the two artists along the corridor connecting her gallery and studio to the hotel. "I like how your studio is a separate room off your gallery," Porendergast said.

"Yes," Philippa answered. "Bertrand told me that when he designed it he wanted it to be like a kitchen and dining room." She leaned down to withdraw several pages from a portfolio leaning against the wall and set them on an easel.

Godchaux took out a monocle and scrutinized her scenes of the teeming waterfront. He wet his long finger with his tongue and gingerly touched the paper, turning to the next one. "These have decided flair. This one with the seagulls soaring over the ship masts is superb. However..."

"Yes?" she prompted him.

"Your horizon is placed at an odd point, revealing a bit more sky than I am used to seeing."

"Three-fourths of the picture is sky," she said. "What do you think of the effect?"

Etienne Godchaux looked pained.

Prendergast said, "I delight so in Mrs. Sutter's company while I paint. Yet, what truly consumes her imagination is her new style of oil painting. She works late in here each night. I have yet to see even one canvas," he said in mock petulance.

They all startled as they heard a distant whoop of laughter and spontaneous applause from the bar own the hall. Philippa said, "We are fellow artists. Let's address each other by our first names and offer frank criticism to one another. Agreed?"

"Not until I see your oils," Prendergast said stubbornly. "After all, we are your colleagues."

"Fair enough." She lit an oil lamp, set it on a stool. She turned around the first easel.

Prendergast walked forward, his hands behind his back. She removed the cloth covering the picture. A riot of blues, violets and purples painted in swathes of horizontal streaks throbbed from the large canvas. Hovering above it was a cloud of yellows and greens. John gasped and stepped back as if assaulted. Godchaux approached, setting his monocle in place, which promptly fell from his face and dangled from his mustaches by its black velvet ribbon.

She uncovered the second easel. John blinked and, squaring his shoulders, gazed upon a landscape of reds vibrating against blues, slashed by a streak of silvery white. Godchaux followed suit, unnaturally bent forward, shoulders tensed.

"Etienne, you must step back to appreciate it," she said.

"These are preliminary ideas?" John asked.

"They are finished works," she said.

"Would you explain the subject of the first one, please," Godchaux said.

"The bay at dusk from the highest hill," she said. "A fog rolls in."

He scowled and tipped his head to the side.

She pointed to the bottom of the picture and slowly moved her hand up. "The perspective is from near the top of the hill. The foreground is a field of heather. Beyond it, the ridge, then the crest, then ocean and sky. The air is dense with fog, but moving in circular patterns, as it does up there."

"But that is not how it is," John Prendergast said. "You cannot see the Pacific Ocean from that hill."

"I am picturing an impression of reality, not reality," she said.

"Your vegetation is ineffectual," John said.

"I agree," she said. "I'm trying to capture the grasses in reflected twilight, but I fear the effort is not entirely successful."

Etienne gingerly approached the canvas. He replaced his monocle. "Your brush strokes are unusually wide. The paint appears to be hastily applied and thicker than need be. Surely with your training you are in command of more refined brush skills."

"Never mind technique for the moment. How does the painting make you feel?" she asked him.

He looked her in the eye. "Uncomfortable. I don't like anything about it."

Philippa paused. She was stunned by the force of his negative response. "And what is your reaction to the second painting?"

Godchaux moved in front of it. "Is it a river?"

"Yes. What else do you see?"

"I presume the red is a mountain and the blue is the riverbank," he said shaking his head. "The colors appear to be quarreling. How bizarre."

She turned to Prendergast. "What do you see?"

"There is something just here on the riverbank. I can't make it out." He stepped back. "It appears to be a woman washing clothes." He peered closer at the canvas. "How intriguing. What are actually blobs of paint up close rearrange themselves into a figure when viewed from a distance."

"That's it," Philippa said. "The viewer must assemble the colors and lines to actualize the image."

"Am I to consider it a puzzle?" Etienne asked. A querulous tone had crept into his voice.

"No," she said slowly. "Think of it as an interpretation using your own imagination."

"The woman is distorted," Etienne said, vexed. "The arms are too large and protruding. Are you going to fix that? "

"No," Philippa said.

"But it mars what little of the composition is pleasing."

"You are used to seeing the human figure in correct proportions," Philippa said. "We have seen the ideal female figure in European art for centuries. There is nothing left to say about it. Consider what the woman is feeling. The river is the light source, a whisk of silver moving quickly past her. The movement gives a sense of urgency and drama. The mountain is dark. I've used graded textures. Nightfall threatens. The riverbank is inky. Perhaps the woman is not washing clothes after all. Maybe she is drowning an unwanted child."

"Great heavens." John laughed uncomfortably. "What do you call this new method of painting?"

"Depiction," she answered.

"I don't like 'depiction,' " John said. "You are presenting an impression of reality. I prefer 'impressionism.' "

"No, that's too weak a term," she said. "It conveys the concept of a brief glance, an indistinct image."

"Well these renderings are certainly indistinct," John said heatedly.

Philippa felt her heart beating fast. They didn't like her work, but she couldn't stop herself from showing them more. She set a portrait of Polynesian sailors on another easel.

Etienne stepped back, startled. "Mon Dieu, what is this?"

"One in a series I call 'Californios,' " she explained. "Faces of foreigners to California who are caught up, displaced, and exploited by the lust for gold." Two menacing heads squarely faced the viewer. Native brown and red-patterned fabrics were wound around their dark skin, prickled with purple tatoos. Their facial features, frozen in south sea island masks, expressed rapturous greed. "These are Tahitians and Samoans waiting on the Broadway wharf. You can see them there most any day. A riverboat approaches to take them to the gold fields. In their homelands these islanders were heathens. Now they are San Franciscan hedonists," she said. "I'm imposing an emotional, even political, content so that people who come after us will understand what it feels like to be here at this time."

"I find this painting ugly." Etienne looked away with disgust.

Philippa lost her patience with him. "Etienne, you are an artist. Touch the canvas, feel the layers of paint against your fingers. I am presenting a metaphor for the energy and decadence of this town. I paint raw emotion and the despair of fools who spend months of digging only to lose everything."

Godchaux stepped back. "However noble you find the subject, your depiction of it offends me."

"Then you are unperceptive, a fatal flaw for an artist. The drama surrounding us cannot be told in vapid watercolors of anatomically precise birds."

Etienne stared at her, aghast. "There is no authority here. C'est affreux!"

"Philippa, do listen." Prendergast spoke quickly. "Your paintings are ill proportioned, unnaturally colorful and too carelessly rendered to be of artistic or commercial value. You are an accomplished artist and a credit to your professors at the Pennsylvania Academy. I suggest you abandon this technique and continue with your sketches and watercolors."

"You must understand," she said. "I am looking ahead."

"But art dealers buy what their clients want now," John protested.

"He has a point," Bertrand said. His presence at the door surprised her. She didn't know how long he'd been there. "If your paintings are not pleasing, they will not sell."

"Selling is secondary," she said heatedly. "I'm creating a new way to render reality into art, a new way to see!"

"I agree with Monsieur La Martine," John Prendergast said. "You should give art buyers what they want."

"Philippa, you're ignoring your guests," Bertrand said sharply. "They want to make their departures." She saw he barely had his quick temper under

control. He glanced at Prendergast and Godchaux and cocked his head toward the door. Heads down, they left the studio.

She stared at Bertrand. "From the whoops I hear from the bar our guests are content to entertain each other. Why are you so angry with me?"

"I haven't seen these," he said tightly, looking at her easels. "I didn't know what you were working on."

"You don't approve?" she asked.

"God knows, I do not approve."

"You saw my experimental work in the gold camp."

"You know how to paint pleasing landscapes, Philippa. I expect you to modify your style so you can produce paintings to sell to customers in your new gallery. These are ugly. You're wasting your time."

"And squandering your investment in me?" she said sarcastically.

Suddenly he raised his hand. She flinched and ducked, crossing her hands across her face. He stopped with his hand extended, then reached on a shelf behind her and snatched a painting smock. "If you are going to show your oils, you will want to protect your white dress from pigment." He fitted the smock over her head, and turning her around sharply, pulled the strings around her waist and yanked them into a tight knot.

# Chapter Eight

Philippa leaned back against the pillows in bed the next morning eating a peach from the silver tray on the bedside table. Peach juice spilled down her chin, and as she licked it, she could smell the cloud of French perfume clinging to her hair from the night before. When Bertrand had spun her around in her studio and tightened the sash of her smock, a bolt of anger had shot through her that triggered a whole new way of thinking. Her imagination was spinning with ideas.

Bertrand pressed his lips to her shoulder. "I'm leaving at noon to ride down to New Almaden to meet Thomas Walker and Roger Weatherall at Weatherall's mercury mines."

She regarded him closely. "You're going to observe the mine operation and assess its possibilities. While Mr. Weatherall interests Mr. Walker in investing, you will sign them both up to finance your claims."

He smiled at her astuteness. " I should take you with me. Will you be all right on your own for a few days? Actually this could stretch into weeks. I don't know how long negotiations will take or where they will lead."

"Just keep yourself honest, Bertrand. These are experienced entrepreneurs and you want to start out on the right footing."

"I want you to think of your future," he said.. "You have some decisions to make if you intend to support yourself as an artist. I know it's difficult because you have so many radical ideas, but I have confidence you'll find a middle ground."

She sat up straighter against the pillows, fresh thoughts churning. "Do you believe in me?"

"Yes," he said, looking deep into her eyes. "I always have."

"And you believe I can make a living as an artist?"

"You can make a fortune. Everyone in California is staking his claim. It's time for you to stake your claim, Philippa."

"Then I will do it! Before you leave I want you to write a letter to your bank manager, telling him that I will paint and sell him six pictures that his customers and depositors will be captivated with when they come in to do business. I promise you, Bertrand, these will be pleasing to the eye and not offend."

He hugged and kissed her. "Now that's what I wanted to hear, my darling. I'll go over and have a talk with Fred Simon before I leave." He eased himself out of bed. "I'm going to take Patrick O'Reilly with me to New Almaden because he is a shrewd observer and valuable advisor. I want you to work in your studio. If you must go about the city, please arrange to have John Prendergast accompany you."

"And what about Etienne Godchaux?" she teased him with a smile.

"He's a harmless dandy, but I wouldn't count on him to pull you out of a patch of mud."

"Please be careful. You are all the beauty in my world. You are my life."

As soon as Bertrand left, Philippa dressed and walked over to Mademoiselle Courbet's shop. The French dressmaker welcomed her warmly, and they shared a pot of tea before Philippa explained what she wanted. "I want you to tailor a pair of sturdy men's pants for me to wear in all weather. I'll need a warm jacket of Mexican wool, roomy enough so I can move my shoulders and arms. No corsets. Nothing to restrict me. I'll need a pair of those long-legged boots to clear the high mud. I've seen the Irishmen in cable-knit vests. See if you can find one with sleeves "

"Are you going prospecting?" Mademoiselle asked.

"No. I'm going to sketch and paint in San Francisco. I want to create an accurate record of how raucous San Francisco is in October 1848 before the word of free gold circulates throughout the Atlantic States and brings thousands more to our shores next spring. Gold miners are streaming in from all over the world. Hundreds of South sea islanders, Chinese, Peruvians Chileans and Kanakas have deserted their ships, left them marooned in the harbor. I want to capture the energy, the hope and greed. I am going to be recognized as a serious artist, and make enough money to support myself."

Mademoiselle gazed at her in wonder. "You don't wish to be seen as a woman."

"A woman causes too much attention in this town. No one is going to pay attention to a street urchin."

"Mademoiselle," she said sadly. "I fear for your safety."

Philippa took her small hands in hers. "Don't worry about me. I have a few friends I can call upon. I have an artist friend, and Yung Lee, the chef at La Martine House, knows the city and its denizens well. We've talked about my plan. He is eager to accompany and protect when I need him. Where is the nearest men's shop?"

"Two doors down to the right. Shall I come with you?"

"No need. I want to find the kind of cap the news boy vendors wear."

On a bright, sunny morning John Prendergast let himself into her gallery and entered her studio. He took one look at her. "My God, Philippa, what have you done to yourself? You look like a boy."

"I've changed my look," she said. "Now I can sketch and paint anywhere in the city and blend in with the crowd."

"But your figure..." he said, perplexed.

"I've wound linen around my chest. Come on, John. Let's have some fun." She gathered up her sketch book and paint set. "Can you carry my easel over your shoulder?"

"No," he teased her. "You're a sturdy boy. You carry it."

"I hear that the New Zealanders have opened a tattoo shop down on the wharf where their latest ship put in," she said. "They're engraving tattoos on the miners. Should be an interesting crowd assembled."

The wharf smelled of sweet potatoes and rotten fish and was slippery underfoot. Dozens of miners leaned against the wall and chugged on their whiskey, waiting their turn to be tattooed. They knew being punctured was going to hurt. Two miners, crying out and moaning, lay on filthy cots in the bright sunshine as two tattoo artists worked in them. Before she could be noticed and shooed away, Philippa set up her easel and sketch pad in the doorway of the tattoo shop. Inside she saw vials of colored inks and all manner of pens and knives spread out on tables covered in colorful textiles, the same cloth the New Zealanders wore around their waists. John Prendergast walked around the shop with his hands behind his back as if he were examining an exhibit at the British Museum

"What do you think you're doing here?" a voice boomed.

Philippa looked up at a block of a brown-skinned man who stood well over six feet. "Hello. I'm so glad you speak English. The newspaper wants me

to do a story and picture. You are a Maori, a native New Zealander. Are you from the North or South Island? My name is Phillip. What is your name?"

His mates laughed. "You don't want to pick on Big Ben."

With one swift kick the brute set her easel flying. "Get Out!"

"Let him stay," three miners said. "Let's see how good he is at drawing pictures."

"Maybe he's better at tattoos that you louts"

John helped Philippa set up again. She sketched quickly in charcoal. As each new miner took his position on one of the cots, he was careful not to cry out from the pain and look like a sissy.

"I just want my wife's name on my forearm," a miner said. He pulled out an ounce of gold.

"What's her name?" Big Ben said.

"Mary Louise," the miner said, teeth clattering on his bottle of whiskey.

"That's two words. Cost you 2 ounces." The men argued, which launched discussions of the costs up and down the line of men who were waiting in line and becoming more intoxicated as the sun rose higher and hotter. Phillipa sketched happily. After an hour she was ready to begin her painting. She blocked in the door to the shop, the men lying on the cots, the miners waiting, and, as background, the dozens of ships that had sailed into San Francisco Bay but had never left because their crews had deserted months before for the gold fields. Many of the ships were used as shops, dilapidated housing, and storage of closely guarded lumber and building supplies. While John watched over her painting, she followed Big Ben across four decks of other boats to the ship they had just arrived in. "When we heard about the free gold, we jumped five feet high. Many of us make the trip," he said. "Nearly 150. All from North Island. Most Maori. We are best navigators. We divide up work. Some came who are called Pakeha, from European families who came to New Zealand. They understand how to do the placer mining and have made cradles and rockers to get out more gold faster. We Maoris take care of the ship, cook the meals and sell what the weavers make at the shop."

Philippa looked at the sleeping quarters, no more than rabbit warren bins smelling of filthy straw. Beautifully woven hammocks stretched across every wall. On the deck were eight canoes.

"At night we take canoes to small islands," Big Ben said with a wide smile, missing several teeth. "Are many beautiful Indian women here in San Francisco Bay."

"We want Phillip to get a tattoo," several miners chanted as she returned to her easel.

John seized her arm. "We have to get out of here. They're all drunk."

She put her hand on his arm to steady him. "The oil sketch is dry enough to pack. I'm almost ready."

She turned to Big Ben and made him bend down to hear her. Then she announced to the crowd, "Big Ben will tattoo my face in purple so I will be an honorary Maori." The miners murmured about what a tough little kid this street artist was. Philippa took a paintbrush from her box, prepared it with purple paint, and gave it to Big Ben. She lay down on the cot. Big Ben leaned over her with several knives he pretended to wield as he swathed and dotted her forehead and nose with purple paint. Philippa cried out in mock agony.

"For godsake, give the boy some grog, a miner shouted.

Both Big Ben and Philippa began to laugh and could not stop. She got up from the cot, held her paint set and sketches under her arm and ran with John as fast as they could down the slippery wharf.

That night, as she lay alone, wind rushed through chinks in the window frames. The candles flickered, their flames sweeping left, then right. Bertrand had been gone for ten days. His two letters to her were a revelation. She understood how much he loved her. She understood she did not love him as much, but that she wanted him more.

During the next week she finished two paintings for the bank. One was a scene on the wharf with the New Zealanders. The other she painted in front of the Custom House where two wealthy businessmen argued about building supplies. Half-a-dozen wastrel miners lolled about the plank porch with their whiskey bottles, while in the bully pulpit set up next to flag pole, a long-bearded, white haired prophet yelled his message: "Repent!"

Philippa studied her finished paintings. The style and its execution served their purpose. The faces of the figures were clear. The scenes were sufficiently dramatic. People would like them. Of course the bank paintings, as she now called them, were embarrassingly sentimental and predictable. They were more illustration than art, but the detour of time away from her new style was worth because they would bring her an income and make her financially independent. Maybe she could talk the bank manager into buying eight paintings. Only six more to go.

Late that afternoon John Prendergast rushed in. "Philippa, I have glorious news!"

"Tell me." She sat on the edge of the chair at the tea table in the gallery and he took the chair across from it. He paused, out of breath. "I just talked with our friend Thomas Larkin. He told me that an acquaintance of his from New York has decided to visit San Francisco. He is to arrive in March"

"Yes?"

"His name is Ludlow Pierson and he is a respected art dealer. He has galleries in New York and Boston. He's an expert on the art people now collect and, what is more important, what new art they will buy. Larkin said Pierson will be willing to look at our work."

She was dubious. "Does he deal in American art?"

"International, according to Larkin. That includes American." She could hear irritation in John's voice as she deflated his enthusiasm.

"But why is he visiting Thomas Larkin?"

"Larkin's a trader. He imports a lot of porcelain and furnishings from China. He told Pierson there's a burgeoning art colony in San Francisco."

"I'd rather be evaluated by an art critic," she said.

"But that's the best news," Prendergast said. "A colleague, an art critic, is traveling with him." Prendergast pulled a piece of paper from his pocket and consulted it. "Henri Seigner."

"I never heard of him. Who does he write for?"

"Some journal in Paris. He's from France."

She leaned back in her chair. "How extraordinary that the two of them are coming all the way to San Francisco."

"Apparently they are curious about the gold camps and want to see them."

She laughed. "Can't you just picture them, John: two art entrepreneurs dressed in formal clothes being shoved aside by the wild and greedy diggers?" She glanced at the easels in her gallery. "I'm not nearly ready," she said, thinking again of a middle ground for her new style that would please patrons.

"But you have lots of time," John said. "We all do. Etienne is thinking of branching out from painting only plants and birds."

She envisioned every street corner sketch artist vying for Monsieur Seigner's eye. She reached over the table and took John's hand. "Thank you for including me in this opportunity."

"Will you show them your paintings for the bank?" Prendergast asked.

"Heavens no!"

John glanced around the spacious room. Rain pelted the wood-framed windows. "We will all have a lot of paintings to show. I suggest we put on an exhibition here in your gallery before the art dealer and critic arrive. It will serve as an incentive to get ourselves ready."

"That's bold," she said. "There are so few people of taste in this town. Who would come to an art exhibition?"

"We'll invite our friends and the newcomers who claim to be part of society, and successful miners with gold to spend."

She forced a dubious smile. "As you say we have months to prepare." She was thinking that she wanted to finish her bank commission within the month so she could get on with her new work. "Have a cup of tea with me," she said to John. She stood up, went out into the corridor and pushed open the double doors to the kitchen. "Jung Le, my artist friend is here. Please bring us a pot of lemon tea and a plate of your fortune cookies."

"Where are we going?" John asked as she hurried him out the door at six o'clock.

"We are having dinner with the Kanakas," she said.

She was wearing a long wool shirt, white blouse and a shawl.

"I see you are going as Philippa, not Philip," John said.

"Yes. I have a letter of introduction from Cousin John," she said. As they approached the house on Montgomery Street she had been directed to, she noticed that he was limping. "Did you hurt your leg?"

"I twisted my knee while crossing the street. Cursed mud! " he said. "It's swelling."

"I'm sorry. We will find a chair for you right away."

John said, "I won't know anyone here. I don't know anything about these people."

"But you were just in the Kanaka Islands before you came to San Francisco."

"Yes, but I didn't mix with the locals."

"Why not?"

"I'm English."

"Yes?"

"And they are so... brown."

"Oh, John, you are such a snob."

"I know. I was raised that way."

"Well, you will have to mix tonight. We've been invited to dine at a Kanakan restaurant by Mr. Kanahale, the official representing the mayor of Honolulu," she said.

John was seated in what looked like a throne, with plush red velvet upholstery. Philippa joined Mr. Kanahale outside in the back garden. She set up her easel and paint box and began to paint on a primed canvas. The Kanakas were roasting a pig buried in a pit of coals and hot ash.

"How do you know John Sutter?" she asked Kanahale?"

"In 1839, his agent brought me, my brothers our cousins, and our friends from Honolulu to the Sacramento Valley. Sutter taught us how to make adobe bricks. We lived in grass huts and built Sutter's Fort."

"Do you remember the name of the agent?" she asked.

"He was French. Bernard or Bertrand. A young man, very smart. He was a good negotiator. All we had to do was to teach our songs and dances to the passengers, and we had first-class accommodations on the ship. The next year Sutter brought over our wives. My wife and I had three children. You see them there, helping to roast the pig. John Sutter is their Godfather.

Philippa spent two days at the bank sketching miners bringing in their pokes to make deposits. In the evenings, she worked in oil to complete her paintings. One morning she stood at her easel in the pouring rain watching two miners pulling their mules across Washington Street. Despite the layers of tree branches and slats of wood from broken-up packing cases over the mud, the animals could not get their footing. She slabbed mud onto her canvas and let the rain streak it. After an hour, she had her painting. She turned when she heard her name being called. John Prendergast came limping out of the back entrance to La Martine House. "Philippa, your chef Yung Lee says you are to come in out of the rain immediately or he will not take us to his club tonight." She scooped off her hat and lifted her face to the rain. She laughed at the way John and Yung Lee fussed over her.

That evening, Philippa dressed as Phillip. As she approached Celestial Heaven, she could smell the sickly sweet aroma of opium. The building was a shanty with two larger shanties pressing it on both sides. The club members did not mind that a young boy was drawing pictures of them. Chinese men lolled on silk couches, passing opium pipes. John was persuaded by Yung Lee to sit in their midst. When John was sufficiently sleepy, Yung Lee signaled to a doctor across the room to join them. The doctor brought over his case of acupuncture needles. When John awoke, he stood up and walked around. He was appalled by the circumstances under which he had fallen asleep, but was delighted his knee no longer hurt.

"Philippa, what did they do to me?"

"Does it still hurt?"

"No."

"That's all you need to know."

On the way back to the hotel, they stopped in at Parker House on Kearny Street. Philippa was astounded by the numbers of gambling table, and by the speed with which gold changed hands. Men stood four deep at every table. She set up her easel and started an oil sketch of the scene. Suddenly, the floor manager started shouting, "What is this street urchin doing? Get him out of here!" Shots rang out. Yung Lee picked up Philippa and carried her out the door. Back at La Martine House, he forced her to sit down in the kitchen and eat a plate of noodles. In the rush, she had left her paintings and sketches behind. She begged him to go back to Parker House and retrieve them immediately. She waited impatiently until he returned, and was overjoyed to see her work. Yung Lee boiled water and filled the tub in her bathroom. She took a long bath and fell into an exhausted sleep.

She spent the next five days finishing her paintings. Then, she worked with a carpenter to have all eight paintings framed. She invited the bank manager, Fred Simon, Etienne, and John Prendergast to tea in her gallery. After a lively discussion, the bank manager decided to buy all eight paintings, instead of only six. Philippa went into the hotel's kitchen and enlisted Yung Lee and four waiters to help carry the paintings to the bank. Everyone took a painting, and carrying it over his head, walked down the hill to the bank on Montgomery Street. At the bank, Phillipa sat in a plush chair, drinking champagne, and supervised the hanging of her pictures. She asked Fred Simon to deposit her $8,000 fee in a new savings account for her.

Yung Lee ordered dinner for everyone from Celestial Heaven. "Congratulations, Philippa," John said, "you are now making a living as an artist."

# Chapter Nine

*La Martine House*

*Portsmouth Square*

*San Francisco*

*October 30th, 1848*

*Dearest Mother,*

*Please forgive me. I know you would rather be holding me in your arms instead of this letter in your hands. After thinking it over for weeks, I have decided to stay in California to pursue my art career. I know this news is a shock, and I regret disappointing you and Father. You may not even receive this missive. I am having it sent by my friend Thomas Larkin. His courier will gallop along the swift route across the southwestern desert. Only God knows if the post rider will survive attacks from Indians or intolerable thirst. I see his sorrel, rounding the bend in the trail, rearing up from a rattler. Perhaps the horse will stumble into a thicket of sagebrush, toppling the rider into a gulch, knocking his head on a boulder. His pouch will fly into deep gorse from which it will never be recovered. Then you will not know how my life has changed.*

*I have developed a new technique of painting and must continue the work in this light, in the face of these cold winds, and in the midst of this raucous town teeming with people of all nationalities and new-found wealth. I am determined to refine my new technique and produce paintings with which I can support myself.*

*I feel I am part of a drama being played out, and I am unable to leave the stage. You will have read all about the gold rush and what it has done to San Francisco. Every manner of man is drawn to its shores, including artists. I am part of a burgeoning art colony. John Prendergast, from England, paints watercolor landscapes. Etienne Godchaux, from New*

*Orleans, paints birds in the style of John Audubon. I've heard that Mr. Audubon's son is soon to join us. A New York art dealer and French critic are on their way and will arrive in May to evaluate our work.*

*I still grieve for Martin, but the worst is over and my memories of him console me. I have made the choice to live.*

*I see Cousin John from time to time and we are very close, like uncle and niece. There are few women to make friends with, but they will come. I have lived at Sutter's Fort and in gold camps in the Sierras. Currently I am staying in a luxurious suite at La Martine House. Bertrand LaMartine is a brilliant man, resourceful, entrepreneurial, politically ambitious. I can only speak the truth to you, dear Mother. Bertrand is my lover. We've made no plans to marry. We do not discuss it. Simply, we are together.*

*I ask you to explain all this to Father.*

*I have never known such clarity of mind and purpose and am enjoying my independence. You will always be my heart, but I've grown beyond my life in Philadelphia. Although I am changing, I am still the daughter you know and love. My goal continues to be recognized as a significant artist in New York and Paris, and I'm as surprised as you are that I am fulfilling my ambition by working in California.*

*Affectionately, Philippa*

Early in November Philippa was working in her studio when the hotel manager called her to the muslin parlor to receive a visitor. A Miwok Indian dressed in deer skins and moccasins bowed when she entered the room and introduced himself as Elk Horn. He handed her a letter stamped with red wax imprinted with Bertrand's seal.

"Monsieur LaMartine has traveled from New Alamden east to the mountains on a prospecting venture," Elk Horn said. "He asked me to tell you that he has formed a consortium. He has convinced Mr. Weatherall and Mr. Walker to finance his new mine."

Bertrand was gathering his forces around him. She smiled at the robust young man who spoke English with a French accent. Bertrand had tutored him well.

"I am to escort you to the new camp," Elk Horn said.

"Where on earth is it?" she asked.

From a pocket in his deerskin vest Elk Horn produced a tattered map of the Sierras and smoothed it out on the surface of the chipped mahogany desk. The feathers in his headpiece quivered as they stood over the map. He ran his square, brown finger along the length of the American River, twisting its way

north. Taking a quill pen from the pen holder on the desk, he dipped it in the inkwell and marked a circle on the map. He wrote ' North Fork Dry Diggings.'

Her painting had progressed so well, she didn't want to leave. Even Etienne agreed her depictions of dramatic scenes throughout the city were clear enough to distinguish the subject matter. Both he and Prendergast were impressed by her success, which inspired them to work harder. Twelve finished oils stood on easels in her studio, and she had sold four more. She asked Prendergast to work in and oversee her gallery while she was away.

Elk Horn rode horseback alongside a wagon loaded with supplies. Picks and shovels and kitchen utensils lay packed in sawdust along with foodstuffs, rifles, pistols and her painting gear. The wagon was covered with white muslin so finely woven, she was tempted to rip it off and use it for canvas. Two straining oxen pulled the lumbering wagon through the mud streets to the wharf and onto a riverboat. The paddlewheel churned, propelling them out into the rain-sheeted bay. Elk Horn, the Sonoran wagon driver named Miguel, and the ship's hands toiled on the slippery deck to unhitch the sweating beasts, cursing one and all.

The road up was appalling. Elk Horn called over his shoulder that they were fortunate it was not more clogged with mud. She'd forgotten how primitive life on the trail could be and how it lowered her spirits. She'd grown soft at LaMartine House. Each day Elk Horn rode next to her mare for a mile or so, no doubt carrying out Bertrand's instructions to monitor her fitness for the journey. She guessed Elk Horn in his late twenties. He did not initiate conversations, but answered politely when questioned. His muscular, compact body was magnificent. She wanted to halt the tedious journey and paint him.

They arrived at Rich Flat at dusk in thin, cold air. Bertrand waved and strode downhill between pine trees. He wore a Quaker hat she hadn't seen before, denim work pants and a wide smile. He scooped her off her horse and into his arms, taking her directly into his tent, taking her directly. His hair and beard were full, but silky to her touch, smelling of soap. His arms embraced her with steely strength. Exhausted from the journey she sagged like a rag doll, then felt her passion stirring, blood coursing fast, faster to her limbs and she was reborn to their loving. They bedded down in bear skins. Night faded to morning. By noon they still had not shown their flushed faces outside the tent.

"I warn you it's as cold out there as a witch's teat," Bertrand said. "I'm having a cabin built for us."

"How did you end up on this God forsaken hillside?" she asked, burrowing her face in his warm shoulder.

" Two men named Joe Woods and Tuck Warner discovered a hoard of gold here at Rich Flat and we've horned in, not without a good deal of negotiating. I

bargain square feet of claim for equipment, fresh food, tents and blankets, pots and pans."

"What a lot of haggling," she said.

"They're as much in need as we are, so we strike deal after deal. Our Indians, their Indians. Our Sonorans, their Sonorans. Our cook's services for their blacksmith's services. Flannel shirts and boots for canned pears from Peru. Supplies are moving from hand to hand so fast, I'm looking for a man who has experience in accounting. I'll pay him well to keep track of it all."

"Are you finding gold?"

"The whole area is a prime digging site. Last August a miner sifting through five cartloads of dirt picked out gold worth sixteen thousand dollars. I assured Weatherall I could locate yet a new source nearby. Then we came upon Joe Woods and Tuck Warner. Weatherall promptly enlisted a banker from Chicago to help finance us."

Philippa shook her head in wonder. "To me this is all a game of monte at the big table. You bet your money and take your chances."

They were camped in a remote ravine between the Bear River and the North Fork of the American River. The men worked energetically, sweating even in the chilled air and cold winds. They slept and wrote letters during their nooning, and drank hard after supper. Some plucked at their fiddles and guitars and sang. They nodded politely to her. "Morning Ma'am, evening Ma'am." She heard snickers from time to time. They didn't know what to think of her. She was the widow of John Sutter's cousin, an Eastern lady, yet the boss's mistress. She earned their respect by standing at her easel among them all day in the cold. She was a hard-working artist and that was explanation enough.

The men dug up the dirt like eager boys, carting it a long way to the river to wash. They whooped at their rich findings all day long. Bertrand was frantic with the length of time taken for each trip to the river. He was desperate to build his sluice box mechanism, but was waiting for funds to come through. When not managing his men, Bertrand supervised carpenters on the building of a cabin, and none too soon. When Philippa moved around the campsite in the early mornings, frost coated the grass and snow flurries danced around her shoulders. The chopping of trees and sawing of logs reminded her of the mill at Coloma. She missed Willy and Jenny Wimmer. Watching the progress of the building of the cabin, she stopped Benjamin Spinder, a Mormon carpenter on Bertrand's crew, and asked if he knew of the whereabouts of Luke Blacker and Edmund Rose.

Mr. Spinder shrugged his shoulders. "Don't rightly know, Ma'am. Alls I do know is that they set out to climb the Sierras last month and are walking back to Utah, empty-handed."

"But they were rich," she said. "I was with them when they dug up on the North Fork all summer. They kept their gold in John Sutter's safe."

"Maybe they gambled it away. Lots of temptations in San Francisco," Spinder said.

"No, they would never do that." she said, stunned. "After all that effort, what a tragedy!"

That night she confronted Bertrand, who was writing a report by candlelight at a makeshift desk in their tent. "Did you know Luke and Edmund lost all their gold?"

He looked up. The flickering light cast a shadow over his eyes. She could not read his expression. "I didn't know that. They were hard-working enough, but naive when it came to the ways of the ruthless men around us. They must have been robbed."

She sat on the cot across from him and looked at him earnestly. "Bertrand, did you borrow their money again from John' safe and not return it?"

He put down his quill pen. "No. For God's sake, how could you accuse me of such a thing?"

"You're an opportunist. You always need gold for one deal or another."

He shook his head. "I was wrong to take their gold. I'll never make that mistake again. You are my conscience." He reached for her hand and squeezed it.

She felt overwhelmed by sadness for Luke and Edmund. All their mindless digging for naught! Before closing the flap to their tent she looked through the tall pines at the round face of the barren moon and imagined they were digging between its eyes.

Her painting went well despite the frigid air, even at midday. She captured colors of the earth she had not studied before. The gulch was steep and ragged with excavations, yards of disturbed dirt concealing gold dust, gold nuggets, gold imprisoned in stone, wet gold, gold drying in the watery sun, gold washed down at the river through fingers numbed blue with cold. Tiny bits of gold were left around the campsite like playing cards and bean tins. The men were growing careless. Not Bertrand. He paced sentry. A set of scales hung from his neck by a leather strap. He weighed the dust and the nuggets before storing them in leather pouches. "Scoop up every one of those flakes, Mr. Smyth," he admonished. "I will not have you squander our riches with your carelessness."

Each afternoon he took three of the boys with him upriver, where downwind, they processed the gold with quicksilver he had brought from the New Almaden mine, separating out dirt, sand and gravel. When they heated the

amalgam, the mercury evaporated and left coarse gold of a spongy consistency. She worried about the poisonous vapors, but Bertrand shrugged off the danger in his French frontiersman style.

"It's a calculated risk," he said. "We know what we're doing."

Each afternoon they left earlier and returned sooner, racing against the failing light, bringing back sackfuls of pure gold worth eighteen dollars an ounce.

She tried mixing mica, even quartz into her pigments to paint sun, sky, water. She tried ochre yellow mixed with silver, lead white, even the time-bleached bones of a small animal she found in an excavated pit, but nothing captured the glint of gold like gold itself. "Lord," she said aloud, "I've caught the fever myself."

Philippa washed her hands in the river and stood up, flexing her back. She had spent four hours at her easel and still the scene would not come to life. She walked down the path into a clearing marked with small white boulders. Smells from the cookfires tantalized her palette. Beef stew, succotash, potatoes. Cornbread baked in a Dutch oven. She had gained weight on the plain fare. She waved a greeting to the blacksmith and stopped in front of the office tent. Bertrand was in conversation with his accountant. She waited. When he saw her out of the corner of his eye, he reached back and took her hand, massaging it in his sensual way. She turned so none of the other laborers would see the flush rise to her cheeks.

"Now, Mrs. Sutter, what may I do for you?"

She looked into his eyes and caught her breath. When she smiled, her eyes half-closed with desire. "What we do best, Monsieur."

"Here, now? What will you pay?" Still holding her hand, he pulled her outside, behind the tent where they embraced.

"You already have my heart and soul," she whispered. "What is left?"

"Your splendid body." He kissed her neck.

Her head rolled to the side and she felt dizzy. She stepped back. "Bertrand, I've come on business. I need a bit of gold."

"Do you wish to buy something from the tent store?"

"No. I want to experiment with gold in pigment. I'm trying to get a certain effect."

He drew her back to the tent. Swiftly he opened a portable safe. She handed him sixteen dollars, knowing the rule. No gold passed from one man to another without an exchange of dollars or goods. He weighed out an ounce and handed it to her in a folded piece of paper. She tested the edges of the

paper between her fingers. The paper was perfect for watercolor, as valuable as gold in this remote ravine. "No, I want the pure gold," she said.

"That will be two dollars more," he said solemnly. "It's worth eighteen dollars."

She slapped his outstretched palm playfully. "Bertrand, I don't have two more dollars. Come, I need the spongy gold."

He took paper packet back from her. "Sorry."

"Surely my credit is good." She stared at him disbelievingly.

"I must get back to work," he said.

She looked into his humorless eyes and saw he was not teasing her. She saw stubbornness, and something more: raw greed.

By the end of November high winds made it impossible to paint outside. She paced the wood planks of the two-room cabin. Turpentine mingled with the burning wood smell in the close quarters, making her nauseous. The men were cold and tired and grumbled continuously. Bertrand drove them like oxen. Rich Flat was no place for anyone not engaged in digging and washing gold. She didn't belong in this coarse world of men any more than she did on a battlefield.

Bertrand read her mood and suggested a plan.. Two days later Philippa stood by the cabin's log fire and buttoned her cape. Her few clothes and painting gear were packed among saddle bags of gold. "Here, take my buffalo robe," he said.

She wrinkled her nose and sniffed. "It's gamey."

"Never mind. It will keep you warm. You're hauling five thousand dollars worth of gold in bags. Let Elk Horn handle the gold. He'll accompany you to Sutter's Fort and wait until you are ready to return."

"Is this all the gold?"

"No, I'm keeping another $7,000 here. I'm expecting Roger Weatherall from the consortium to visit the camp. He will want to see the gleam of his profits."

Tears welled in her eyes. She didn't want to leave Bertrand. They held on to each other urgently and kissed until her lips swelled. Then he set her back, ready to talk business. "Young John Sutter will welcome you. God knows, you're part of California's reigning family. Now that they're besieged with creditors, he's selling land holdings in order to pay the debts. I want you to tour the entire Sacramento City waterfront with young John. Listen carefully to him. I hear he is shrewd, but observe for yourself. I want you to select the most

valuable pieces of property and make down payments with the gold. Here are a dozen deed documents. I've left the description spaces blank for you to fill in."

She glanced at the papers he handed her.

"I hear Sam Brannan's in town making his own land deals," he continued. "I want you to undercut him wherever you can. I'll not be second in line. I want at least ten lots, most of them waterfront. Remember, not only are you part of the Sutter family, you're my agent for the consortium."

"But I have no authority as agent."

Bertrand handed her his quill and a fresh document, government printed, and illustrated with baroque scrolling. "By signing here you become my Power of Attorney."

Philippa looked around helplessly, as if expecting a lawyer to step forward. "I don't like this, Bertrand. We have no legal witness."

"Tell John Sutter to notarize it and stamp his seal. There is no more respected authority in the region."

Reluctantly she placed the document on his desk and, standing over it, signed where his rigid finger pointed. He whipped it away and produced a second copy. "Take this and keep it safe."

"I feel uneasy acting as the consortium's agent," she said.

"Just purchase the land and sign the deeds!"

She stared at him, stunned by his impatience. It was past time for her to go. She gathered up the documents.

"I will come to you as soon as I can," he said.

When she was settled in the wagon she pinched out an ounce of the pure, spongy gold from one of the saddle pouches and placed it in her painting box.

She was astounded by young John Sutter's business acumen. It was a pity he had not come to his father's rescue sooner. They boarded a wagon and he took her on a tour of the town. He was only twenty-one, yet swaggered about Sacramento like a titan. He had a light voice, heavily accented. His aesthetic countenance reminded her of art students she'd known in Philadelphia. She had no doubt about the shrewdness of this cultured European gentleman.

The muddy roads, so many more now than even three months ago, stretched fairly straight east to west and north to south in an orderly, if unimaginative grid. When they passed a shaded grove of large oaks, young John said, "That would make a good spot for a livery stable."

Roads closer to the wharf were clogged with wagons and merchants eager to do business. Young John showed her all the available lots. Sam Brannan

rode up to them on his horse, prancing and posturing. She said to young John, "Since Mr. Brannan and Bertrand's consortium want the same waterfront lots you have to sell, let's begin our negotiations now."

"Wouldn't you care to adjourn to my tent office?" Brannan asked.

"This wagon will serve just as well," she said.

She outbid Brannan and bought eight of the best waterfront lots. All of the property was expensive, considering the river the lots bordered would surely flood in a good rain. She spread out the deeds on her lap, filled in the descriptive information as young John supplied it, and signed each one.

"Outrageous prices!" Brannan said. "A year ago the whole waterfront wasn't worth one hundred dollars." He turned his horse around and rode off.

"Now, please show me the best lots you have in the town," she said to young Sutter. Later in the afternoon as they returned, she asked him to stop at the double lot under the oak trees. "How much for this?"

"Three hundred and fifty."

"That's an inflated price. I'll take it at two hundred and fifty," she said.

Young John paused. She could see him calculating the number of offers he was apt to have on the property. She was offering him a bird in the hand. He needed the gold. "Agreed. Why do you want it?"

"I'm partial to oak groves, and I agree it's a good place for a livery stable. If there's a horse dealer hereabouts, have him come to me. This town will need a thriving market for horses and mules."

*Sutter's Fort*

*December 3, 1848*

*My dearest Bertrand,*

*I realize I have never before written you a letter. This is a day for firsts. I have purchased the land as you requested. Ten waterfront lots at five hundred dollars each and ten in the heart of town, or what will be the town, at an average of two hundred and fifty dollars each. Our new acquaintance Lieutenant William (odd Indian name, which I cannot recall) Sherman, a man of multiple talents, is among the team surveying the city. Demand by speculators has made the land more valuable, but even by Brannan's standards I bargained well, and yes, I aced him out of at several prime waterfront lots. When I explained that these were consortium deeds, he backed down. He realizes your colleagues' purse is deeper than his and gave grudging respect. Now that the word is out, the riverfront is thronged with San Franciscans who rush up on day sloops. "Slim pickings left," as these country people say.*

*How strange it is to look out over these flat, bare fields and envision an entire town sprouting shack by tent, no doubt as ugly as San Francisco. I filled in the information on each of the deed forms you gave me. I have also taken it upon myself to contract with a number of merchants who want to lease from you to set up their groceries, hardware stores and*

*restaurants–a fancy term for the tent kitchens they have in mind. Brannan had a supply of merchant leasing forms and offered to supervise the drawing up of documents, but I refused. Instead, I asked young John Sutter to locate an attorney. We found one down a muddy lane, a savvy young man, who I also employed to collect rents and deliver them to me. I specified that merchants are to render cash only. We don't want to receive cartloads of sour melons from Chile or whatever else they plan to sell wharf side. The lawyer acted as notary and stamped his seal on the document and copy entitling me to be your Power of Attorney.*

*Although you did not instruct me to lease your properties, I believe you will be pleased with the results. Many supplicants applied. It was an opportunity to take advantage of. I was tough. I extracted rents, payable monthly, that are commensurate with the property costs. From the time you and I have spent in each other's company, I know what you want.*

*Young John and I have placed your property leases and the merchant rental leases in Cousin John's safe. We made a ceremony of it, sliding out the giant iron box, opening it, filling it and locking it. I looked for Luke and Edmund's strong boxes, but they were gone. I miss those dear, serious Mormons and am heartsick over the loss of their fortunes.*

*I will stay here and not return to the North Fork diggings. I've started a portrait of Quartermoon. I want to work uninterrupted now, and I rather fancy my cozy room. I'm sending Elk Horn back with this letter. I send you my kisses.*

*Philippa*

*Rich Flat*

*December 8, 1848*

*Dear Philippa,*

*Your plan for the overly large fireplace in the cabin has proved a good one. The two rooms stay warm, even to their corners. This idea of your of staying at the fort is nonsense. You are to return immediately before the big snows block the trails. Perhaps the comforts of living at a lower elevation are more enticing. I thought you to be a woman of hardihood. Please come back. I miss you.*

*You have done well to secure merchant rentals. By now Colonel Mason has delivered his report on the gold discovery to the U.S. Government. I expect President Polk himself may make a public declaration. He'll probably put Mason's tea caddy of gold on display in the Capitol. That will whet appetites. It is only a matter of months before hoards of farmers and office workers from every state of the union pour into the gold fields. Probably thousands will set out in the spring, as soon as the plains and mountains are passable. Now you understand the importance of reaping the benefits of being the first. I am yours cordially,*

*Bertrand LaMartine*

*Sutter's Fort*

*December 18, 1848*

*Dear Bertrand,*

*I miss you desperately, but no, I will not return. I work at a faster pace here, and I'm confident the men work better for you now that they can swear and spit, drink, shout and piss in the dirt without my restricting presence in the camp. It's better if you come to me.*

*Cousin John recently returned from Coloma, and we commiserated over a roasted beef and sweet potato dinner–tastier fare than at Rich Flat. He tried panning and using a cradle and was sorely disappointed not to find more gold. He realized it is a young man's quest, and that's made him melancholy. Other than Quartermoon, who survives the chaos of decay about the place, and brings me a bowl of soup at noon, I do not see anyone from dawn to dusk. She sits for me several hours a day. She wears her ceremonial white dress and beads. I am capturing a sadness in her dark eyes. I think this will make a splendid addition to my paintings of Native Californians.*

*My dear cousin respects his son, but I sense the strain between them. Even with his debts being paid, Cousin John remains sour. Young John says his father's debts exceed one hundred thousand dollars. I'm worried they will put New Helvetia on auction. The fort is Cousin's John's kingdom. Selling it would break his heart. His investment in Sutterville has gone bust. With all the activity now centered on Sacramento City, Sutterville has been bypassed. Cousin John missed the fact that, although only five miles south, Sutterville is off the trail to the mountains.*

*Young John told me a new bank is to open in Portsmouth Square next month. Henry Naglee and Richard Sinton are behind it. They are to call it the Exchange and Deposit Office. They will be fierce competitors for you, according to young John, who unlike his father seems continuously on edge, as if he expects to be interrupted by a clerk with an urgent message. Poor man, he has short vision and tends to hang his head over his work, whether it be reading, writing or forking pork from a plate.*

*I am glad the cabin keeps you warm. When you write me next, please do not sign it with a formalized business signature. I know who you are.*

*Philippa*

During her portrait sitting Quartermoon sagged in her chair. Tears coursed like silver drops down her cheeks.

"What's happened?" Philippa asked.

"Mister young John sent for his mother and sisters and brothers to come to California."

Philippa took her hand and looked at her with deep affection. "You are Cousin John's common-law wife."

Quartermoon nodded.

"It will be months before they arrive."

Quartermoon shrugged. Her happiness was finished.

Philippa embraced her, surprised by the firmness of her body. She was younger than Philippa had thought.

Cousin John let Philippa know that he was expecting a guest for dinner that evening. Philippa borrowed a doeskin dress belonging to Quartermoon's niece and brushed her hair one hundred times to bring up its sheen. John Sutter knocked on her door and escorted her up the outside staircase to the dining room.

"You will be surprised when you learn who our guest is."

Her heart leapt. "Is Bertrand here?"

"No. It's one of his partners, Roger Weatherall. He is on his way up to the North Fork Dry Diggings."

Philippa sank into the nearest chair, crestfallen with disappointment.

Quartermoon served a dinner of roast lamb, potatoes, beans with pine nuts and hot sesame bread. She had baked a corn pudding, its honeyed top crust drizzled with syrup. As she passed behind Philippa she placed a hand on her shoulder. Philippa covered it gently with her hand.

"What news of San Francisco?" Sutter asked Weatherall.

"Despite the mucky streets and sprouting tents, we are becoming civilized." Roger Weatherall was broad chested, with a florid complexion, probably due to his excess weight. He had the watery blue eyes of a farm boy who had grown up to secure his fortune in the city. Bushy side whiskers concealed the nuances of the expression around his mouth. "Colonel Stevenson's Volunteers are officially disbanded."

"I'm not surprised," Sutter said. "So many soldiers defected and bolted to the gold fields."

"A Presbyterian minister now preaches Sundays at the school house in Portsmouth Square. A post office opened on Clay street. There's talk about establishing a branch of the U.S. mint.

Big money in town is sending their gold back east, but LaMartine's fledgling bank gets a vigorous trade from the hot strikers who need to stash their pokes. His clerk's got a vegetable market set up in the foyer that's attracting customers."

"Bertrand's bank is not federally backed or affiliated with an eastern bank. How does he operate without a charter?" Sutter asked.

Weatherall laughed. "The way he does everything else–by the seat of his pants. He had cast-iron safes shipped down from Oregon and hires thugs with pistols to stand guard twenty-four hours. A new bank is opening in January, the Exchange and Deposit Office."

"Yes," she said, "I've heard." He might as well have said a "real" bank.

Weatherall whipped his lips with his napkin. "The newspaper is finally publishing again. I brought you a copy."

Philippa studied the newspaper he handed her. The two rival publishing companies had combined into the Star and Californian. The lead story on new gold strikes was illustrated by an engraving by John Prendergast.

"You were up at the dry diggings, Mrs. Sutter."

She nodded.

"Bertrand has sent me a report too successful to believe. Are they digging up that much?"

"Yes, I've seen thousands and thousands of dollars worth of amalgamated gold. When you see it glinting in the sun, it's actually painful on the eye. Bertrand is an able steward, precise in his accounting to the dollar. He is earning a grand wealth for the consortium."

"Well, I've come to see for myself. He wants me to sink more capital into the venture."

"He offers a justifiable risk," she said. She waited, puzzled by his hesitancy. "What troubles you?"

"Bertrand is over-extended. He's buying lots in Sacramento City. Apparently he plans to build a wharf."

Philippa was surprised. She did not know he had bought lots for himself in addition to the ones for the consortium. She wondered who had agented that deal, and when.

Sutter laughed. "Isn't that brilliant! He will collect astronomical taxes from every riverboat arriving and departing."

Weatherall's lips pursed as if he had smelled rotten meat. "I fear he is using his bank's reserves."

"You mean bank customers' gold?" Sutter said. "Of course he's using other people's money. How else would he do business?"

Philippa was stunned. A feeling of dread began to sweep over her. "His customers store their gold in the bank for safekeeping. Bertrand would be sure it was a mutually agreed-upon enterprise before he spent their money."

Weatherall sighed in impatience. "I took a survey among the depositors. They know nothing of the deal."

"LaMartine Bank is not a consortium holding," she said evenly. "Perhaps he has agreements with depositors you know nothing of."

"Thomas Walker has dropped out of the syndicate. I'm nearly tapped out. Where is Bertrand getting his cash flow?"

"From his independent rental properties," she said simply. "As you know he owns a good deal of real estate in San Francisco. I wouldn't be concerned about Bertrand's business acumen, Mr. Weatherall. He finds gold everywhere he looks. We are already collecting rents from the lots in Sacramento City. The consortium was wise to purchase them only weeks after Young John publicly announced he was selling Cousin John's land as lots. We took advantage of that matchless opportunity and got the best possible price. Tomorrow I will take you on a tour of the Embarcadero. You will be amazed at how many tent stores are getting ready to open. Within six months we predict three and four buildings to a lot."

Weatherall stared at her. "I know of no Sacramento property owned by the consortium."

Philippa's heart stopped beating. Instead it slid up to her throat, threatening to choke her.

Sutter bowed his head and crossed his arms across his chest.

She stood up from the table. "Cousin John, please open your safe. Mr. Weatherall and I will examine in detail the deeds Bertrand drew up."

Philippa and Weatherall waited while Sutter opened the safe. They stared at each other in the dim light of the hallway, each sensing an imminent revelation of betrayal. Sutter lit an oil lamp on a plank table hastily cleared and they spread out the documents.

Weatherall hooked on a pair of half spectacles. The thick paper rustled as he picked up the papers. He tilted his head back and read silently. His lips moved. In those thick lips, Philippa saw the farm boy lying on his mother's hooked rug by the kitchen fire, learning to read. He slapped down the first deed and reached for the second. "The man has the morals of a goat!"

She read through the first deed carefully. Lord, almighty. Bertrand had made down payments on thousands of dollars worth of land in his own name with syndicate money.

"I blame myself," she said. "I did not read the documents."

"It is of no consequence," Weatherall said. "He hasn't signed them."

"No, sir!" Sutter interjected. "Those are sold lots. You'll not get the money back. My son has already sent the money to Colonel Steward to pay what I owed him for Fort Ross."

"These deeds are perfectly legal," Philippa said. "I signed them as Bertrand's Power of Attorney. As you see they have been notarized by a Sacramento City lawyer.

"This is embezzlement!" Weatherall shouted.

"No, you're dramatizing it," Philippa said. "I'm sure he means to report the transactions to you and compensate the partners. He simply took advantage of a unique opportunity quickly and used whatever documents he had on hand."

Weatherall stamped around the small room, fuming. "By God, I won't be hornswoggled."

Sutter shook his head, unimpressed with the uproar, and returned the papers to his safe. Weatherall sank into his dining room chair. Philippa poured brandy in a glass and set it before him. She sat across from him. "Don't lose faith in Bertrand LaMartine, Mr. Weatherall. He may not conduct business in the way you are accustomed, but he finds gold like a diviner. You and your partners will amass a fortune." She felt her voice honeying. "When you go up to Rich Flat you can confront him. Thousands of dollars worth of pure gold is there, amalgamated and weighed, ready to be melted into bullion. You can cut your ties with him and walk away with the syndicate's share. Or you can reprimand Bertrand and give him another chance." She turned slightly in her chair so the candlelight fell on her shining hair. She wet her kips. "I assure you, you will not find a more conscientious foreman in any mining camp. Who else could keep a crew working in this weather? He brooks no fights, no thefts. He exacts prodigious work from the men because he pays well and they respect him."

Roger Weatherall sighed and drank his brandy. She poured him a second glass. She leaned back in her chair across from him and felt like a whore.

Philippa arranged her boor-bristled brushes on the table by width, thinnest to widest, like a surgeon. She set out vials of binders, rags, a dish of egg yoke. She arranged pigments on her palette. She did not mix them. When she'd started her portrait she'd positioned Quartermoon by the open door, seated, looking out at dawn. The pose was derivatively Dutch. Vermeer knew how to capture light and put it to work for him, so she might as well profit from his discovery.

The charcoal underdrawing on a finely woven, stretched primed canvas was completed. Now she would paint.

She worked for hours, by fading daylight, by the light of three oil lamps, candlelight, firelight, to finish Quartermoon's portrait. She was possessed by a desire to bring a breathing person to life on canvas. There would be no layers, no opportunities to correct mistakes, only fresh, rich application of colors side by side, in harmony, dissonance or outright conflict. She worked from right to left as left-handers must, beginning with the upper field. She framed Quartermoon against a background of grass, the color green she imagined the fort courtyard to be in early spring. She applied narrow strokes of green, and then dots of yellow, blue. At a slight distance the colors swarmed together in

the eye as chartreuse. In the background she painted a figure, head bent, but body erect, moving across the fields, out the open doors of the fort. High in the sky she painted a quarter moon.

Up close, the eyes, with their whites and blacks and silver glints portrayed the luster of tears formed, but not shed. As Phillipa walked around the portrait Quartermoon's deep eyes followed her. The figure in the background was Quartermoon leaving the fort as she must, abandoned by her lover, yet she would survive.

Philippa rocked in her chair before the hearth in her room. The old wood joints squeaked. She heard a rapid knock on the door. "Go away, Quartermoon. I am in need of nothing," she said, pulling her red wool rebozo around her shoulders. She was putting another log on the fire when the latch clicked and the door creaked open. Dried leaves blew into the room as Bertrand stood in the dimly-lit doorway.

"So, you are in need of nothing," he said in his deep voice, smiling. "Shall I go?"

She looked into his face. He was cleanly shaven, his long hair, blown by the wind, crested around his face. His penetrating gaze roamed over her body and lingered on her eyes. Both desire and anger at his dishonesty shot through her. "Why are you here?"

"It's Christmas Eve," he said in his low voice.

"Instead of the Christ child, it is you. Who will protect me?" she whispered.

"Don't expect me to."

Their love-making blazed with sharp desire and anger intricately tangled, leaving her exhausted. He stroked her hair and looked up at the candle. When she stared into his lustrous black eyes she saw a reflection of the glazed panes of the window shimmering in candlelight. Distrust of him flowed back into her veins. He was a cheat. She was frightened by the grip he exerted on her mind and body, knowing that nothing could protect her from the inexorable heartache that awaited her.

Philippa sat in a chair across from him in front of the fire, wrapped in her rebozo. She leaned forward and back, causing the chair to creak.

"What's gnawing at you?" he asked.

"Weatherall was here asking questions. You cheated the consortium out of thousands of dollars to buy Sacramento property for yourself. You've broken trust again and, worse, used me as your dupe."

He sat in the rocker staring at the flames in the fireplace. "It was the only gold readily available."

She had not anticipated such a simple answer. "You took advantage of my good will, not telling me of the deception."

"This is true. I chose an expedient way to do business that could not wait."

"I think we should talk about it," she said.

"We just did."

"Bertrand, what you did is dishonest."

"Weatherall came up to the camp right after he left here and cleaned me out of gold to take his fair share." Bertrand shrugged. "Sacramento waterfront property will be far more valuable than the gold."

"You know what you did was wrong," she said.

He frowned. "These dealings shoot back and forth with the velocity of cannonball shot. Weatherall is a lily. He hasn't the stomach or the imagination for the game."

"Is he going to give you another chance?"

"I sent him packing," he said.

"What?"

"He's out of the consortium."

She was too surprised to respond. She had thoroughly anticipated that Weatherall would dismiss Bertrand. Who was in charge here?

He stood up and stoked the fire with an iron poker. "Weatherall's a meddler, talking to my bank depositors behind my back, spreading vicious rumor and innuendo."

"Well, did you use your clients's deposits to buy property?"

"No! Do you take me for a fool?" He probed at the fire, sending sparks up the narrow chimney. "I've sent my accountant to San Francisco to pay off the rest of the consortium members. We're officially disbanded, so ease your mind about it."

"Where is that money coming from?"

"I will borrow from the new Exchange and Deposit Office," he said.

"But that's your competition!" Her head was spinning.

He laughed. "My collateral is matchless. They will revel in collecting interest payments from me." He reached for her hand.

She pulled away. "The way you go about your affairs upsets me. I think of the way my father conducts his business."

"Yes?"

"He is scrupulous, trustworthy. Everyone says that of him."

"What would he think of me?" Bertrand asked.

She stood up from her chair and walked a few steps. "I can see him now, behind his big desk. When told of your dealings, he would go to the window, look down on the vastness of his shipping yard. He would raise his eyebrows and close his eyes."

"As if he smelled something rotting."

"Yes."

Bertrand was silent. "Now, tell me, what would your father say if you explained the intricacies of my business dealings in the context of the new California, where thousands of dollars changes hands hourly."

She looked at him. "I don't believe I could do that," she said.

"Why not?"

"I don't understand it."

"Exactly," he said. "I'm shrewd. I know what I'm doing. My tactics are my own, but I make good on every deal. We are surrounded by extraordinary opportunities never before seen. We are ploughing new ground and this calls for new laws. It is men like me who will make the new laws. Are you willing to accept that?"

She shook her head. "My father wouldn't do business with you."

"Compared to him, you think I'm an unprincipled scoundrel."

She faced him. "You're a swindler."

He gazed at the pine-slatted ceiling. "But Philippa, are a ruthless swindler. You extort people's emotions.

"What?"

"Tell me, did the Tahitian and Samoan on the Broadway wharf give you permission to paint their greed?" He stood and walked around the room, stopping at Quartermoon's portrait to study it. "Sutter is fortunate to have so fine a common law wife. But once his family arrives, he'll send his mistress away." He turned to her in anger. "Did Quartermoon ask you to portray her sadness? Has she even seen this?"

Philippa pulled her rebozo closer around her shoulders. "You taught me to go beyond the surface of my subjects and paint the truth of their suffering."

"But once you put a portrait on display, you expose your subject's weakness. Even worse, after exploiting tender emotion, you will sell that painting and profit from it."

She looked away. After a long silence, he said. "We are both embezzlers. Let's not base our trust in one another in how we do business. Let us trust in our hearts."

"I don't know what is in your heart."

"I love you, Philippa and I want you to stay with me."

She shrank from his embrace. "I'm no fool. I'm a well-born Easterner, who will be an asset to you when you become a rich politician. How am I to know if you speak from your ambitions or your heart?"

"Whether I am California's Governor or the town tinker I want you with me."

She was filled with misgivings.

"Learn to allow." His voice was low. "Let loose of the bonds that restrict you. Reality isn't black or white. We live in shadowed light."

"That's not good enough," she said, knowing it would have to be. She took a deep breath. She was an artist, focused on color and perspective. She was changing laws too. She could try to see his business affairs from his point of view. What about her own morality? She was his mistress. She had abandoned Martin in a rain-sodden ravine.

She looked at Bertrand and saw a man she wanted with a passion that astounded her. They made love, unhurried, touching each other's body with tenderness. The intensity of her desire for him, her need to paint and the knowledge of the continuous supply of gold under Bertrand's feet created shockwaves building like ocean swells, lifting her higher and higher. "I love you beyond my own words," she said.

"Then you will have to paint it," he answered.

They caressed with lips, finger tips, voice. She was amazed by the depths of sexuality he revealed to her and the heights to which she soared. She learned to pleasure him as he pleasured her. The more she gave of herself, the more he responded, evoking even greater expression from her. The last of their dissonance resolved itself.

"Let's go outside." He wrapped his buffalo robe around her, and they walked slowly across the winter-browned grass under the moonlight. He stooped to pet the Great Dane watch dogs before they reared up in alarm. "Tomorrow I leave for San Francisco," he said in his rumbling voice. "A

legislative assembly of the district of San Francisco is forming to elect members. I'm determined to be among their numbers."

"How will you gain support?" she asked.

"I'll go around town talking to people, see how the bank is progressing, drop in on the Presbyterian minister, visit the Custom House. I know how it is done."

She could feel his political mind churning like an idle machine gearing up. "I don't want you spending time at the El Dorado or Parker House."

He laughed. "I have no taste for gambling or the ladies now. Besides I'd have to wait my turn with all the business they have these days. Thomas Larkin estimates there were six thousand miners on the Sierra rivers this past year. They came from farms, towns, and Indian camps in upper California, lower California, Sonora in Mexico, Oregon, not to mention those arriving by ship. I predict that as soon as the word spreads in the East, forty or fifty thousand gold seekers will arrive by sea and pour in from the plains over the Sierras. Grass-clogged trails will be hardened ruts cut by wagon wheels by summer. We've had the best of it. "

"I'll come with you tomorrow," she said. "Ugly as it all it, I've missed the energy."

"Good!" He tightened his grip around her waist.

Her teeth started t o chatter from the cold. "How can you tolerate the frigid temperatures up at Dry Diggings?" she asked him.

He massaged her back and shoulders to give her warmth. "I am used to it from my years along the Canadian rivers. Of course we had many fox furs to wrap around us."

"How have you been able to dig for gold in the snow?"

"I designed a snowshed and the men built it." She felt his energy rising like sap, and her desire for him with it. "I woke up early one November morning and the ravine was blanketed with snow. After the second snowfall Joe Woods and Tuck Warner pulled out. I bought their shares. I abandoned the outer claims and put the crew on the main site, but it was no good. It took two thirds of them to shovel the snow off so one-third could dig. An wasteful misuse of manpower and time. There are plenty of stout pines between the rivers," he said. "I sent several of the men down to the Coloma sawmill for tree-felling equipment such as large saws and ropes. I had two carpenters come back with them at an astronomical wage, but it was worth it. For six days all hands worked to pull down trees and saw lumber. We lit bonfires and worked through the night in shifts." He laughed. "With the constant hammering and sawing no one could sleep anyway. We built an enormous snowshed over the primary dig with timbered sides and roofing ten feet high at the peak. The

snow just slides off. It's open-ended and roped to rolling logs so we can hitch up two oxen teams and move it along to the next area as we finished digging. We light fires to unfreeze the ground. We fill barrels with snowmelt to wash the gold."

She could feel the heat of his hand around her waist. He spoke in a feverish excitement, reliving it. "Think of it, Philippa! For two weeks we collected an average of two thousand dollars a day in gold. The men put in longer hours under the shed because they were warm. The light was eerie. Fires in flour barrels the length of it lit up their faces."

"I should liked to have painted them in that light," Philippa said.

"I thought of it." He sounded profoundly sad. He stopped walking and embraced her. They kissed again and again until only their kisses existed. "It's no damn good unless you're with me," he said. She heard the anger in his voice, as if he were being crossed.

He whistled and the dogs barked, came running on their long spindly legs, their tongues slobbering on his outstretched hand.

"The cabin is warm at Dry Diggings. I'll keep the men away from you. I'm going back in mid-January. Please come with me."

She shook her head. "I can't paint there. I dearly want to be with you, but I can't have both now. Do you understand?"

His mouth grew tense, his tone bitter. "I detest being separated from you. I hope your painting is worth it."

"At least I have a worthy objective. In May Thomas Larkin has a respected art dealer, called Ludlow Pierson, coming from New York to evaluate his Far Eastern imports of furniture and porcelain. Larkin says Pierson will be willing to look at my paintings along with those of John Prendergast and other artists who are working in San Francisco. Pierson is bringing an art critic with him."

"A painting expert?" Bertrand asked, surprised.

"Yes, Henri Seigner from France." She was aware of his stunned silence. She held tightly to his hand. "Before they come John Prendergast and I want to put on an exhibition in our gallery of the work of all the artists in town. I will show a dozen of my paintings in my new technique."

Bertrand recoiled, as if struck. "Is that wise? I think you should wait until your work has been evaluated."

She cocked her head. "Don't worry. I'm working on the middle ground we spoke of. I am modifying my style to produce landscapes that will sell."

"What about the portraits?"

She would not compromise on the portraits. She still had things to learn. She looked closely at his expression. "You are worried. Don't be. You must

believe in me. It's important to exhibit my paintings. Then when the experts arrive, we'll know whether or not you made a worthwhile investment in my art."

A few days after they returned to San Francisco Philippa sat on the edge of the bed in their suite and read a letter that had been delivered to her. "Cousin John has gone up to his farm on the Feather River. He wants me to visit him."

"When?" Bertrand tied his silk cravat and put on his frock coat.

"Right away. He says he's supervising the building of a house for his wife and children."

"I need you here, Philippa. I'm going to campaign to get appointed to the legislative assembly and I rely on you to help me."

"I do so want to go to Hock Farm," she said. "I want to paint those mountains he calls Sutter's Buttes. There are three of them. I want to do them in a series with sunlight on them at different times of day. And this time of year with the snow glimmering, it will be a wonderful challenge."

"Wait a few weeks, then go. We have politics to work on now."

She tensed her shoulders. "You're pushing me."

"Damn right. This is my time. Yours comes later when you have your exhibition." She stared into middle space. "I wonder if Cousin John will let me borrow back the paintings I gave him so I can exhibit them.

"Which ones?"

The ones you admired when we first met. "Morning on the American River and "Shadowed Light."

"Those are too experimental to show. Focus on producing your new work. How many of those tea dresses do you have?" He asked.

"One."

"Have your French dressmaker make up two more with matching hats. And see if you find a pair of shoes that are more feminine than your sabots. Have Mademoiselle send me the bill."

"I can buy my own clothes. I have enough gold to support myself."

Philippa left her studio every afternoon to dress in an elegant silk gown and matching hat and sat in the muslin parlor with neglected needlework in her lap, receiving Bertrand's many friends and colleagues. She felt as she were still in Philadelphia. So accustomed had she become to wearing wide woolen skirts

and wooden shoes, she had to practice walking around their room in a narrow gowns and pair of delicate, heeled boots. Chaffing against the hours spent away from painting, she forced her concentration on the parade of politically motivated, self-serving businessmen and pompous officers from the Presidio.

Some of the visitors fascinated her and gave her hope that a new wave of brilliant men was converging on San Francisco. Jasper O'Farrell, a handsome Irish civil engineer, was surveying San Francisco and laying out a grid of streets. He introduced her to a Swiss ship captain and surveyor Jean-Jacques Vioget, who had laid out Cousin John's New Helvetia. She was surprised to learn that Vioget was also an artist. They quickly fell into conversation on perspective and color. Then she took him aside to bring him up to date on the decay of Sutter's Fort. He was devastated to hear the fort was in shambles. The weavers and bakers, even Will Harker, the blacksmith, had deserted. Only the Natoma were left to tend the vegetable gardens, which barely fed them. Vioget's large eyes glistened with tears.

Sam Brannan oozed back in town, looking more florid than ever. He tried to wheedle Bertrand into investing in his latest caper, carpet tacks, hundreds of which he claimed, every miner and purveyor will need to assemble their canvas shacks. From her chair in the parlor she watched Bertrand as he led Brannan to a grouping of club chairs imported from Boston. As soon as the carpet tack shyster eased himself in the deep leather and warmed to his subject, Bertrand stood and leaned against the fireplace mantel so that Brannan had to look up to Bertrand to plead his case.

After three weeks when Bertrand had buttonholed everyone of importance and seen to his business affairs, he returned to Rich Flat, promising to come back to her in March when the assembly election would be held.

In late January Philippa packed up her painting gear and took a steamship up the Feather River to visit Hock Farm. She was soon happily ensconced in a cell-like bedroom at the back of the original adobe house. At Cousin John's suggestion, and with the help of his Indian ranch hands, they converted a lean-to adjacent to the cow barn into a studio. On the first mild morning she set her easel outside in the snow and moved it this way and that. As she turned to the northwest, clouds parted, and the sun shone its rays onto the splendid range of three buttes.

She worked slowly, taking time to think through theory. She completed charcoal sketches and began oil sketches of the three promontories rising above the valley. The various shadings of color of volcanic rock stimulated her imagination. She went back at noon and again at dusk to paint the buttes in different light. For the first time, she worked to make her paintings desirable to a buying public, if indeed there were any art buyers in San Francisco. She applied fewer layers of paint, used thinner brushstrokes, and made sure the images were recognizable as mountains. Two weeks later she returned to San

Francisco with her series of the buttes shown at different times of day, three finished, wood-framed paintings.

Patrick O' Reilly stood when Philippa entered the muslin parlor. "Good morning, Madame. And where might we be off to today?"

"To the post office."

"But I thought that you and Monsieur La Martine had your mail delivered."

"We do," she said, adjusting her wide-brimmed hat. "I want to paint the miners as they get their mail."

"The line extends to the plaza. We could just as well go there."

"No, I want to set up right at the post office and find as a subject a lonely man who's been away for months, opening his first letter from home."

Patrick carried her easel and their camp chairs as they made their way across the plaza. Hundreds of miners stood in line for the post office, blocks away. At the corner of Clay and Pike Streets Philippa found an open section of yard and set up her easel. Half a dozen lines had formed in front of the small building. The porch of Garret House next door was jammed with men shouting their names to busy clerks, who sorted through thousands of envelopes from what they called the Atlantic States.

She did several charcoal sketches, and after a time a man skipped out of the post office holding two envelopes high above the crowd. Philippa offered her camp chair. He sat on it, examined the post marked dates and opened the first letter. She watched him as he ran his finger along the script, a smile forming on his dry lips. He folded the letter and stared up at her. "My child was born. A son! They named him Adam, after me."

"Congratulations to you, sir," she said. "Would you allow me to paint you in your happiness?"

He nodded, still in a fog. She began an oil sketch, focusing on his figure, hunched over the letter rereading it, his long legs stretched out. She worked quickly, knowing he would soon be off to celebrate. He remembered the other letter, and carefully stuffing the first back into its envelope and then into a pocket in his plaid shirt, he opened the second. She selected a fine-bristled brush and began to paint in his features. The blonde hair flopping over his brow, the ruddy complexion, the wide smile.

Suddenly he slumped over, arms dangling. The letter fell to the dirt. "Good God, no! Baby Adam is dead of the cholera."

Philippa sank to her knees and picked up the second letter, reading the first paragraph swiftly, "I'm sorry," she whispered.

The miner's shoulders shook in silent sobs. Suddenly he stood up, swearing at the top of his voice, and kicked the camp stool across the yard. He wiped his tears with the back of his hand and disappeared into the crowd. Philippa stood still a long while, her heart sinking as she saw the finished picture in her mind. Then she turned to her oil painting and sketched a few strokes. "Let's go, Patrick, I'll complete this in my studio."

*San Francisco*

*March 15, 1849*

*Dear Mother,*

*How wonderful to read your letter and hear your voice in my ear. I am so relieved to learn that both you and father are in good health. The reports of cholera in the Eastern states are dire.*

*I am well. Men by the thousands are arriving in San Francisco to profit from our gold mania, and the city is sprouting more amenities to accommodate them. Shacks and tents teem together in the flats and cling precariously to hillsides. At the rate wealth is being accumulated, however, luxury will soon abound. I hear that whole Boston houses are being brought around Cape Horn to be reassembled on lots.*

*We have a variety of eating houses now, including Celestial Jon-Ling's Chinese restaurant on Jackson Street. With the steady influx of Chinese immigrants, their cuisine has improved. We no longer see dogs on the menu, although I imagine the delicacy can be had for a price. I discovered the most delicious French bread at Isadore Boudin's store. It is made from what he calls sour dough. Do you have this at home?"*

*Bertrand estimates five thousand people live here or are passing through to the Sierras. Chinese coolies in their basket hats slog through the muddy streets carrying parcels on their backs like ants, intent on their mission. Ships from Chile, Peru, China and the Sandwich Islands put into port. Dozens of them tie up to the docks and anchor further out, congesting the harbor. They do not leave. Their crews, even their officers, desert. They mill around the city, outfitting themselves for mining, then take the river steamers to the gold fields.*

*Bertrand holds controlling interest in the main wharf and is able to charge sizable taxes for its users. I believe there are five vessels tied up there now, each with another ship connected by planks to these on their port or starboard sides. Bertrand estimates there are two hundred deserted ships in the harbor, a forest of masts.*

*No, I have not changed my mind. I will not come home. My future is here with Bertrand. He is a banker, landholder, chief mining engineer for a partnership of financial backers. He is immensely talented in accumulating money and managing it to earn more for him.*

*Mother, take heart. Do not reprove yourself for what you may think you failed to teach me. The moral code you and father passed on to me belonged to another woman who died in*

*Panama with her young husband. When the person most precious to me was lost, I realized the value of what he taught me: to live fully and take risks.*

*My moral resolve has become to develop my talent to its fullest capacity. As I wrote to you earlier, I am inventing a new technique I call depiction: the canvases are awash with pure colors, brighter than what I've previously used. The lines are blurred–think of how a rock looks underwater. My brush strokes are broad. I use a palette knife to paste the oil paint on as one would smear jam on morning toast. In portraits the subjects stare out at the viewer, challenging him. In landscapes, figures move in and out of the frame, often only the backs of them are seen. There is a sense of urgency and haste-- not in the way I paint, because I take great care–but in the position and movement of the people depicted. I am capturing the spirit of this alien land through which thousands pass, each eager to grasp his own elixir.*

*When I first began working in this style it was too experimental and the finished works were not pleasing. So I have modified it. I' m now completing twelve canvases I will show in an exhibition with fellow artists, and hopefully sell. I've steeled myself for a mixed reaction. Some people are still offended by my break with traditional art. Eventually I will succeed with my new technique and the art world will take notice.*

*How proud I am of Bertrand! He was just elected a member of the Legislative Assembly, San Francisco District. There was a fine ceremony in the plaza, right in front of his hotel. General Riley is backing him as a delegate to a constitutional convention in Monterey in September. At the convention they intend to establish an area of Upper California and organize its government. Bertrand says all this is precursor to establishing sufficient law and order in California to warrant statehood.*

*Dearest Mother, I come to the bottom of these pages and have filled the margins. Please explain to father what he will not understand. Don't allow my life in this raw city to distress you. I am happy enough. I tell you about the woman I am becoming because you know so well the girl I once was. I love you as much as my life. Don't forsake me. Don't disappoint me as I have disappointed you.*

*Your loving daughter, Philippa*

The next afternoon she set both early and recent paintings on easels close to the windows of the gallery, opened the main door and sat on a chair pushed back, where she could not be seen. Now she would learn what the general public thought of her work. During the first hour a sea captain strolling down Clay Street with his brass-buttoned chest puffed out, no doubt on his way to the wharf, glanced in, stopped, shook his head and moved on.

Four Chinese people, dressed in blue coats and pants, and carrying buckets of fish hung by handles over the ends of poles across their shoulders, hurried by without looking up. She pondered whether they were male or female, adults or boys and girls, so diminutive were they, hunched beneath their wide straw hats. She speculated that beneath their simple garments, the limbs of the Chinese laborers would be deceptively muscular. Although less than a thousand now inhabited the city, more poured in each month, settling in their own

neighborhood a few blocks north, constructing muslin shacks, tents, temples and shops.

She shifted in her chair and studied Portsmouth Square, an uncommonly ugly patch of city common, despite the generous drenching of spring sunshine. Pitched at a sloping angle on the hill of dirt and weedy grass were improvised tent booths where hawkers sold vegetables, fish and fresh cuts of beef from the malodorous slaughterhouse up the road. The square could do with a stand of pine trees or live oaks, or at least a garden to brighten up the wasteland of raucous commerce. In front of the Custom House, the covered platform for entertainment and speakers was vacant. When the shopkeepers and laborers took their nooning, some fool would climb up and plead his cause. Next to the stage stood a pole with an American flag, hanging listlessly, signifying California as United States territory, hard-won from Mexico. She wondered how long it would be before a state flag would be run up.

To the left, on Kearny Street, stood Bertrand's competitor, the two-story Exchange and Deposit Office. Neighboring it were the gambling saloons Parker House and El Dorado. Across the plaza on the corner of Clay Street, the City Hotel spread its wide porches, a popular gathering spot.

A group of men, recently off a ship from the look of their crumpled clothes and stiff gait, turned the corner on Washington Street and walking by, looked in her window. "Lord, almighty, lookie here," one said. He leaned closer to the glass. "If this ain't a fanciful city!"

Curious, three others in the group approached the gallery. Philippa watched their faces as they squinted to get a better look. One man stepped back, tilted his hat to the back of his head, and looked again. The others followed him. All three moved forward. "Can't make out what the picture is up close," the leader said, "but from back aways it appears to be a river with a mountain hanging' over it."

"Jes' a mess of sticky color to me," one of his companions said in a southern drawl.

"No," the leader said. "I kinda like the way it changes. When I git rich I'm gonna buy me one like that." They sauntered on towards the El Dorado, giddy with laughter and anticipation.

A few minutes later she watched three gentlemen in frock coats cross the square, dodging several cows on the run that must have escaped from the slaughterhouse. As they walked toward LaMartine House next door, one glanced into her gallery. He signaled to his fellows and the three of them grouped together, first in front of one window, then walked slowly along past the open door to stand in front of the second window. The tallest man, with ginger side whiskers, took off his hat and peered closer. He place his hand over his forehead to shade his eyes from the glare. He stared directly at Morning on the American River. "Why, that's extraordinary," he said to his mates. She

recognized him now as Henry Naglee from the Exchange bank. "Look how superb the workmanship is. I must have it!"

Philippa stood up, her heart beating.

The second man pressed closer to the glass. "By jove. Astonishing."

"This is the finest example of French windows I've seen in the city," Naglee said. He pressed his hand along the glass panes. "I must ask LaMartine where he had them shipped from." They moved on toward the hotel entrance. Philippa sank back into her chair.

The afternoon wore on. Several men glanced into her windows without curiosity and moved along the porch to enter the hotel. At four o'clock a tall, slender man walked in through the open door of her studio. He was dressed in cravat and black woolen frock coat. His boots were of the highest quality and shone with polish, save for one or two unavoidable splashes of mud. He walked up to her trio of paintings, Sutter's Buttes, and looked with rapt attention at each one. She saw him take in a breath of surprise when he turned to Morning on the American River. As she stepped forward, he removed his hat and bowed. "Mrs. Sutter?"

A smile careened across her face.

"Allow me to introduce myself. My name is William McIlvaine from Philadelphia. I've had the privilege of seeing your paintings at the academy at a showing of your work last year."

The sound of his voice, his East Coast accent and formality of manner triggered a gust of memories that rushed at her like headwinds. "Please join me for tea," she said, recovering herself. "Do look around. I'll just be a moment." She hurried to the kitchen and called for a tray of scones and fresh pot of tea. Smells of fresh fish and sizzling onion and garlic tantalized her appetite. The Chinese cook yelled over the sounds of vegetable chopping and dish clattering to his workers chattering to each other in their cacophonous, incomprehensible language of high-pitched tones.

When she reentered her showroom, she forced herself to walk slowly across the floor. McIlvaine stood at the side table examining her portfolio of watercolors and sketches. She judged him to be about thirty-five. "Forgive me for my presumption," he said. "These caught my eye." He turned and gazed at her with nothing short of rapture. His hazel eyes probed hers. "Mrs. Sutter, surely you are the best of us."

"Are you an artist then?" she asked.

"I am an alumnus of the Academy of Fine Arts. I graduated in 1835. I toured Europe for a time, studying and painting."

"Have you brought any paintings with you?" Philippa asked. "I should be honored to see them."

"I leave tomorrow for the gold fields," he said. "When I return I will have a number of watercolors to show you."

"Ah, here is our tea. Let's sit over here and reminisce about our school days."

She led him to her dining table near the window. As they spoke of professors they'd shared and the quadrangle they'd both hurried across in the snow, she was transported in time and distance. Like her, he had noticed and remembered the particular light through the high windows in the student studio on long summer evenings. They had both dined at the Italian restaurant two blocks from the academy's chapel, although they couldn't agree on its name. She and Martin had dined there. A forceful wave of heat suddenly overtook her, beginning in her stomach and washing up through her chest. She recognized the all too familiar, almost sexual, feeling of bereavement. The tea cup she held rattled in its saucer. She set it down and steadied her breathing.

He went to the first easel. "May I study your oils?" He peered at them with his hands clasped behind his back, the way she imagined he had studied the great paintings of the Louvre and Ufitzi. He stepped back, then forward again. She listened to riotous calls from Portsmouth Plaza. The work day had ended. Men crossed the square and stood about it groups. An evangelist ascended to the public platform to warn his audience of the evils of greed and easy gold. Too late for prophets, she thought to herself.

"Tell me what you see," she said to McIlvaine.

He turned to her, trying to conceal his consternation. His aristocratic features were slightly twisted with a deep furrow in his brow, pursed lips. "You are trying something new," he said.

She laughed. It started as a chuckle and nearly got away from her.

He swallowed. Bolstered by her good will, continued. "The landscapes have the appearance of having been painted in haste. Frankly I find the colors jarring and your brush work hectic. I know you to be a superior artist, classically trained and, after our education, incapable of sloppy work. So I must conclude that you are deconstructing painting as we know it and attempting to reassemble images and light in a new way."

She smiled. "Yes."

He stepped over to the portrait of Quartermoon. His mouth opened with surprise. He took in air. His shoulders tensed. He walked in front of the picture, side to side. "I think you are trying to make too many changes at once." He walked over to the Buttes paintings and studied them. "I don't think you've got it yet," he said.

"What do you recommend?"

"Take this one," he said. "Although you have set the mountain in the middle distance, the monochromatic gray tones of its cliffs make me feel they are looming over me. I feel threatened." He gazed at her, trying to soften his critique with a pleasant expression. "When I purchase an oil painting and hang it in my study, I don't want to feel disturbed each time I look at it."

She felt overwhelmed by disappointment. She'd made difficult compromises with brushstrokes and color on the Butte paintings to attract buyers, and here was an artist still offended by them.

He leaned closer to one of the canvasses. "Your proportions are unbalanced."

"Yes, indeed unbalanced," she said. "When you've lived here for a time you realize that the world as we know it has shifted on its axis and been knocked off its center of gravity. I am representing new experience. The search for gold brings pain and loss, disappointment, heartache as well as a triumph. Think of the excitement frenzied miners feel when they seize from a gravel bar in only two hours the equivalent of six months wages."

His frown grew deeper. "The trend now is to romanticize scenes. The idealistic, even the poetic feel to landscapes is found pleasing to art collectors. You are working against the grain."

He was tactful. After all, she'd been away from the Eastern Seaboard, the core of civilization for a year.

"You refer to the work of artists in the Hudson River Valley School?" she asked.

He looked relieved to know she wasn't entirely out of touch.

Philippa shivered. "As craftsmen, they render scenes accurately, but I cannot abide their sentimentality. Mawkishness is precisely what I'm rebelling against."

McIlvaine drew a breath and moved to her portrait of Quartermoon. "I don't have to tell you that in classical portraits the subject is posed in a noble stance and the features rendered exactly. Your portrait of this Indian person, for example, would be more palatable if you softened the glare she trains on the viewer. She appears to be enraged."

"She's in a fury. Her lover has abandoned her. Her Natoma tribal lands are being stolen by greedy miners."

McIlvaine said, "Then I find this particular individual more worthy of a daguerreotype. Oil paintings are for the ages."

"Exactly," Philippa said.

"I suggest you abandon this effort. It's not worthy of your prodigious talents. I fear if you show this work in the East you will raise old nick with the art establishment. Surely you do not want to forfeit your success."

She experienced an odd sensation of slipping down, as if all her training was for nought.

"On the other hand," McIlvaine said quickly, "your watercolors and sketches will sell instantly. If you were to produce a series of oils in the traditional style, I would carry them back to Philadelphia and mount an exhibition."

She did not, even for an instant, consider the easy way out. "No. I cannot go backward." He focused his hazel eyes on hers. "You possess extraordinary courage."

"Several artist friends and I are holding an exhibit here July 3rd," she said. Would you like to join us? We are showing a dozen paintings each."

"Yes, thank you for the opportunity. I fear, though, that yours will be ridiculed. Are you prepared for criticism?"

"Yes, I welcome it." McIlvaine was an intelligent, trained artist with European experience, yet he had no understanding–not a glimmer--of her vision.

Whether she was ahead of her time, or had made a gross miscalculation, it didn't matter. She wanted art scholars to judge her, not in the context of traditional art, but from the unique position in which she created, poised at the far edge of the new world, a place where suddenly all eyes were focused on gold because it was free for the taking.

"I must be off," he said briskly. At the door he turned back. "I will tell every artist I meet in the gold camps that Philippa Stuart Sutter is giving birth to a new technique in art."

The next morning wind whipped Philippa's skirt around her ankles, pressing the wool merino to her knees as she walked to the end of Montgomery Street and up Loma Alta. She carried her portable easel and paint set. Only a few shacks were built this far from the square. She passed by them, listening to the gusts rattle their tin roofs. A dog barked. Tinkling piano music from two gambling tents, and shouts of men carried a distance on the wind, then were blown aside. She could hear the throaty horns of ships and falsetto toots of ferries. Black plums of smoke rose from the slim stacks of a steamer making its way across the bay to the mouth of the Sacramento River.

She passed General Montgomery's fortification along the east side of the hill. Wild grasses had grown up around the heavy guns. Some of the hardware was rusting after only three years. In the bay far below, the wind skimmed

whitecaps off the tips of waves. Hundreds of ships pitched precariously at anchor, their tipping masts describing delicate charcoal strokes against the sky. The wind diminished, content to stir the grasses but not knock over her easel. Bertrand said that this was where they would build the telegraph station if the modern world ever progressed across the plains. She stood in the midst of a historical event of monumental impact. Ordinary men from every corner of the world were on their way, by ox cart, on foot, by mule-back, by steamer, sail boat, and lumbering freighter to seize gold for themselves. Such bold aspirations and exhilaration, such physical and mental suffering required bold representation. She needed to refine her technique even more, making the scenes more pleasing, yet in a way that would not compromise her vision. As an experienced tracker of fox and beaver in the Canadian forests, Bertrand would say she must be the hunter who goes back over her course to see where she missed the scent.

She looked down the hill. After last night's rain, the mud was appalling. On Kearny Street she saw two mules stuck up to their knees, braying and snorting. Trapped! A feeling of compassion for them swept over her. She heard Bertrand's voice: "There's a scene for you, Philippa. Paint it with palette knife and mix actual mud into your pigment." She laughed and began to sketch the bay with its ships idling. She drew the hillsides with their temporary tents and Portsmouth Square as the throbbing heart of the city.

She spent a restless afternoon at her easel in her studio, struggling over her scene of the bay. On a separate canvas she practiced different brushstrokes. That evening when she came into their suite, she saw Bertrand in bed reading. "Why do you read The Prince over and over," she asked.

"It's my credo."

"More so than the Bible?" she asked.

He looked at her out of the side of his eye to see if she was serious. An ironic smile played around his mouth.

"I'm working on a scene of the bay," she said. "I'm altering my technique."

"Good," Bertrand said. "At least the subject of the painting should be recognizable."

They stared at each other. She saw him steal a glance at his book. Its pages fell open to where he'd marked it. He was thinking of other things. She walked onto the patio. As she looked back, she saw he'd resumed his reading.

The night was beautiful, despite shouts of carousers tumbling out of the gambling halls. The full moon was so bright, she blew out the candle. Suddenly he was beside her. They stood with their arms around one another, looking at the stars. "I'm going back to the mines," he said.

"So soon? You've only been here for a week."

"I've formed a new partnership. They're backing the operation of another section of the mine we worked last winter. It's being called Wood's Dry Diggings now. Most of the miners will have moved up mountain to where the rivers are still flowing. We'll have the dry gulch to ourselves.

"How will you mine without water?" she asked.

We'll build flumes and sluices to bring water down to two ravines that converge there. Another crew will mine a claim at the end of another long ravine farther up in the hills."

Philippa envisioned Bertrand riding his horse back and forth between the two camps, urging the men to work harder and faster. The thought of his vitality aroused her. She would be desolate without him. "Take me with you," she cried, pressing closer to him.

She heard his quick intake of breath, felt him stiffen in her arms. "No. I'll send for you.

You have paintings to finish for the exhibition. When is it?"

"July 3rd. John Prendergast has lined up two artists, Emile Godchaux and John Audubon's son. William McIlvaine has decided to join us and is bringing in two artists from Havana, who are working on lithographs."

"More importantly Thomas Larkin's art dealer and critic are due to arrive about then," Bertrand said. " You'll want to be ready."

She kissed him greedily. "You're right."

In mid-June she looked up suddenly and realized she had not ceased working for weeks. She'd had eighteen paintings in her new technique. With the help of John Prendergast she selected the twelve most likely to sell to be framed for the exhibition. She was ready for a change of scene. She missed Bertrand with a desperate hunger. Although he had not sent for her she decided to ride up to Woods Dry Diggings and surprise him--a hundred-mile trip, all for love.

Before leaving the hotel the next day she stopped at the desk. "I am checking out for a week. How much do I owe for the past four months?"

The clerk stared at her. He pushed his slouched hat back. "Monsieur La Martine owns the hotel, Madame."

"I am living independently," she said, eyes riveted on him. She laid her purse on the desk. "Please calculate my share of the charges."

Every seat was taken on the Sacramento steamer by the time Philippa boarded. She stood at the railing as they crossed the glittering bay and slipped onto a bench vacated by a fellow who was new to mining from the looks of his pristine pack and tools. He paced the deck, restless and eager to get rich. At the Sacramento wharf she hired a carriage to take her the three miles to Sutter's Fort, where she learned Cousin John was not in residence. The Negro groom loaned her a horse, saddle and had the kitchen pack food and water. "Sure you won't let me send a guide with you, Missus?" he said for the third time. "It be dangerous for a lady to ride alone. Captain Sutter, he won't like it."

She touched his arm. "What he doesn't know will not upset him, Ezra." Eager to be underway, she started out at a canter, then slowed down as the trail ascended. She had a good deal to think over. Her painting was going well. She was on to a new way of portraying light She'd argued with Prendergast over the paintings to show, but they had finally agreed on the selection. He assured her that her new landscapes were more agreeable and would sell. Despite his prodding, she refused to change or compromise her technique on the portraits.

Other travelers greeted her on the well-marked trail, but she did not engage them in conversation. The first night she slept out in the open against an oak tree, wrapped in a cotton blanket and awoke often, shivering.

After another day's ride she overnighted at a shanty marked with a crudely painted sign that read Halfway House, and on the third morning stopped for a hot meal at the Miner's Hotel. She rode into the sandy flats of Woods' Dry Diggings, surprised to see several stores spouting among the tents in the barren ravine.

At J. W. Wadleigh's establishment she purchased three pounds of flour, a pound of butter, and paper envelopes of yeast and sugar for five dollars. She would make a cake for Bertrand. At William Gwynn's trading post she inquired about the location of the LaMartine party. "They done move up the canyon, dragging those long wooden tubs," the clerk said. "When they hitch 'em end to end, why, darnation, if they don't look like a bunch of pig troughs. Creek is mighty sluggish, but runs clear higher up. Could you use some carpet tacks, Missus?"

As she rode up the ravine, she noticed the dry river bed, studded with bleached stones. It was impossible to sift gold from dirt without water, and the miners had climbed up into the mountains where snowmelt from the American and Bear rivers still flowed. The sun beat down with more heat in the thinner air, and boughs of the pines offered little respite. When she heard the rush of water, the sounds of shovels on rock and the men calling to each other, she urged her horse over a rise on the trail.

The men were astounded to see a woman ride in to their camp. Their heads went up and they passed the word along like a curling ocean wave. A few miners sent up shouts of appreciation. Several dropped their shovels and

clapped. As each one stared she scanned their faces, excited beyond containment to see Bertrand.

"Can I help you, Ma'am? I'm the foreman, George Foster," a husky man said. He slid sideways down the embankment to greet her. Men climbed from the shallow creek and others came out of their tents, a host of dirty, unkempt, bearded men with curious expressions. Philippa felt as if she was being surrounded by a militia, however well-intended.

"I wish to see Monsieur LaMartine, she said.

The foreman stood at the top of a gulch and pushed his straw hat to the back of his head. "LaMartine left for Sacramento to buy more lumber. We're clean out."

"No!" Disappointment sucked the breath out of her. She leaned forward on her horse and looked over the crowd of upturned faces, again searching for Bertrand, not believing he was not there. She had come so far! The blinding sun glanced off the water coursing down the troughs and pierced her eyes. She suddenly felt light-headed. The sky and dirt and trees spun dizzily. "I need to rest." she said, dismounting.

Forster escorted her to the largest tent. She lay down on a cot with rough blankets, none too clean. She gagged on the smell of over-cooked beans and unwashed bodies. "Move out, move out," Foster shouted at the men standing around. "It's the widow Sutter, LaMartine's woman."

Philippa drank from the tin cup of water and lay back. Someone folded a flannel shirt and slipped it under her head to make a pillow. The tent smelled of moldy canvas and paraffin. She breathed through her mouth. After a while she sat up and drank a cup of tea. "I'm all right," she protested as Foster offered her a swig of whiskey. "The altitude, fatigue. I haven't eaten much. When did Monsieur Bertrand leave?"

"Two days ago."

"I can't understand how I missed him on the trail," she said. She closed her eyes against the crushing disappointment, trying to dispel it.

"He often travels late into the night," Foster said. He shouted an order to a young man. Presently Foster handed her a plate of hot stewed beef and potatoes.

At dusk Philippa felt more refreshed. She gave her store-bought ingredients to the cook, who was delighted to bake the cake, and walked along the creek greeting many of the men who had worked with Bertrand at Dry Diggings during the past winter. The men handed her up, each to the other, and she climbed to a higher elevation where a ditch was dammed, holding back a black pool of water. They showed her how the wooden planked boxes, called long toms, were used. "We're the first team in the Sierras to git 'em," Foster

said with pride. "La Martine bought one off a Peruvian miner and we copied it to make the rest. He says it will be six months before you will see other long toms in the Sierras."

A short, stocky man approached her and removed his hat. "How do, Mrs. Sutter. You may remember me. William Slickworthy, English teacher from Cincinnati, Ohio." She shook his hand. His palm was heavily calloused, the knuckles grimed with soil. He led her to the bank of the ditch. "Each chute is like a rocker only larger and longer. When we link them they form a sluice. We shovel dirt into the top end. At the same time we open the dam and let water from the reservoir pool rush down the chute. Water washes the gold-bearing dirt over the riffle box where the gold gets trapped. We've got a dozen chutes working and need two dozen more. That's why LaMartine's gone to Sacramento for lumber."

"But you have carpenters here," she said. "Could you not fell a few trees and hand-saw the planks?"

"Takes too long. Also, we need perforated iron to line the chutes. We need supplies for the men."

"I should think Monsieur LaMartine would be needed here. Shouldn't your foreman have gone for him?"

"No one bargains in Sacramento like LaMartine, Ma'am," he said a with a grin.

The situation still didn't make sense to her. Bertrand was nothing if not efficient with his time. "I understand you have a second site, farther back in the hills. Perhaps he is there."

"We abandoned that one weeks ago," Slickworthy explained. "One day the water flowing over the flume stopped. Monsieur La Martine went back over it, step by step. I was with him. We found that a portion had caved in. The stream had dried up. We agreed it was too expensive to construct a flume into another creek, so we abandoned that operation. All of us now work here at the river site."

She shrugged off her irritation. Logical reasoning would not bring him fifty miles up the Sierras any sooner. The men built up the fire and sat around it on boulders. Philippa refused the canvas chair brought to her and sat on a log next to George Foster. When the Chinese cook brought the arm sugar cake from the oven, the men devoured their slices. Just before darkness fell a group of the younger men hiked up the cliff behind the camp. To celebrate her arrival they set a clump of branches on fire at the top and tossed the firey mass down to the ravine while at the bottom, other fellows shouted and hooted. The men laughed and leaned back and watched the twilight fade into an indigo starry sky. Most nursed their whiskey bottles. One man brought out his harmonica. A fiddler tuned up and they sang favorite country songs, a few dancing together

around the campfire. The birds protested and winged overhead back to their nests.

Despite the heat of the fire, Philippa shivered in the bracing air. She feared a touch of sunstroke. She walked awhile along the ravine, clearing her head with the clean smell of pine. At the fireside the boys were making up verses of "Oh Susanna" about her, and she was touched.

"Oh, widder Sutter has come this far for Bert.

But he's off in Sacramento buying lumber for the dirt."

Four of the younger men, proclaiming they would be honored to sleep out in the open, escorted her to their tent. "Good night," they called, first one, then the other, a chorus of mostly intelligent, well-schooled men who, for all they complained of missing their wives and children and sweethearts back East, were having the hooky hay-day time of their lives. Unlike most of the miners that summer, who would hardscrabble for enough gold dust to pay for food, they would eat and drink their fill and collect a steady wage as members of Bertrand's work crew.

"Senora," a soft voice spoke at her elbow. She turned. Firelight played across the weathered face of a middle-aged Spaniard who had worked for on the North Fork of the American River.

She clasped his hand. "Senor Ricardo, it is good to greet you again. I did not see you among the boys," she said, puzzled.

He led her aside. "Senora, Monsieur LaMartine did not go to Sacramento for the lumber. He is here. I will take you to him tomorrow."

Philippa rose at dawn and set out with Ricardo. He led her mare and had her ride a mule that would be more sure footed on the steep terrain. They stopped at noon for a saddlebag meal and rest, then moved on. Late in the afternoon, they crested a hill and began a gentle descent, riding around a series of lakes. The thin, hot air, physical effort, and steady rhythms of the mule ride combined to make her sleepy. Ricardo rode behind her on the twisting trail that followed a fast-moving creek. She listened to the aspens rustling under a cobalt blue sky, where hawks glided on down drafts, and felt her blood stir in anticipation of being reunited with Bertrand. She and Ricardo rode past an abandoned gold camp. Ugly digging disfigured the hillsides where a stream appeared to have dried up.

As she rounded a turning not a quarter mile later she saw an expanse of a wildflower meadow, tents gathered in a semi-circle. Mules stood in a coral constructed of rough-hewn logs. She smelled coffee brewing on a cookfire. Rays of late afternoon sun sinking behind a cliff framed Bertrand walking up and down a gulch site, where a crew of a dozen Miwok Indians, bare to the

waist, stood knee deep in a stream, shoveling and swinging pickaxes. Their tools rang against rock. She watched Bertrand as he suddenly looked up, sensing a presence. Of what? A dear, a bear? He turned, and seeing her, stopped, open- mouthed. She grinned, delighted to surprise him so completely. She slid off the mule, her leg muscles cramped from the long ride. Then, gaining her balance and losing her composure, she ran to him. He caught her up in his arms and embraced her, swinging her around in a circle.

"Is it really you or did I conjure you up out of my loneliness?" he whispered after their kisses.

"I am real as you see." She hugged him again and hung on fiercely.

Bertrand looked at her. "What are you doing here?"

"I could not stay away from you any longer," she said.

He kissed her eyes, her hair, breathing in her scent. He looked around as Ricardo rode up. "You old rascal, I send you to the camp for beans and coffee and you bring me treasure more precious than gold."

"Si, Senor," the Spaniard said, chuckling to himself. "Now you take a day off from digging, eh?"

Bertrand took her hand and walked with her across the meadow into a stand of aspens beneath the granite cliff, where they sat on a mossy bank next to the creek. He stared at her, his dark eyes unreadable at first, until a slow smile made its way across his face. Sunlight dappled his hair, turning some of the dark brown strands to copper as well as silver. He reached into the creek and wet his fingers. Kneeling in front of her, he traced her cheek with his forefinger, ran it down her neck, across her collar bone. The cold water sent a shock of joy through her. They began to kiss and the kissing had no end. So fierce was their desire for each other, they found the damp moss a suitable bed.

Philippa slept. When her eyes opened she saw a canape of sky ringed by granite cliffs to anchor it to earth. The setting sun poised momentarily on a high rock and fell over backward in a spray of light. Instantly the air grew cooler. She sat up and reached for Bertrand, who leaned back against a tree watching her.

"You are more beautiful than I remembered," he said, caressing her hand.

She smiled with satisfaction. After awhile she made an attempt to tidy her hair, and looked around. "I saw Mr. Slickworthy at your lower camp. He told me this site had dried up."

Bertrand eyed her, sucking on a twig. "It did."

"Then what's all this activity?"

"A week after we closed the site, I had a hunch. I came out with Ricardo and followed the stream back further. I found a second streambed. Last spring

the snowmelt must have diverged around boulders. It carried off part of the dirt and laid bare a deposit of coarse gold."

"The partnership will surely reward you for your enterprise," she said.

"Oh, I will be well rewarded."

"But why the secrecy?" she asked.

"I staked a claim, but I haven't taken time to register it. We're moving fast to get in and out before other prospectors find their way up here."

"Oh, my love, ever the opportunist."

He laughed and drew her closer to him. "Speaking of opportunity, our military governor has named me as one of the eight delegates to represent San Francisco at the constitutional convention."

"I knew it!" She was immensely proud of him. "But, you're too young to be a founding father."

He lunged at her, growling playfully.

"When do you go to Monterey?" she asked.

"John Sutter and I will take the coaster down August 30th. There will be nearly fifty delegates from throughout the territory. I'll meet ranchers and land owners from the southern pueblos and ports. Everyone of influence. Accommodations promise to be scant, so we'll bunk at Larkin's adobe house in town."

"But how can you write a state constitution if California is still a territory?"

"Congress is slow as molasses to admit us. They are stumped over whether to make us a free or slave state. We can't wait! We'll write our own document, get the people to vote it in and take it East to Washington. When they finally bring us in we will be ready to do business. But here's the best part, my darling." He sat forward and took her hands in his. "I'm going to line up Sutter and Larkin to nominate me for governor."

"Governor of the State of California." Philippa whispered. She stared at him in awe. She envisioned the day-to-day meetings with politicians, bankers, supplicants, squabbling parties. "Is it what you truly want?"

He leaned his head back against the tree trunk. "I want the power."

"Why?"

"So I can make the rules, of course!" He laughed off his hubris, but she saw it for what it was, raw ambition. He'd moved beyond his need to avenge his father's disgrace. His obsession for power and wealth was all his own. She shivered in the rapidly cooling air. "How can you be elected governor when California is not yet a state?"

"Our constitution won't be valid in Washington until Congress grants us statehood, but it will out here," he said. "California needs the governance of elected officials. We have no laws or courts, no adequate policing or standard money. The military can't protect the interests of the thousands of miners flocking here from all over the world."

Philippa leaned against him, wrapping his arms around hers. Hob nobbing with respected leaders will be good for Bertrand LaMartine. He will be a strong advocate for miners; he'll learn he has to comply with the law and can't bend it to his own interests.

For two days they walked through the meadows and hiked the hills, picnicking and making love under the trees alongside hidden stream banks. She told him how her painting was progressing and that she would be ready when Pierson and the critic arrived.

By the third night she knew he was growing restive. She knew his rhythms because she understood her own. It was time to resume work. She awakened, alarmed to hear a sudden braying and stomping of mules from the corral. Bertrand was not in his cot drawn up next to hers. She wrapped his discarded blanket around her and walked barefoot out of the tent and across the wet, coarse grass, down to the creek. Stars arched over her in an arbor of lacy white. Across the field she saw a tent at the end of a line of Miwok tents that was lit from within, and glowing brilliantly in the darkness. She followed the light, walking silently up to it, wondering if she would find Bertrand within.

Two men moved about inside. This much she could make out from their shadows thrown against the canvas walls. Uncomfortable with eavesdropping, yet unable to resist, she moved to a vantage point where she could look between two tent poles and see inside. Bertrand stood over a pine table with another man, who she guessed to be his accountant. Both of them were armed with a pistol. Two rifles and a shotgun were propped against the tent's corner. The trays of two measuring scales swung on their miniature chains in the slight breeze that came through the open flap of the tent. Burlap sacks and opened crates full of washed gold were stacked on the ground.

"What's your figure?" Bertrand asked.

"I make it four thousand, nine eighty-five," the accountant answered. He was a tall slender man wearing spectacles. Philippa recognized him. He'd worked on Sutter's staff at the fort that first year. Peter Weston.

"Good enough," Bertrand answered. "I get five thousand fifty-two. Either way, we're close to five thousand pounds. The quality is superb. I say its worth eighty thousand dollars."

"Or more." Weston grinned at him. "Not bad for three weeks work."

Bertrand ran a hand through his hair. "This vein is tapped out. I'm shutting down the operation. I've got to get back to my other camp. First thing in the morning we'll have the Miwok boys load up the mules. I want you lead the train down the hill. Take Bromwell and Spencer with you. They're both handy with their firearms and aren't afraid to shoot. I'll give you the name of the smelter I trust in Sacramento City to amalgamate the load into ingots. The three of you will have to stay at the smelters until the job is finished. I'll pay extra."

"What denomination" Weston asked.

"Equal number of fifty and one-hundred dollar bars. Load them on a river steamer and take them to my bank in San Francisco."

"But the partnership's account is at Naglee's Exchange and Deposit Office. Isn't Henry Naglee a partnership member?"

Bertrand faced him. "This load goes to LaMartine Bank."

Peter Weston looked him in the eye. "This is your own venture then, apart from the partnership?"

"Yes."

"Who else knows beside me?"

"No one," Bertrand answered.

Philippa drew in her breath and held it during the ensuing silence as the men stared at each other, Bertrand grim-faced, Weston smiling in a snide way. Weston spoke first. "You say you will pay extra."

"Yes, for your time at the smelters," Bertrand said tightly.

"What will you pay?"

Bertrand shrugged. "Double time."

"And how much is my time at Naglee's bank worth to you when I pay a visit there, but am silent about this transaction?"

"Five percent of the value of the ingots you deposit in my bank."

"Ten percent," Weston countered.

"Eight," Bertrand said.

"I say ten percent," Weston repeated. "You wouldn't want word to get around."

Bertrand smiled and stepped back. "All right. Ten percent. Eight thousand dollars it is Peter. Just remember, unlike you, after this job, Bromwell and Spencer will continue to work for me."

Bertrand walked out of the accountant's tent. He did not see Philippa standing in the shadows. She ran after him. He stopped and pulled out his pistol.

# Chapter Ten

"Good, God, Philippa. I almost shot you. What are you doing?" He grabbed her arm and hurried her along the wet grass.

"You're cheating again," she said, breaking free of his grasp. "You have no right to send that gold to your bank. Your colleagues trusted you to mine it for the partnership."

He stopped walking and faced her. holding her by her wrist. His fingers pressed alarming hard on her narrow bones. "It's not theirs. It's my gold. The claim I worked for them dried up. I trekked back further, found the source and staked this one for myself."

"Then why must you buy silence from your accountant?"

"Naglee and the rest may not see it my way."

"Because it's outright thievery! This land is part of the claim you filed on behalf of the partnership, is it not?"

He looked off into the distance.

"You're using their financial resources, yet taking the gain for yourself."

He stared at her. She could not read his expression in the dim starlight. She took hold of his two hands. "It's wrong."

"How judgmental you are, Philippa." He shook her off and walked on.

"Don't walk off when I'm speaking," she said. "Do you think you can operate by your own set of ethics?"

"We've been together for months. You've seen how I work. I take opportunities where I find them."

"You are a cheat and a traitor to your colleagues." She lowered her voice. "You above all men know how despicable a traitor is." She saw his head shake in a spasm. She'd reached him.

"I'll be working for statehood for little or no compensation," he said. "I need leverage with the legislature. There are palms to be greased. Neophyte politicians can't afford the luxury of square dealing."

"Nonsense! You have plenty of other resources. We've been over this terrain before, Bertrand," she said bitterly. "Despite my urging and your promises, nothing's changed." She walked ahead of him in silence. When she came to the tent they shared, she looked around in despair. So much joy forfeited. He tried to take her in his arms. She resisted and sat on the cot, her arms wrapped across her chest.

He sat next to her. "Philippa, this is difficult for you. In affairs of business you are inexperienced."

"I know right from wrong."

"I'm doing what's expedient," he said.

"You're breaking the law."

"Are you my court of law, judge and jury?"

"That is correct," she said crisply.

He sat next to her on the cot, her closest friend, her lover, her life. A core of goodness was eroding. He looked straight ahead, not touching her. "I need you," he said.

"You need me to save you from yourself," she said. She stood abruptly. "I won't burden you with my reproachful presence. I am taking over this tent. Get out!"

He reached for her. "We must talk about this."

"Leave me alone. Go find a hole to scuttle into. You and your ill-gotten gold will be rid of me as soon as it's light. I'll ride down to Sacramento with Ricardo."

She stood on deck of the steamer, fanning her face with her wide-brimmed straw hat, looking over the forlorn city of tent stores and hastily slapped together houses. The Sacramento Valley was an inferno in summer. Spring green grasses had long ago died under the parching sun, leaving tall brown summer stalks that were beaten to the ground by the hooves of horses, mules, donkeys, and thousands of men eager to set out for the storied rivers. Hawkers shouted petitions to dine at their beaneries, buy picks and pans at their hardware stores, sleep in their hotels. Their clamor aggravated her. She turned her back to it, whirling around so hard she felt the ship's railing press against

her spine. For the past two days she'd felt hopelessly conflicted, in love with Bertrand, yet unable to condone his unprincipled business dealings. He shamed her.

"Mrs. Sutter?" Ezra, the steward from Sutter's Fort presented himself to her, bowing.

"Hello Ezra. I left Cousin John's mare in the barn," she said.

"I know that, Mrs. Sutter. The gentleman out there on the wharf, he asked me to give this to you."

As Ezra handed her a folded sheet of paper, she glanced over her shoulder at the teeming crowd with boxes and bundles, waiting to board the steamer to San Francisco. Ezra pointed to the left of the embarcadero in front of a livery stable. She shaded her eyes with her hat. Bertrand stood on a box. He held his rifle up. Perched on top of the menacing barrel was a white handkerchief, fluttering in a breeze. Framed by the darkness of the stable it stood out like a beacon. He smiled with his white teeth.

She read the letter.

"Dear Philippa, my conscience, you are right and I'm wrong. I have instructed my accountant Peter Weston to bring all of the gold to Naglee's bank to be deposited to the partnership's account. Weston is on your steamer. I've asked him to talk with you and confirm my intention. Please forgive me. Bertrand."

She read the letter a second time, glancing at him in the crowd.

Ezra was perspiring fiercely in the heat, rivulets of sweat coursed down his ebony face.

"Can I get you some water?" she asked.

"No, Missus." His voice was tense, eyes wide with the importance of his errand. "What is your answer for Monsieur?"

She turned to look at Bertrand across the crowded wharf. His face had an expectant expression she hadn't seen before. She pressed herself closer to the railing, pushing out the disappointment and hurt. She regarded him for a long while without smiling, then said to Ezra. Tell him, "I forgive him." Philippa watched as Ezra threaded through the crowd. Bertrand quickly stood down from the crate he had been balancing on and bent down so he could hear what the Negro messenger said. Bertrand moved unhurriedly through the throngs as if they had been choreographed to step aside for him. Head up, smiling with confidence, he took the gangplank in four strides and came to her on deck before she could frame an answer, or question, or any sensible opinion on what to do about him.

He took her hands in his and kissed them, the backs first, and then turning them over, the palms. His lips on her moist palms sent shivers of desire through her.

"This is positively the last time I will allow you to do this to me," she said in a low voice.

He looked into her eyes. "I need you."

"Then come with me to San Francisco. Now. Can you do that?"

She watched him draw in his breath, think through a dozen tasks he was responsible for. He smiled. "Of course."

"Just be with me. Don't talk," she said curtly. "We will look at the light on the water and think. We'll talk about solutions later."

"I love you, Philippa," he said.

She held his hand her hers. "Yes, I know." He would woo her with the same passion as he would pursue political power, and would not rest until he possessed both.

On the day of the exhibition Philippa dressed carefully in a peach taffeta tea gown and mother-of-pearl-buttoned shoes made to match. She swept her blond hair to the back of her head, twisted it and fastened the curls with a pearl-studded comb. Setting down her hand mirror, she heard the bells from the Congregational Church tolling the 3:00 o'clock hour. They expected over a hundred guests for the joint exhibition, many of them Bertrand's business associates. The art dealer and critic had arrived in Monterey and were visiting with Thomas Larkin. Since they would not view the exhibition until the following week, the artists had agreed to tag paintings sold, but leave the show intact until all the works could all be critically evaluated. Bertrand was so was nervous about having the paintings in her new technique shown he'd ordered ten crates of champagne. As she walked down the hotel corridor and into her gallery and its forest of easels filled with a vast variety of work, she felt a mounting excitement. They were inaugurating an art colony in San Francisco. She and her colleagues were members of an exclusive club, is much like a medieval guild.

Her bold mountain buttes, brooding riverscapes, portraits, and fog-shrouded landscapes stood out among the traditional watercolors of Prendergast, McIlvaine and the others. Bertrand stood with her at the main door of the gallery opening to Portsmouth Square to welcome their guests "Ah, here is Sam Brannan," Bertrand said. "Good of you to come. May I offer you champagne?" Within moments Philippa and Bertrand were surrounded by a cluster of townspeople. When William McIlvaine arrived, she introduced him

to potential buyers. Waiters circled with trays of glasses. She shook hands, spoke, smiled automatically.

"Madame Sutter, you look lovely."

"Wonderful party, my dear!" Voices rose around her. Over all the chatter she heard her inner voice: No one is talking about my paintings. The studio was soon jammed with people. So many guests swarmed through the door Bertrand had it propped open with a granite doorstop. They were even entering through the open French windows.

The diminutive Etienne Godchaux arrived, wearing a velvet cape. He kissed Philippa's left cheek and then her right. John Prendergast came in, kissed her hand, and introduced her to a tall New Englander, Harrison Eastman. "Mr. Eastman has done a splendid scene of the Saint Francis Hotel," Prendergast said.

"I look forward to seeing it," Philippa said.

Eastman shook her hand. "I dabble in watercolor, Mrs. LaMartine, but I specialize in engravings."

"Mr. Eastman hopes to establish himself as an engraver in town," John said.

Eastman had a gaunt, hungry look she recognized. No doubt he had been unsuccessful in the goldfields and had settled in town to practice his own profession. "You should do well. I'm sure many of the artists will want to have their work reproduced as prints."

Eastman introduced her to E. Hall Martin, an artist who'd arrived from New York. Her brain whirled. "A pleasure to meet you, sir," she said. "Where did you say you've opened a studio?" Unable to hear his answer, she led him out of the studio and into the hallway.

Hall Martin was a tall, reedy man. When he leaned over to answer her, his oversized frock coat swung forward. "Haley House," he said. "I've taken a flat on the second floor." She watched his Adam's apple bob in his throat, wondering when he'd last tasted a solid meal. "Eastman has designed a newspaper advertisement for me."

"What are you advertising?" she asked.

"Portraits," he said. "Or, I'll do landscapes, pencil sketches, whatever is requested. Mostly I prefer figurative oil studies. I have in mind a trilogy depicting miners out in the gold fields."

She studied his craggy face. He didn't look well. "You are very versatile, sir."

"I'm grateful to be included among Mr. Prendergast's associates," Hall Martin said. "I look forward to encouraging one another and exchanging ideas. It is my honor to meet you, Madame," he said with a bow.

"It is I who am grateful to be embraced among fellow artists," she said. "Often those closest to us do not appreciate what we are about."

"Ah, there you are, Philippa," Prendergast said. "I want you to meet Thomas Ayres. He's just back from the mines."

Clasping both her hands in his, an eager young man held them against his chest. "Mrs. Sutter, you are the center of a thriving art scene in San Francisco."

"Did you come here for the gold?"

Color rose to his face. "Truth be told, I've not been successful with pick and shovel."

"That about sums it up for all of us," John Audubon said.

Philippa hadn't seen Audubon arrive. Surprised by a robust round of laughter, she saw that a half-dozen artists had grouped around her like a phalanx. She wished they would stop their chatter and discuss her work.

Ayres addressed her. "Don't you find the Sierras stunning subject matter? I've been sketching mountains, rivers and canyons. I'm not much of a painter, so I'm searching for an artist to transpose my drawings into oils. Would you consider it?"

"What?" Philippa leaned closer to him.

"I work mostly in graphite and charcoal. I use sand-coated paper for added texture. I'm asking you to transform these into oil paintings. Together we would mount an exhibition." He looked at her earnestly. Out of the tail of her eye she caught John Prendergast's smile.

"He's offering you a commission, Philippa," Prendergast said.

"Yes, perhaps we can talk about it later," she said. She took John's arm and whispered, "Help me to escape!"

She sat on a stool in the hotel kitchen, sipping a glass of water, gathering her composure. The shouts of the Chinese cooks and banging of pots were a welcome distraction after the babble of voices. "I had no idea there were so many artists in town,"she said.

"There's room for all of us." He spoke calmly, watching her. "What's bothering you?"

"None of our guests is buying the paintings or even talking about them."

"They're socializing. They'll be back to buy."

"But I want to know what they think of my work."

"Be patient. Soon you'll have all the critique you can handle."

She closed her eyes and drank deeply from her glass of cold water.

Bertrand greeted her as she reentered the studio. "I think all of San Francisco is here. Naglee, the banker, is anxious to meet you." He leaned down and kissed her ear, whispering, "Naglee wants to purchase the sketch of your view of the bay. At the moment we're stalled at one thousand dollars. I'm holding out for two."

Her heart jumped at the prospect of her first sale, even if it was just a rough sketch.

"He's been talking with Harrison Eastman," Bertrand continued. "He wants Eastman to produce lithographs of it by the carload to be shipped back to the Eastern States."

"He wants to sell prints of my work?" She was aghast.

As always, Bertrand reveled in putting together a deal. "He's going to have Eastman reproduce it on letter sheets. Every miner in the goldfields will write his letters home on stationery decorated with your view of the bay. Think of it, Philippa, you'll be known in every county across the nation."

She gasped. "But I don't want to be known for a sketch."

He leaned closer and lowered his voice. "At some juncture art must meet commerce, Philippa. This will give you a solid commission. I'll negotiate a fee for every letter sheet Naglee produces."

She was horrified. Was this how he intended to profit from his investment in her art? "Bring Naglee over to me."

Without taking his stern eyes off hers, Bertrand signaled a waiter and told him to fetch the portly banker by the window. "Mr. Naglee," she said pleasantly, "we meet at last. I understand you are interested in purchasing some of my work?"

"Yes, the sketch of your view of the bay."

"For what purpose?" she said.

"To reproduce and sell in the East, Madame. I'm offering your husband a thousand dollars."

"I'll only consider two thousand," Bertrand said.

"First of all, sir, if you wish to purchase my work, you must deal with me," Philippa said. "Secondly, if you want my drawings I will sell them only with the understanding that they are not to be reproduced. I have far more important pieces to show you." She put her hand on Mr. Naglee's arm and steered him toward the easels holding her recent landscapes. "These pictures are bold representations of San Francisco, Mr. Naglee. They speak of energy,

excitement, confidence in the future. When you display these on the walls of the Exchange and Deposit Bank your customers will be inspired by your vision and reassured by your taste."

Even as Naglee diligently stood in front of each easel, looking, Philippa knew he was incapable of seeing.

"Nope," Naglee said. "Don't like 'em. Don't like any of these painted ones. I'll stick with the drawing. If there is a demand for a reproduction of it, I'll know it's good," he said with a nervous laugh.

Philippa caught her breath and let it out slowly, forcing herself to relax. "Mr. Naglee, I'm curious. What is it about the oils you don't like?"

"I'm not schooled in art, Mrs. LaMartine, but I know I'm not going to hang up a picture if it looks like the devil."

"Do you find these offensive?" she said evenly.

"Yes! You haven't painted one damn building, hillside or ship the way it truly looks. The colors are unnaturally bright. They jump out at you. The proportions are cockeyed." He looked around at the crowd. "William McMurtrie over there. Now there's an artist knows what he's doing. He brought his painting of Telegraph Hill to the bank yesterday. His houses and people look right. The ships in the harbor stand up straight. I don't have to think about it. I can just like it. I'm gonna buy McMurtrie's painting. I'm a traditional man, Mrs. LaMartine."

"It offends you to have art break from tradition?"

"That it does," he said.

"You're not one to take a risk when it comes to collecting art?"

"I'll buy only what I'm sure of," he said.

She stood closer to him. "Tell me, as a banker, are you equally afraid to take a risk?"

She tried hard not to smile at his stricken expression and turned away. She sipped her wine listening to voices all around her. Jose Baturone and Augusto Ferran, the Havana boys, as they were called, were working on a book of lithographs of the gold camps, due out by their publisher by the end of the year. A new gambling hall with a particularly risque burlesque show had opened down at the waterfront. A Mexican man and his wife had hit it tremendously rich in a gold strike down in Tuolumne. She endured the babble for another hour. Gradually people left. She ushered John Prendergast out the door, the last of her guests. "Let's hope they come back to buy," she said with a bleak smile.

At noon the next day Philippa stood on the porch of the hotel and saw Bernard and Patrick O'Reilly walking downhill to the waterfront. They threaded their way between a thicket of Chinese vendors pushing their wooden carts. Glory be, the lighter from Monterey had arrived and was tied up at the wharf. Passengers were making their way along the uneven planks. Among them was Ludlow Pierson and his Henri Seigner. She just had time to set vases of flowers in their hotel rooms.

In the gallery Bertrand helped her to remove the other artists's work from easels for the time being and arrange her paintings the way she wanted them. She nodded to Bertrand that she was ready. He went into the hotel bar and returned with Pierson and Seigner. Philippa greeted them with her outstretched hand. "Welcome, gentlemen. I have anticipated this moment for many months. Please, take your time. The recent oil paintings, in a style I call depiction, are displayed to the right." They nodded to her, eager to get to work.

Bertrand spoke up. "If you wish to consider Mrs. Sutter's California work chronologically, you will want to begin with her 1848 charcoals, watercolors and oil sketches to the left."

Pierson, the elder of the two, studied the parade of easels, and crossed the room to the left. For a prominent New York art dealer, he was a surprisingly colorless man with gray hair, beard, and complexion. He dressed in a severe black suit, was of medium height, and carried himself with the formality of an academic professor. She guessed Henri Seigner to be in his mid-thirties. His thick black hair ,slicked down across his head, grew long and bushy at the temples. He had an athletic build and moved like a dancer. His expression was slightly pugnacious, similar to other Parisians she'd met, tough and direct. She had learned from Thomas Larkin that Seigner wrote for a number of art journals. He was lecturing at various American art schools for a year before returning to Paris, where he taught at the French Academy. That concerned her because the Academy was known as a conservative institution. But he also judged the annual Salon exhibitions and would be familiar with the freshest artistic trends.

She wondered how these two gentlemen had fared during the long sea voyages and dangerous Panama crossing. They seemed to be the least likely travel companions. Seigner flicked a glance at her drawings and moved deliberately to her most recent oil paintings. Bertrand retired to a chair in the corner. Philippa stood in the center of the room.

Time ticked along. Neither man looked at the other, exchanged a word or wrote down a note. Through the windows she saw the noonday sun bathing Portsmouth Square. Cows stood in the deep grasses, swatting flies with their tails. She refused Bertrand's offer for a chair. She stood and turned her head to watch first one critic, then the other as they studied each of her works, and moved to the next easel, stepping inexorably closer to one another from

opposite sides of the room. She felt as if two planets were traversing the night sky. When they crossed and changed sides she knew her wait was half over.

A waiter from the kitchen brought in a tray of tea, biscuits, cake and cream sherry, and set it on the table near the window. Presently Pierson and Seigner completed their inspection. Philippa poured hot tea into porcelain cups with hands she could not keep from trembling. "May we speak freely?" Pierson said.

"Of course," Philippa answered.

Pierson looked at Seigner who nodded his assent that Pierson should speak first. "Having evaluated your early drawings through to the latest oils, I see you are a superb draftsman. Your charcoal portraits are realistic, precise renderings and demonstrate an academic approach. But, in your subsequent work I believe you have lost your way."

"Oh. How is that, sir?" she asked. She set down the cup that rattled in its saucer.

Pierson cleared his throat. "Hundreds of years of art demonstrate that western man demands a balance of composition, realistic rendering, harmony, beauty, colors that are true to nature, and nobility of subject matter. We find spirituality in artistic objects from which we take inspiration and pleasure. You have digressed from every one of these fundamentals. You give us hacked-off composition, skin tones of garish color, grotesque perspective, rough paint surfaces, and most offensive, subject matter that is downright gross. A woman squatting at the riverbank, a miner cleaning his boots with his knife. There is nothing spiritual, moral, or uplifting here!"

"Are you not moved by the miner receiving tragic news in a letter from home?"

"His facial features are not sufficiently clear," Pierson said.

"But his dejected posture tells the story." Her voice rose. "What about this scene of the bay?" She swept her hand along a line of easels. "In fact the twelve paintings in this group I did recently using a different technique to make them more commercial. Do you see, the brushstrokes are not so wide, the colors less jarring."

Pierson shook his head. "I barely see a difference from the earlier work. I couldn't sell these." As to application of paint, I despair. If you continue on in this vein, your pictures will resemble so many blobs of mud on canvas. They are an insult to art collectors. You flaunt the fundamentals of western civilization art."

Philippa sat back as if struck.

"More importantly, you waste a perfectly stunning talent." He turned to Bertrand. "Did any of her oils sell at the exhibit yesterday?

"No." he said. "We had a bid on one of the sketches."

"My point exactly. " Ludlow Pierson took a sip of sherry and leaned toward Philippa. "What you call your depiction technique is a disastrous foray into artistic expression." He drew himself together and shivered. "I strongly suggest you go back to your watercolor and charcoals. These are what show promise."

Philippa drew a deep breath and gripped the seat of her chair. She turned to Seigner. "What is your opinion, Sir?"

Henri Seigner had been sitting across the table from her with his head down as if braced against a gale. He now lifted his gaze to hers. "Mr. Pierson and I have spent the past few days in Monterey viewing sketches of miners and dance-hall revelers. I imagine when we examine and critique the work of your colleagues we will see dozens of watercolors of miners digging in streams, tents clinging to hillsides, and deserted ships at anchor in the bay. Possibly there will be a few exceptions, but I expect the majority will reveal the hastily-rendered quality of illustrations sketched on a battlefield. They will be visual accounts, reports, if you will, of how the rush for gold looks now. This so-called school of art is temporary and will be supplanted by a more permanent movement. You, Madame Sutter, have moved light years beyond these artists. But what I cannot grasp is where you are going, and who will follow."

Seigner took a long sip of cream sherry. "Your technique intrigues me. It draws me in more than it repels me. It makes me think. It inspires me to see things in a new way. In the future, artistic expression could feasiblely veer in the direction you are pioneering, but it will be half a century before the public will be ready to accept it.

"I've been in the United States nearly a year now," Seigner continued. "I've visited art academies, galleries, museums. As you know, the new wave of American art is greatly influenced by the Hudson River School of large-scale, romantic landscapes. Many of these scenes feature dramatic storms, high mountain peaks, rays of sunlight. They are not accurate landscapes topographically–in fact, are exaggerated for an effect-- but the landscape features are painted precisely."

Ludlow Pierson interrupted. "They sell, Mrs. Sutter. People of wealth and prestige want them in their homes, their city offices. They are beautiful, inspirational, and enormously popular."

Seigner waited politely for Pierson to finish before continuing. "I predict that as more and more Americans venture westward, the Hudson River School will flourish. I envision a host of similar-styled paintings of western landscapes being executed and shown in galleries and museums. And as sweeping prairie scenes, mountain peaks, herds of buffalo, and portraits of Indians enter American minds and imaginations, they will emerge as political statements glorifying the west, underscoring yearnings for freedoms promised. This, then,

Mrs. Sutter, is where I see the direction of art. You have the prodigious talent and vision to take the lead of this movement in the west."

Phillipa got up and paced the wood-planked floor. "Gentlemen, I thank you for your candid assessment."

"Who do you paint for?" Seigner asked.

She looked at him. "Certainly not people who seek to sedate themselves by looking at idealistic landscapes, or think they can learn moral lessons from classical art. We live in turbulent times. I paint for people who are uplifted by looking at their everyday, mundane world in a new way."

"Must you make it so offensive?" Pierson asked.

"My art is meant to offend," she said. "My art requires an investment of all of your emotions. I will draw a response from you. It matters not whether it is positive or negative. Simply, I demand that you react. The more you are astonished, the better I have succeeded."

Henri folded his napkin and got up from the table. As you know Professor Pierson and I are leaving soon for three weeks in the gold fields." He looked at Bertrand. "Thank you, Monsieur, for organizing our tour through the Sierras."

Bertrand cleared his throat. Philippa could see consternation in his eyes. He'd been shaken by what the critics had to say. "I have arranged several camp managers to receive you and make their best accommodation available to you," he said.

Seigner bowed his head in appreciation. "I expect the intense spirit of adventure that we will encounter in the river camps will shed light on Madame's work. I for one am eager to approach the source of her inspiration." He took Philippa's hand and bent to kissed it. "You give me much to think about."

When the critics left the room Philippa began to tremble. She had held herself in check for so long, she could no longer bear the restraint. Tears pooled in her eyes, slid down her cheeks. She sobbed into her hands. Her whole body shook.

Bertrand placed a hand on her shoulders. "Well, now we have a consensus. We all think you should abandon this discordant style."

She drew back and wiped away her tears with the back of her gloved hand. "For what purpose?"

"So you will sell," he said.

She eyed him through her tears. "Do you think I want to paint ordinary landscapes to be reproduced as pretty pictures and sold everywhere from St. Louis to Boston?"

"You'll be famous and admired. You'll exert a powerful influence in the art world." He spread his arms. "Why won't you listen? The most successful art dealer in America says you're a superb draftsman. A French art critic thinks you have prodigious talent and can lead an art movement in the west. Think of it. You can paint dozens of huge canvases and sell them to the rich. You'll make a fortune."

She shook her head. "No, Bertrand, not that way." A feeling of dread crept over her. She looked into his dark eyes. He didn't understand her, but she understood him all too well. "My being famous and admired would enhance your reputation."

"Of course!"

"The way a splendid house would. Or a bank with your name on it."

She recognized the look that came across his face. He saw her as his possession. Her function was to advance his career. Why would she jeopardize her role?

"You're afraid your friends and colleagues see me as an eccentric fool. I'm a liability."

He stared at her. "You can be a success," he answered. "It's your choice."

"But a success on your terms, because you see me as your investment."

His face flushed with anger. "Yes, and a damned expensive investment with not even your appreciation to show for it! You've lost your way, Philippa. You're wasting your time and my resources." He walked out of the studio.

# Chapter Eleven

Bertrand struggled out of sleep to consciousness. He heard Philippa calling him, dragging him from a frightening dream. Something precious was slipping out of his hands. He always felt powerful and successful in his dreams. Fear was rare.

He smelled her French perfume as she stood over him. "Bertrand, wake up. I've had the most incredible news! Henri Seigner's returned. He's sent a messenger with a note. He wants to see my paintings again."

He sat up with a sinking heart and rubbed his hands over his face.

"It looks like my offensive art may be worthy after all. Help me set up the easels," she said. He'd rarely seen her so excited.

They dressed quickly. In the studio Bertrand set up easels across the wood-planked floor of the gallery, twenty-four in all, including the charcoals and oil sketches. He couldn't figure out why Seigner would change his mind.

Philippa spotted a few easels that were rickety and made Bertrand take a hammer and nail to them. The pounding brought the sous-chef out from the kitchen wielding a bread knife, fearful a burglar had broken in. She asked him to bring coffee, rolls and fruit. She arranged her paintings on the easels in some order Bertrand did not fathom, but which made sense to her. He lit four oil lamps and placed them so each painting was well illuminated, then hung the three Sutter's Buttes mountain-scapes and two portraits on the wall where, within the hour, the rising sun would bathe them in clear light.

He put his coat back on. Philippa straightened his vest and cravat. She wore a dark blue gown with a white lace collar, unduly severe to his tastes, but it

gave her the businesslike air she apparently wished to assume. Looking at her, flushed and confident, it occurred to him that Seigner might actually find her work momentous, might want to bring it to the attention of the European art world. The prospect worried him.

At seven o'clock Henri Seigner stood by the open door and cleared his throat discretely.

"Bonjour, Monsieur," Philippa said. She led him into the room. "Would you care for coffee?"

Seigner nodded a greeting to Bertrand. "Later, Madame."

Bertrand motioned to Philippa to stand with him in the back of the room. They watched Seigner go from easel to easel. He looked at each painting for long periods of time. Occasionally he nodded and smiled to himself. He jotted down observations in a notebook. He moved closer to a canvas, leaned down to study it. "May I have more light, please," he asked. Philippa handed him another oil lamp. He examined the rest of the canvases on easels and stood before the five works hung on the wall. He asked Philippa to join him.

Bertrand looked at their backs as they studied her triptych of Sutter's Buttes. They spoke in low tones, as if in church. Seigner asked a question, she answered. The reverence of their exchange in his low baritone and her light-toned voice made him think of the confessional. Seigner said, "What do you mean by 'depiction?' "

"It is a matter of light," she said. She explained how she represented shadows in gradation of tones and thickness of paint. "I describe how a man's face or a vine on a wall looks right now before it changes with the movement of the sun. This glimpse is private, very personal. But I allow you as the viewer to look on it."

Seigner asked her how she mixed her colors on the palette.

"I don't. I mix them on the canvas."

He stared at her. "Is that so?" He moved closer to her third painting of Sutter's Buttes. He tipped his head. "Extraordinary! I'll have my breakfast now."

Bertrand stood at the side of the room watching Philippa at the table with Seigner. Bertrand's gaze followed every bite the critic took. When Seigner bit into a slice of pineapple, his mouth worked at the sweet-sour taste. He consulted his notes, took another slice of fruit. The man was awash with overwhelming sensation, not the least of which was Philippa, herself. Bertrand knew no man who did not find her ravishing, especially with her blue-green eyes sparkling their brightest, color rising from her throat, the shape of her breasts evident beneath her silk bodice and lacy collar. Philippa was his. He wouldn't

share her with anyone. He remembered his morning nightmare, the fear of something slipping from his grasp.

Bertrand shook his head to clear it and paced the floor, hands behind his back. The sooner this was over the better. He glanced at the easels. The sun rose over Portsmouth Square and splashed its rays against the windows of the studio. One by one he turned each easel slightly so it stood in direct sunlight. It didn't occur to him after the first easel, or even after the sixth, but after he had turned the twelfth easel, Bertrand knew why he felt uneasy. As seen glittering in the clear light, Philippa's paintings of California vibrated with color and daring. He felt challenged to see his own life differently, something he didn't want to do. Her vision of art became clear to him. More than a prodigy, she was a genius.

Across the room he heard her say, "Yes, Monsieur Seigner, I would be pleased to let you take several of my paintings back to France."

Bertrand clenched his hands.

Seigner said to him, "Madame believes she is creating a revolutionary new movement of art. Do you agree?"

"The question is, do you?" Bertrand answered. He paced the room with his hands in his pockets to keep them from shaking. If her work was praised by Parisians, she would be in demand throughout Europe. No. He would lose her.

"I do believe it. I believe my colleagues at the Academy will agree," Seigner said. He stood up from the table eagerly and moved among the easels, making his selection. "I want to take this portrait," he said with his hands on Quartermoon. He turned to Philippa. "And the mountain triptych. I can't break it up. I must take all three paintings." He circled the paintings, which throbbed with color in the direct morning sunlight. "I want Morning on the American River , Shadowed Light, and at least two of the views of the bay."

Bertrand leaned against the wall, watching him.

"Monsieur La Martine, I've asked Mrs. Sutter to come to France and address the members of the Academy," Seigner said. "I want her to enter her paintings in the Salon Exhibition."

Philippa sat rigidly, her back not touching the chair, and beamed at Bertrand. This was how he envisioned she would look on the morning their first child was born.

"Her work is defiant," Seigner said. "I was affronted at first, but its greatness stayed with me. Walking through this untamed city and watching the miners in the gold camps has helped me to understand how her art is a synthesis of her talent, vision, and these unique times. I believe she is on the

cusp of a new style that will carry us into the latter part of the century. It is imperative that her work be seen. She has much to teach us."

"Isn't it enough that she sends the paintings to France with you?" Bertrand asked.

"No, she must come!" the critic said. "Having her work evaluated is only the beginning. She must serve as interpreter. Also, she must champion it in the face of the controversy it is sure to incite."

Philippa flashed a smile.

She'd finally attained all she had worked for. Bertrand had known moments its equal. He frowned.

Philippa stood up and went to Seigner. "I will come to France as soon as I can, I"'ll sail in three months."

"No, Bertrand said. "I need you here for the election."

"Bertrand is campaigning to be California's first Governor," she said with pride. "We'll work the timing out."

Seigner took her face in his hands, impulsively kissed her left cheek and right. "You have a great future, Madame. You must meet with artists, critics, dealers. I will write to you to let you know my plans for you." He began to collect the paintings he wanted from their easels.

Bertrand stepped forward to help him. "Do you want to take them framed?"

"No. Please remove the frames. My ship is the New World Glory. It sails at noon, but we are to have baggage stowed by ten o'clock." He pulled out his pocket watch. "That's less than an hour and I have errands to see to."

"I'll pack the canvases immediately," Philippa said. "I know how it is done, Monsieur." Bertrand had never seen her so happy, not even with him. As she walked Seigner out of the gallery he visualized her in Paris, meeting fellow artists, critics and patrons. If her work was exhibited by the Academy, she would never return to him. He knew instinctively what to do about it.

Seigner turned at the door. "Perhaps you can help me," he said. "I need the services of a banker before I leave."

"Bertrand can help you," Philippa said. "He's the owner of LaMartine Bank. Bertrand, why don't you take Monsieur Seigner to the bank now. I'll wrap the paintings and bring them to you at the bank. You can deliver them to the boat and I'll accompany Monsieur on his other errands."

"Good," Seigner said. "We can talk over details of your trip to France."

Bertrand went to her and put his hand around her waist. He whispered, "When I return I'll bring a bottle of champagne. This is a great day!"

Charged with excitement, she kissed him. "Thank you, Bertrand." She clung to him for so long, he removed her arms from around his neck, lest he lose his resolve.

Bertrand walked Seigner to the bank and introduced him to his manager Frank Osbourne. He stood to the side while the Frenchman conducted his business. Half and hour later Philippa joined them with her large parcel, looking radiant. She handed it to Bertrand and took Seigner's arm. She would accompany him to the tailor on Montgomery Street.

Instead of going to the harbor with his package, Bertrand returned to her studio. He undid the paintings she had wrapped, rolled them up and stuffed them into a burlap bag he found under the sink. Rummaging around the studio, he found a portfolio. Inside were a dozen landscapes painted in watercolor and oil, each one more inept than the next. He looked for a signature. None, front or back. Good. From a note attached to the top painting he saw that an artist he'd never heard of wanted Philippa to evaluate his work. Bertrand gathered up seven of these paintings, wrapped each canvas, and bound all of them together. The hotel cook found a small wood crate in the yard behind the kitchen. Bertrand packed the paintings in it, labeled it, and wrote out a receipt. Not knowing what to do with the burlap bag holding Philippa's paintings, he knotted its string handles and slung it over his shoulder.

He carried the crate two blocks to the harbor, walking downhill in a stately gait. He hired two seamen lounging along the wharf. He boarded the New World Glory with the seamen and brought them to the office of the chief porter. He told the porter, "Here is a receipt for this shipment of paintings. I want you to give it to Monsieur Seigner as soon as the ship is underway. But, he is not to be able to find the crate for months."

"Why is that, sir?"

"Why does not concern you," Bertrand said. He turned to the seamen, "Bring the crate to the hold, and stash it well under the eaves where it can not be readily found. If there is a cupboard where you can hide it, all the better." He reached into his pocket and drew out three gold nuggets, placing one in the palm of each man. "If there is no such cupboard on this sleek ship, and you have to build one, see to it."

On the way back to Portsmouth Square, Bertrand paused in a lot between the wharf and a row of warehouses. It was chilly for a July day. Low clouds hung in the sky and a wind sprang up off the bay. A number of down-and-out miners were huddled over a barrel, burning refuse and warming their hands over the flames. Bertrand drew near. He still carried the burlap bag containing Philippa's paintings. He slung it off his shoulder and opened it. "Are you cold, fellows?" he asked them.

They nodded, one or two answering in mumbles. Bertrand recognized their despair. They'd arrived months ago, probably from an overland journey

that left them exhausted, sick, and broke. They'd had no luck in the mines. Without steady work, they lived on scraps of beef jerky and cheap liquor. Thoroughly defeated, not one of them met his gaze.

Bertrand opened the burlap bag, took out first one, then the next of Philippa's paintings and tossed them into the barrel. The dying flames leaped at her heavy pieces of canvas. The vagrants leaned back. One grizzled man stood close to Bertrand. "Where'd you git those pitchurs?"

Bertrand smelled dirt and sweat on his clothes and alcohol on his breath. "In a gambling saloon," Bertrand said. The smell of burning linseed oil filled his nostrils, putrid ash choked his throat.

The old man stared at the fire. "The pitchurs do make a lovely flame."

Quartermoon's face glared at Bertrand, then folded in on itself, flared, and sizzled.

Bertrand was reading The Prince when Philippa breezed in to their hotel suite late the next afternoon. He came across a quote that gave him momentary pause. "People should be treated either with generosity or destroyed. They can take revenge from slight injuries–but not from heavy ones."

"Hello, Dearest." She sat in his lap and greeted him with a kiss. The euphoria of being invited to Paris glowed like an aura around her. Seven of her painting were already on their way to the center of the art world. She glanced at his book. "I see you're reading your Bible. Can you put it down long enough to call for some hot water? I want to take a bath. I've been down at the ships for hours." She started to undress, undoing buttons, loosening her corset.

Aroused, he stood up and embraced her. He kissed her bare shoulders. "Where have you been? Both O'Reilly and I were worried."

"Get me hot water and I tell you how I made a new friend today."

He went to the front desk and ordered hot water for her bath. When he returned to their suite Philippa was wearing a silk dressing gown and brushing her hair.

"I rescued a frightened lady in Portsmouth Square," she said. "The poor lamb was surrounded by a passel of sailors drinking under the Custom House flag pool–some because they're in the money and others because they 'ain't.' I've grown used to this rabble. They scare me not one wit, but Miss Abigail Fraser from Delaware is new to town and possesses a sunny nature, if somewhat timid demeanor. I brought her to the gallery to catch her breath. In appreciation she invited me to her home. Instead of a hotel or apartment, however, she took me down to the harbor, where we boarded a sailing ship, imposing with its naked masts as tall and thick as trees. Because housing is

unavailable, she and a number of other ladies have set up housekeeping onboard the ships in which they sailed from Boston and New York, while their husbands tramp about town looking for a lot to build on."

Three porters came to their door with six buckets of hot water, filled Philippa's tub, and left with handsome tips.

"Mrs. Lucinda Brown from Boston joined Miss Fraser and me for afternoon tea," Philippa said. "Mrs. Brown was fairly good company, although I found her recitation of the high prices of goods and services in town repetitive and tedious. I suspect she's accustomed to having more than one servant do for her and is at sea, as it were, under her new circumstances.

"Miss Fraser is an accomplished mathematician and came out to teach, but is waiting for a suitable school to be founded. If I were she, I would meet with the San Francisco City Council and establish a school myself. Opportunities for each and every enterprise abound, but I held my tongue." Philippa sponged her face and neck, relishing the hot water. Strands of wet hair coiled along her shoulders. Bertrand sat on a stool watching her soak in her lavender-scented bath. He ached to make love with her.

"Another matron, Mrs. Pellpot from Boston sat with us, eager for conversation, or more accurately gossip. She was large bosomed, possessing pleasant features, but she had a judgmental quality about her that made me wary. While I sipped tea with these ladies, I studied them as possible portrait subjects.

"Society portraits? You haven't done anything like that before" Bertrand said. "Maybe you could render them in a traditional style."

"The light off the bay was marvelous. I wouldn't have to replicate the oily surface of the water or the foul garbage bobbing at the shoreline. Just femininity."

She frowned. Water dripped from her elbows. "But they're as tough a lot as the boys loitering around the Custom House. Mrs. Brown questioned me closely. I explained my Philadelphia provenance and everyone was impressed with my good Sutter name, but as my relationship to you became clear, my new acquaintances glanced at one another under raised eyebrows. I could see them struggling to apply long-regarded rules of society to this frontier town.

" 'You say you live with Monsieur LaMartine in his hotel without the benefit of marriage?'" Mrs. Brown asked. "She was actually scowling at me as if I were a wayward school girl."

"I told them, 'Yes.' They were shocked."

" 'Perhaps he is your guardian, with you recently widowed and stranded in this frightful town.' " Mrs. Brown said.

"No, we are lovers," I said. "Well, that stopped them all cold. Then Abigail Fraser spoke up with great enthusiasm.

'Mrs. Sutter is an accomplished artist. She has exhibited her work here and a number of her paintings have been sent to Paris for critique.'

"They buzzed about that for a time. Finally Mrs. Pillpot said, 'Isn't Bertrand LaMartine a member of the Legislative Assembly?'

"Mrs. Brown said, 'Yes, and very distinguished. He owns half of San Francisco.'"

"Mrs. Pillpot looked alive." 'Maybe he can find us a decent house.' "

Philippa smiled. "In their eyes my blue blood background and my illicit alliance with you place me somewhere between them and the prostitutes at the gambling houses. At least as an artist, I am an acceptable curiosity."

He helped her out of her tub and toweled her off. They stretched out on their bed. He ran his fingers through her long blonde hair, unraveling the wet tangles. His desire for her grew by the moment.

Oblivious to his needs, Philippa talked on. "Another curiosity has arrived in San Francisco. The ladies said that Jessie Benton Fremont is resting at her hotel awaiting her husband's return from his latest overland journey. She is said to be quite beautiful, brilliant and well-connected. No wonder when she has a senator for a father. Lord knows these people have been mythologized in their own lifetime. How I would love to meet them!"

Bertrand sat up. "I know about Fremont. The maps and survey reports of his exploration expeditions to the west have been scrutinized by nearly every gold miner traveling across the country."

" What a courageous man to have pioneered tracks over mountains and deserts and live to write about it," she said.

"The rumor is that his wife edited the reports, making them so readable that hundreds of settlers were inspired to set out on the Oregon Trail. The discovery of gold in California has given thousands more another reason to come. We must meet them. Fremont is destined to have a major political career in California."

The next day Bertrand summoned Patrick O'Reilly. "I want you to accompany Mrs. Sutter on her every foray. She's made new lady friends and is visiting them on board their ships where they live. She is painting their portraits. The waterfront is a dangerous place, but you know how independent she is. Don't leave her side. When she is safely returned to her studio each afternoon, come to my bank and report what's going on."

Two days later Patrick pulled up a chair next to the massive oak table Bertrand worked at. In the background Bertrand heard the buzz of voices conducting business. Overworked clerks soothed the nerves of newly arrived miners seeking loans to finance their grubstakes.

"Mrs. Sutter and Abigail Fraser are on a first name basis," O'Reilly began. "Mrs. Suttter calls her Miss Gail, which delights the lady as her other intimates call her Abby.

"How have you explained your presence to women?" Bertrand asked.

Patrick laughed. "Mrs. Sutter is always direct. I was introduced as her protector as you are concerned for her safety. The ladies were impressed. Mrs. Sutter has progressed considerably on Miss Gail's portrait. Yesterday she spent about two hours on the deck of the ship. On our walk back to her studio Mrs. Sutter talked about her painting. She said her subject had unusually handsome features. The eyes were a large and lustrous deep blue, the nose well-modeled, and her lips were full and rosy. She looks the least likely person to be a mathematics scholar. Under this beauteous exterior and gentle manner functions a steely mind. Mrs. Sutter believes she must take after her father, yet resemble her mother in looks."

Bertrand sat back in surprise. He didn't expect this much detail. "It looks like you're enjoying this assignment."

"That I am, Sir. I am learning about art. Mrs. Sutter posed Miss Gail sitting on a straw chair at the bow of her ship, her head bent over a book. She persuaded her to take off her cap so the crown of her hair and a curl or two over her brow lend softness. Mrs. Sutter had a sailor run up a small canvas sail to serve as a drape. It's very clever how the sail screens the direct sunlight, diffusing it. She decided to paint miss Gail's gray dress coral to complement the coloring of the skin of her arms under rolled-up sleeves. Unlike her other paintings, Mrs. Sutter's brushwork on this portrait is delicate."

"So you find it pleasing so far?"

"I do."

"Excellent," Bertrand said. "She will sell this painting. Her first."

"She explained she was adamant about lifting the portrait above what she calls simpering sentimentality, so she is giving the quality of a genre scene," Patrick said. "I don't know what that means, except that living on a ship at anchor in San Francisco Bay is distinctly unique from a woman's everyday experience. Mrs. Sutter says painting in this location constitutes a bit of irony to keep her going whilst in the company of so many ladies."

Bertrand escorted Philippa between the overlit, raucous gambling tables on the first floor of the Parker House. "Why are we dining here?" she complained.

"Because until my banquet room is finished, it's the best fare in town, don't you agree Thomas?"

"He's right, Mrs. Sutter," Thomas Larkin said, climbing the red carpeted staircase behind them to a private dining room. When the oak doors were closed and the wall sconces and candelabra lit by waiters, the paneled room took on a quiet elegance. Bertrand seated Philippa at one end of the table and the gentleman pulled up their chairs, one on each side of her. "You look lovely tonight in your white silk gown," Thomas said to her.

"Thank you, Mr. Larkin."

"We have known one another long enough. Let us use our first names, shall we?"

She nodded and touched his arm with her gloved hand. Bertrand was impressed by Larkin's frilled dress shirt, frock coat and silk cravat. He made a mental note to ask Thomas about a good tailor. He intended to stand out in every way at the Constitutional Convention in Monterey the next month.

They were served oxtail soup, followed by baked trout. Three waiters brought out roasted beef, stewed kidneys, new potatoes and asparagus, lifting silver domes off French porcelain plates simultaneously. "How did you spend your day, Philippa?" Thomas asked.

"I am painting portraits on board ship with new companions. Mrs. Lucinda Brown watched me paint a portrait of Miss Abigail Fraser, a teacher, and complained it was vain and vaguely rendered. She was not sure she liked my 'unsuitably gay' colors. Nevertheless, she commissioned one of herself.

"Now I have a challenge!" Philippa sipped her wine. "As those New England women so often are afflicted, she is hawk-faced. What I will have to do is catch an impression of her. I will pose her with her fourteen-year-old daughter, Mirabelle, seated on two deck chairs at right angles to one other, the mother reading to the girl. I've thought it all through. With the light coming from Mrs. Brown's right, I'll shade her nose and the plane of her cheek. I'll add a bit of lace to dangle from her sleeve. Although young Mirabelle is understandably restless. Mrs. Brown likes being posed on deck. She had a lemon tree brought on board to simulate a garden, and now I must paint that in. Mirabelle's eyes are a light gray-brown, most unusual. Unfortunately she has inherited the same nose, so I'll downplay it by calling attention to the eyes and mouth. I'll have her look at the viewer with an expectant gaze, as if catching sight of her future."

"How you are enjoying this!" Thomas said.

"Yes. I've found these normally austere ladies like having their likenesses recorded in pastel colors and their sharp features softened by flattering brushwork. These paintings, which I'm sure they consider to be unfinished oil

sketches, capture the novelty of living on board ship. No doubt they will take them home as amusing souvenirs of a trying adventure."

"But they must buy them," Bertrand interjected. "Surely, you won't give them away. Portraits can be a profitable new direction for you."

Philippa barely gave him a glance. "Today I met the famous Jessie Fremont!" she exclaimed. "She is as petite as I am. Her satin gown was too heavy and dark for our weather. Her complexion was drawn from the long trip through Panama, but I expect she will recover her bloom. I think of how I must have looked after that exhausting journey. She wore her dark hair parted in the middle. Her deep hazel eyes missed nothing. I was introduced as John Sutter's young cousin's widow and very tentatively as Bernard LaMartine's friend. As a senator's daughter, Mrs. Fremont is used to sizing up situations quickly. As she studied my face I could see her warring with herself, whether or not to accept me socially.

"When I told her that Monsieur LaMartine was named a delegate from San Francisco District Assembly to the Constitutional Convention, her head went up, like a Labrador sniffing another dog's scent. She has an imperious way about her that fascinates me. She is so sure of herself. She asked me where Monsieur LaMartine stood on the slavery question. She was quite stern. 'You know that Washington is hesitant to give this territory statehood until that is resolved,' she said.

"I told her that Monsieur La Martine and I both want to prohibit slavery. I assured her that no man who has stood up to his knees in icy water swinging a pickaxe for sixteen dollars a day wants to see slaves toiling next to him, while their master snaps a whip."

"Then Mrs. Fremont gave me a slow, full smile. When she looked at the portrait of Mrs. Brown and her daughter, she asked me a number of questions about my technique. 'I am leaving tomorrow for Monterey where Colonel Fremont awaits me.' she said. 'I would like you and Monsieur La Martine to visit. I want you to paint my husband's portrait, if he will sit still long enough,' she added with a tinkling laugh. I assured her he could read or write or dictate to an assistant while I worked. Mrs. Fremont left for her afternoon rest, and within several hours, I received commissions from three more Eastern matrons."

Larkin laughed, "I'd say you have been most heartily accepted."

Bertrand leaned forward in his chair. "But this is a marvelous invitation to visit the Fremonts. Good work, Philippa."

She turned to him. "You look as if I have given you the world."

"You have, my darling." He put an arm around her shoulders and kissed her full on the lips. She glanced at the waiters and blushed at his impropriety. Larkin looked amused.

"When did she ask you to come?" Bertrand asked.

"We set no particular time."

"We must go immediately. I'll send a messenger down there first thing in the morning."

"Why the urgency?" Philippa asked. "Surely they will want time to get settled in their house."

"Fremont is my ticket in. That they have asked for us is a miracle of timing."

"Come along to Monterey," Larkin said. "You can stay with me if the Fremonts are not ready to receive you."

At Philippa's hesitancy, Larkin took her hand. "Bertrand is ambitious and eager to start his political future. He has the energy and vision we need. Your Cousin John and I will back him at the convention, but if he can become acquainted on his own terms with a national figure like Fremont, he has a greater chance of achieving his goals."

# Chapter Twelve

Late in the afternoon on a hot August day Philippa and Bertrand disembarked from the sloop in Monterey onto the pier. Gregorio, a young Indian who introduced himself as Colonel Fremont's scout from the California Battalion, greeted them and took their bags, escorting them up the hill to the house of Senora Jose Castro, where the Fremonts were staying. The walk was only a short distance, but Philippa wanted it to take an hour. She was on fire with an idea she wanted Bertrand to agree to, but she felt shy to bring it up. What if he said 'no?' After thinking about it for weeks, she suddenly felt an urgency to get the matter settled. "Let's stop a moment," she said to Bertrand.

They stood by a seawall and she removed her straw hat to let the breeze cool her. He put his arm around her waist and gently kissed her perspiring forehead. She took his hands in hers. "Bertrand, I want us to be married."

A grin careened across his face. "I've yearned to hear you say it, my darling."

"Why have you not spoken first?" she asked.

"It must be your decision. Are you ready? Are you over Martin? I will not have three of us in this marriage."

She looked out over the sparkling bay, traced the purpling horizon line, and forced herself to stare at the sun. Its unforgiving rays brought searing tears, but no sadness. The pain of her loss was gone. "Martin was my young heart. You are my life now. I love you and I want us to be together." They embraced. Their kisses searched deeper and deeper.

They walked with arms around each other a few steps behind Gregorio and came to a pueblo square. She felt exhilarated as dozens of Spanish-

speaking people strolled around her, a sea of humanity. Guitar music delighted her. Shrieking children darted underfoot. She laughed.

"Let's get married soon," he said. "Tonight in this square." He took off the gold nugget ring he always wore on his pinky and slid it over her finger. Light glinting off the water leaping from the fountain and reflected in his black eyes. She saw for the first time in the center of his irises a hint of brown mixed with the black. His earnestness moved her deeply. "This is my promise, Philippa. I will always be faithful to you."

When they entered the Spanish house, they stood in the doorway until their eyes adjusted to the dim interior. Mrs. Fremont rustled across the wood floor to greet Philippa, and then beamed at Bertrand as Philippa introduced him. She ushered them inside. As they looked around Mrs. Fremont said, "The Castro family has been so kind as to allow us to rent a wing of this lovely house while they are away. We're delighted to have you visit with us. Colonel Fremont had an array of household goods shipped down from San Francisco to give the house a homey feeling. I will show you around, but first come sit by me and we will become acquainted."

She led them to a leather couch covered with damask and satin-covered pillows. An immense bear-skin rug covered the floor. Philippa stepped around its yawning jaw of yellowed teeth and stared into its glassy eyes. She recognized the teak furnishings imported from China as similar to the ones she had seen in tent stores around San Francisco. The wicker chairs looked to have been shipped from a Caribbean island, which confused her. Gregorio, the Indian who had greeted them at the wharf, served tea and tinned biscuits.

"Monsieur La Martine," Jessie began, "I invited Mrs. Sutter here because I want her to paint Colonel Fremont's portrait in her bold style. She is obviously classically trained, but it is her ability to depart from tradition that has captured my imagination. I believe she has a great future as an artist."

Bertrand nodded. "I concur, Madame Fremont. Mrs. Sutter is not afraid to take a risk, a trait of character valuable to art as well as overland exploration. 'To conquer without risk is to triumph without glory.' "

"I see you reference my husband's career by quoting from Le Cid." Jessie said.

"Your husband's courage is legendary," Bertrand replied. "For years as a trapper and trader, I relied on his maps and astronomical findings. He has found the door to California and opened it to the world."

Jessie laughed. "I do believe discovery of gold has expedited the current influx. But let us talk of Mrs. Sutter's work. "I say it exudes a fresh, raw courage. What is your opinion?"

"I leave that to the experts, Madame." Seeing he was at a loss to discuss her style of painting, Jessie Fremont covered the awkward moment by quickly

turning to Philippa and stretching out her hand. Her clasp was firm. Her smile was genuine, touching those overly large eyes, a confirmation of extended friendship. Even before she spoke, Philippa was thinking about how she would paint a new portrait of Jessie. "Now, my dear Mrs. Sutter, let me take you to another room where you may rest from your journey. Colonel Fremont is on his way. We are going to take a carriage ride to show you our countryside."

Philippa fell asleep in a cool bedroom of the Castro house with a peace of mind she had not experienced in a year. She and Bertrand were about to embark on a new life. Deep down she felt qualms, but there were uncertainties about any new venture. She awakened feeling refreshed. She splashed water on her face from a crystal punch bowl set on an inlaid teak night stand, and walked across the woven straw mat that served as a carpet. She marveled anew at the odd assortment of European and Asian furnishings for a Spanish house.

"Greetings!" she heard a man say from the next room. "Welcome, Monsieur La Martine. This is Lily. Curtsey now, my dear, and say hello." Philippa smiled to herself. The Colonel had returned with his seven-year-old daughter. Philippa smoothed her dress and slipped on her shoes.

"And this must be Mrs. Sutter," Colonel Fremont said as she entered the bear-skin room. He took her hand and held it to his lips. Philippa stared into his eagle eyes. She envisioned him standing on Rocky Mountain peaks looking across valleys. "What magnificent vistas you have seen, Colonel," she said.

"Few as rare as yourself, Madame," he said.

She flushed with embarrassment. "It is an honor to meet you."

He regarded her closely, even as she was observing him. Who did he see? A petite woman who in size, shape and vitality resembled his wife? Did he see La Martine's mistress? A portrait artist? Possibly all three. He was a diminutive man with compelling, dark eyes, a compact, robust torso, and a large head with towers of well-trimmed hair and beard. She'd have to begin his portrait with sketches to get the proportions exactly right. His coloring would be a challenge. His complexion showed wear of harsh outdoor life. Streaks of silver wove through his hair. His energy and vision are what she would strive to capture. Bertrand came forward and took her arm, escorting her outside where a carriage waited.

Philippa was amazed to see such a luxurious vehicle. The enormous surrey's lacquer finish and gold scroll work gleamed in the sunlight. The interior was upholstered with fragrant leather, Spanish, she presumed. Mules stood in harness, heads down. Colonel Fremont handed her in. She saw compartments for storing baggage and rolled-up leather curtains that would protect against rain. "This is magnificent," she said, making room for Jessie and Lily as they climbed in.

"I had it specially made in New Jersey for my wife," Fremont said proudly. "It has six seats. Unique in California. Had it shipped around the Horn."

"Look, Mrs. Sutter," Lily said. The slender, tall girl stood up and folded her seat back flat. "We have beds!"

"What fun," Philippa said. "Do you camp overnight?"

"We do indeed! I used to be afraid when the Indians poked their heads through the trees, but Father knows their language."

"We'll be safe," she assured the child. "Monsieur La Martine also knows how to talk to them."

Bertrand sat up front with Fremont and Jessie sat with Philippa. Lily took a side seat and was content to keep to herself. They climbed a hill to a plateau, then followed a trail through fragrant pines, doubling back to reach the higher elevation. At the top they paused to look at the bay. Stunted pines Philippa had never seen before turned their backs to the sea and leaned against the cliffs. "What are those?" she asked Jessie.

"Colonel Fremont says they are a type of cypress. See how the wind has blown their brittle boughs against the rocks. They look tortured to me," Jessie said. "Tomorrow we will take you to our ranch Las Mariposas. Colonel Fremont wants Monsieur La Martine's opinion on his gold mining operation."

At nine the next morning they set off in the surrey. The Colonel drove the carriage mules with Bertrand at his side. Philippa and Jessie sat in the middle seats. Lily arranged herself in the boot, book in hand. Gregorio led a train of pack mules with panniers stocked with food and blankets.

Once they were underway Jessie said, "We'll have a splendid picnic as soon as we cross the valley. Did you bring your painting kit?"

"Yes," Philippa answered.

Jessie leaned forward and tapped her husband's shoulder. "John, dear, I want you to find time at the ranch to allow Mrs. Sutter to begin her portrait of you."

He looked over his shoulder. "Now, Jessie, I told you I won't do it."

"Oh, but you must!"

The two men looked at each other and exchanged knowing smiles.

Jessie stood up and placed both hands on her husband's shoulders. The wind knocked her bonnet off; it fell to her back, still tied around her neck by its silk ribbons. She swayed dangerously from side to side on her small feet as the carriage jolted along the trail. Strands of her black hair came loose and blew about her face. Air billowed through her loose sleeves.

"Mother, what are you doing?" cried Lily.

"Getting your Father's attention," she shouted back.

Fremont gave the reins to Bertrand and turned in his seat, half standing. Jessie gave him a radiant smile.

He laughed. "If it means so much to you, I will sit for Madame Sutter," the Colonel conceded.

Philippa saw the look that passed between them. There was nothing one would not do to please the other. Sitting reluctantly for his portrait was just one more way that John Fremont showed his love to Jessie. Philippa thought of the words of endearment they exchanged so naturally. They collaborated completely, trusted implicitly. This was what Philippa would strive to create, a marriage untainted by questions of integrity. Fremont was in line to be named the first senator from California. Jessie's father was Thomas Hart Benton, the esteemed democratic senator from Missouri. If Bertrand were to participate in politics at this level, he would have to keep to the high ground.

Their journey up and down the ridges of the Pacific Coast Range of mountains was laborious. Philippa was astounded by the length and breadth of the valley they crossed. The midsummer air was intensely hot. They kept the leather curtains rolled up for air and lay down on the reversible seats to nap. Philippa soon grew accustomed to the swaying movement of the carriage. She drifted in and out of sleep, savoring the exotic smell the Moroccan leather cushion, mixed with the scent of roadside sage. The fragrant heat penetrated her skin and bathed her nerves with its balm. Jessie stirred in her sleep, and Philippa smiled to herself. She liked Jessie. He felt she could confide in this strong woman who possessed such zest for life. They could be great friends.

They spent the night in a grove of spring green cottonwoods by a stream. Lily demonstrated her Indian scouting skills by fetching firewood and stones to create an overly large cookfire. While Gregorio and Bertrand roasted cuts of venison and whole potatoes, Philippa sketched the Colonel as he walked about, setting up tents. Then she put her charcoal aside and watched him go about his tasks to impress his movements in her memory. Surely he was the nation's most experienced and efficient outdoorsman. When he finally lit a pipe and rested on a boulder near the fire, she drew closer to him and began to sketch in earnest. Coffee bubbled in a tin pot over the fire.

Bertrand settled next to him. Two fellow Frenchmen, they had more in common than they realized. Philippa had heard the rumor of Fremont's illegitimate birth, a scourge that was said to drive him to nearly inhuman endeavors. His strong will to rise above his stigma probably sustained him during the physical and emotional hardships of leading men across the alien, frozen landscape of the Rocky Mountains. Bertrand was driven in much the same way.

"Las Mariposas belongs to me," Fremont said to Bertrand. "I've got the deed for the grant. I've hired Mexicans to mine the rivers for me, but we're

overrun with random gold seekers who stand in the water and pan right next to them. Apparently my mineral rights are only for gold in the land and not on its surface."

"By 'in it' you mean underground veins," Bertrand said.

"Yes," Fremont answered. "We're finding so much surface gold I think it must be washing down river from a vein inside the cliffs. You're the most experienced prospector I know, La Martine. I want you to help me find the source of the quartz."

Across the camp fire Philippa caught Bertrand's eye. He returned her glance. He was as excited as she had ever seen him.

The next day they continued into the Sierra Nevada foothills, the mules pulling them higher and higher along twining trails. Pine trees sprouted, tall, short, young, old--ubiquitous. The terrain was much like Dry Diggings. Finally they began to descend on a twisting trail. Errant branches of live oaks poked into the carriage. Philippa held her breath as the carriage tilted forward and their belongings slid to the floor. Jessie pointed down. "We're coming to Bear Valley," she said. "We're almost there."

Evening had descended by the time they came to a stop in a clearing of pines by the river. Philippa walked along the mossy bank, stretching her legs. Stars studded the sky; the mountain air sparkled like May wine. By the light of oil lamps and firelight she helped to set up the tents. "We must have separate tents again," Bertrand whispered in her ear as they struggled with the canvas and poles.

"I understand," she said. "But you'll have to make up for it when we're back in San Francisco."

He placed his hand on her hip, sliding it down to her buttocks. His touch warmed her in so many ways. "Maybe if we tell them we are promised we can share a tent." She felt reassured, loved, desired. She let his hand rest a moment before gently removing it. "I don't mind bunking with Lily. She's a sweet child." Philippa walked to her tent and fell asleep on her cot the instant she lay her head back on the pillow.

By the time Philippa awoke, the men had breakfasted and left for the mines, leaving Gregorio to keep an eye on the camp. Philippa bathed in the river quickly and dressed leisurely, savoring the warmth of the sun on her arms and legs. Jessie was reading to Lily under a shading of tall pines. Philippa approached with her painting box and easel. "I see my subject has fled."

"They've disappeared into the caves with hammers and chisels to search for the quartz vein," Jessie said. "Monsieur La Martine has sent a messenger to

fetch an engineer colleague from New Almaden, where they mine quicksilver. He is to bring boring equipment. They are as excited as school boys."

"I don't think Colonel Fremont really wants me to paint his portrait."

Jessie closed her book and laughed. "Would you agree to doing one of Lily and me?"

"I would be delighted."

"No, Mother. I refuse to spend this day sitting still," Lily said. She ran off. Both women watched in dismay as she skipped down to the river. "She is as stubborn as her father," Jessie said.

"I'd like to paint another portrait of you," Philippa said. "I feel I did not capture the essence of your spirit before."

"Oh, I think you did, but I will happily sit again," Jessie said. Philippa set up her easel, found a rock on which to place her paint box, and posed Jessie in the camp chair. Fortunately it had a canvas back, so she would be comfortable sitting for a long period. "You may read," if you wish.

"No, I'm just going to enjoy nature," Jessie said with a sigh. She looked off to the distance and seemed to go into a trance.

Philippa felt rejuvenated by the journey and brisk morning air, eager to work. She set out unmixed colors on her palette and then looked closely at her subject. Jessie Benton Fremont's natural beauty was enhanced by an uncommon confidence. Whether camping in the Sierras or dancing at a Washington ball, she was at home in the world. It was this spirit that Philippa wanted to capture. She would work in pastel tones, shadowed sufficiently to suggest Jessie's complexity. This was a thoughtful woman with considered opinions. Philippa suspected she possessed a will as steely as her husband's.

An hour went by. The charcoal sketch was complete. Although Philippa stood as she worked and had not stopped to rest, she did not feel tired. She never wearied once she began a painting. She began to wash the canvas with a light beige undercoat. She picked up a brush to begin painting Jessie' rosy complexion.

"Why do you not marry him?" Jessie suddenly said.

"What?"

"Oh, forgive me," Jessie said. "You and I are linked so closely in this endeavor, I feel as if we have been speaking, when all the while, I have been conversing with myself in my head."

Philippa paused, paintbrush in the air. "What is the nature of the conversation?"

"It is clear to me how much you and Monsieur La Martine love one another," Jessie began. "He looks at you with such tenderness, and you return

his looks. He sees to your every comfort. He cherishes you. Has he asked for your hand?"

"Yes, we are promised." Philippa held up her right hand to show off Bertrand's gold nugget ring.

"I am so happy for you both. Monsieur La Martine has an auspicious future as a politician, but he needs your guiding hand."

"How so?" Philippa asked.

Jessie paused to collect her thoughts. "Under his guise as the gallant, he is rough around the edges. He has the makings of a rogue. He is ambitious and opportunistic. No doubt he is driven as well by events of his family's past. I've seen that look in my husband's eyes. Like my husband, he has good cause."

Philippa looked closely at her. "Then you know the story of Bertrand's father."

"Yes. He was a traitor to France." Jessie drew a deep breath, "You may have heard a rumor that my husband was born illegitimately. It is true." They smiled grimly at one another. Philippa walked to Jessie's chair, took her hands in hers and pressed them. "I see that we both understand the will of a man obsessed by the need for vindication. We know the lengths he will go to achieve acceptance."

But Philippa did not know what lengths Bertrand would go and it scared her. "Let's walk along the creek."

Jessie joined her. "You are in a position to influence Bertrand and shape his future. He loves you. He sees you as his equal, which is very rare in a marriage."

Philippa turned to her. "Why do you take such interest in us?"

Jessie raised her arms and looked to the sky. "I long to stay here. But I'm sure John will be selected as senator, and we will return to Washington. We are only passing through. But you and Bertrand with your extraordinary talents are the future of California. You are in a position to sink roots into this new state, strengthen it, guide it and unite its diverse people. I envy you!"

Philippa pulled her cot closer to Bertrand's. "I had no idea how much I would enjoy the luxury of tent camping."

"Ah, well this is Las Mariposas. The weather is warm and dry. We have servants see to us and good friends. We'll remember these days fondly," he said, kissing her neck.

"I value Jessie's confidences. She sees into my heart. She is very direct and makes it her business to know me through and through. No place to hide! She opens me up and makes me realize how much I have missed the friendship

of a kindred friend. I must tell you she's heard rumors of your nefarious business dealings."

Bertrand leaned over onto his back and sighed. "I presume she's warned you to keep a sharp eye on me to see I do not bring myself to disgrace. She's an experienced helpmate. Her husband went through a nasty Court Martial."

"Yes, and as a result of the strain, she lost a baby," Philippa said. "So much tragedy, yet they triumphed over it."

He gripped her hand. "We don't know what's ahead. The convention starts in two weeks and could go on for months. Let's get married as soon as we return to Monterey. I'm sure the Fremonts would enjoy putting on a celebration for us."

"Yes, let's plan it," she said. "John and Jessie have such fun together. I love the way they talk in loud voices and walk through the chaparral in wide strides. Between his exploration of thousands of miles of frontier, her connections in congress, and now the seemingly endless pockets of gold along their rivers, they own the world."

"Or soon will," he said. "I'm convinced the Fremonts are sitting on a gold quartz mine that will pump out millions of dollars worth of gold. You should see all the equipment our engineer Douglas Campbell hauled over the trails by donkeys."

"Is it dangerous work?" she asked.

"We wear protective head and eye cover, but mostly we're boring into the walls and there's not a lot of rock cascading around us, " he said.

Philippa's second portrait of Jessie was such a success, Jessie asked permission to make an engraving of it and run off a number of prints to help her become more well known in the Eastern states. John Fremont expected a realistic picture, more along the lines of a Samuel Stallman Osgood, who he'd heard had come out to the California gold fields to mine his own wealth as a portrait painter.

As a gentle dusk surrounded them, Fremont regarded Philippa over their camp supper table. The fire crackled. "Tell me about this portrait."

"Mrs. Fremont did not ask for a precise image of herself. I have posed her in a chair against an indeterminate leafy green background. Her dark eyes gaze straight ahead, but she is not confrontational. She regards the viewer with the confidence of an Eastern-born lady and the zeal of a western adventurer. I've employed a freer brush stroke than I used with the portraits of the San Francisco ladies I painted. With a combination of pastel and primary colors I've shaped the serious and light-hearted sides to her character."

Fremont nodded. He was a man accustomed to evaluating new ways. "Fortunately Mrs. Fremont is more thoroughly educated in painting than I. She

has studied the various schools of art, and is able to make the leap between the traditional approach and your innovative way of working."

For five days the sounds of compressors and boring instruments echoing off rocky cliffs filled the hazy air. Philippa, Jessie and Lily were picnicking on cold chicken, cucumber and tomato salad in the shade of a stand of oaks, chatting and ignoring the discordant sounds as best they could. Philippa turned over on the Mexican blanket and dozed. A shadow moving through the sunlight startled her eyes open. Bertrand ran across the tall grass, shimmering with summer heat. He shouted for them to come. Within moments they entered the cave-like entrance to the cliff. Phillipa shivered as a rush of cold air bathed her arms. Bertrand lit a lamp and guided them to a turning, then another. They stepped around shards of rock and stopped at a bored out section of the cliff wall. Douglas Campbell respectively stood back against his compressor, allowing Bertrand to take the lead. Bertrand lifted out a polished slab of what looked to be glass, so beautifully did it sparkle in the light from the lantern. He handed it to Fremont.

"My God, look at the gold," John whispered.

Bertrand set another piece of quartz on a boulder and, taking his hammer and chisel, tapped, then split it into chunks that fell away. He held a newly split piece to the light. "This is where the vein of gold has passed through it." He tapped gently at the chunk with his chisel. When a nugget of gold tumbled out, he placed it in Jessie's hand. He clapped Fremont on his back. "You were right. The source of a mountain of gold lay on your property and it's all yours. You have full title to it. No one can touch it."

"You've done a fine joy, Mr. Campbell," Jessie said.

Campbell spoke up. "Monsieur La Martine knew where to look. I only provided the muscle."

They emerged from the darkness, stunned. Bertrand and Fremont walked ahead. Over Jessie's frantic exclamations, Philippa overheard fragments of what the men were saying: "How deep do you think the vein is...may be more than one...I'll need ore crushing machines....I'd suggest you get a good lawyer over here to protect your deed....I'll need blasting powder...By God, a quartz mine...going to cost me a lot of capital to work it."

One statement she heard in its entirety. Fremont stopped walking and faced Bertrand. "You found it, La Martine. I thank you. I want you to line up some financiers for me, and I'll start with a sizable loan from your bank. Shall we say $100,000?"

On the balmy evening of August 25th the Fremonts stood up as witnesses for Philippa and Bertrand at their wedding ceremony, conducted by the Parish

priest and a host of young acolytes holding candles. Senora Jose Castro, who returned for the occasion, opened her spacious home and decorated her walled garden with a profusion of cut flowers and banks of votive candle stands borrowed from the church. Flares and lanterns lit the furthest reaches of the patio walls and low hanging branches of fruit trees with soft light. Wearing a borrowed Spanish red dress, white mantilla, and carrying a bouquet of roses, Philippa walked on air out of the house and into the garden on the arm of Cousin John, who gave her away with a heartfelt, and mercifully brief, tribute. With tears in his eyes he told guests he'd known Bertrand for many years and considered him a son, and Philippa a daughter. The townspeople climbed on each others shoulders to look over the wall. They cheered, sang, and set off fireworks. Rival guitar and horn players took up their posts at either end of the square.

The guests mingled, a combination of acquaintances of the Fremonts and delegates in town for the convention. The wines were strong and plentiful. Peter Burnett, a former judge from Oregon, drank too much and joked about whether he or Bertrand would be elected first governor of California. Dr. William Gwin, a Mississippi congressman toasted them at length. At his conclusion, a number of delegates good-naturedly jeered at him for electioneering.

"Who is this bore?" Philippa whispered to Bertrand.

" He's favored to be the other senator to go back to Washington with Fremont," Bertrand said, squeezing his hand around her waist.

After the toasts everyone threw rose petals at them and they were led to an olive tree where a bundle wrapped in decorated paper hung suspended by a rope. Senora Castro had a big grin on her face as she handed Philippa an elm branch. Philippa was completely mystified. Bertrand whispered to her that the bundle was a pinata and to give it a good poke so it would break and fall, spilling its contents, a Spanish custom. Even in her high-heels Philippa could not reach it, so they lowered the rope, amid a good deal of laughing. She swung the stick like an ax and everyone cheered as a shower of candies, small wood-carved animals and tiny, costumed dolls fell to the patio. The children outside the wall swarmed through the gate and scrambled to collect the treats.

They dined on guisado, a local stew of meat, rice and hot peppers, and fresh vegetables from neighbor's gardens. She placed her hand over Bertrand's as they cut through the fragrant marzipan wedding cake. Suddenly she began to shake. Bertrand supported her. "What is it?"

"I've never been so happy," Philippa said through her tears. "But I miss my mother and father."

"Imagine they are here with us," he said in low voice that both soothed and thrilled her. "Just over there by the lemon tree, smiling, loving you, loving your courage." The townspeople sang and clapped their hands, encouraging

them to kiss in front of everyone. The Fremonts embraced them, waved goodbye and handed them into their surrey with a basket of strawberries, wine glasses and an opened bottle of champagne. Philippa was grateful Giorgio was at the reins, because they were in no condition to negotiate the trail to the home of Senor and Senora Guadalupe, who had given them their guest house for a week.

*Monterey, September 16, 1849*

*Dearest Mother,*

*You will be happy to know Bertrand and I were married August 25th at a gorgeous evening ceremony here at the Castro adobe. The Fremonts stood up for us and Cousin John gave me away, and my heart was filled with thoughts of you. So I begin a new life, full of love and at peace.*

*We continue to stay with the Fremonts. Last month Bertrand and an engineer colleague found a quartz mine on their ranch Las Mariposes.. The quartz is shot through with veins of gold. Not only do the Fremonts have heaps of placer gold, they also have access to its source. It is rare enough to find gold on land that one owns, but to find it embedded in the rock cliffs of your property is extraordinary. The bears in Bear Valley have retreated to make room for the sharks.*

*Quartz mining is big business. Colonel Fremont lives in a tent up there interviewing lawyers, financiers, mining experts, while Jessie, her daughter, Lily, Bertrand and I have returned to in Monterey.*

*So much news. Bertrand and his fellow delegates are making progress at the constitutional convention being held here. Even though California is not yet a state, they are selecting leaders. They sit all day in the stuffy Colton Hall, discussing a number of problems, among them the slavery question, which is a sensitive issue with the southerners among them. Makes me think of our founding fathers hammering out our original constitution in Philadelphia. A particularly thorny problem that has arisen is the interests of the ranchers who own vast land grants, versus the miners, who want to join the Union. The ranchers have land, not money, and cannot pay the property taxes that would be levied if California were to become a state. They want to remain a territory and let the U.S. government police us. Bertrand thinks the miners will prevail because they are the majority.*

*Fremont is too busy with his mining to attend the convention. Even though he was found guilty in a court-martial last year, he is so popular among the delegates he is favored for senator. We Californians are a resilient lot! Because Bertrand has become close to Fremont, advising him on prospecting as well as finance, a number of delegates thought he would accompany Fremont back to Washington as our second senator. Instead Bernard is running for Governor. Think of that, Mother, Governor of California! Colonel Larkin and Colonel Fremont are backing him for that post. I thought Cousin John would support Bertrand's campaign, but it turns out he would also like to be Governor and is running his own campaign.*

*During the past months Bertrand has established a new venture: La Martine Express Company. Miners bring their gold dust to company representatives who travel with armed guards between camps and purchases it at $14 to $16 an ounce, depending upon its quality. The representatives charge a ten percent shipping and insurance fee to bring it to his bank in San Francisco, or a twenty percent fee to ship the gold dust to banking agents he has contracted with in New York and Boston. Bertrand expects a major bank will buy up his and other pioneer express companies by year end. He is positioning himself to sell out handsomely–just the kind of business deal he is becoming celebrated for.*

*I pray daily for your health and well-being. How I wish you could be here with me to share these exciting days.*

*Your loving daughter, Philippa.*

At the beginning of October Bertrand left the Casa Castro and warm hospitality of the Fremonts to bunk in with Thomas Larkin while attending the convention meetings. Philippa went back to San Francisco to work on her painting. With time alone she began to think about when she would schedule her trip to Paris. Bertrand wanted her to stay in California until the gubernatorial election had been decided. If he was not elected Governor, he would run for the second senatorial position. That campaign could go on through December.

Philippa was torn. She wanted to support Bertrand, and she was equally eager to pursue the stunning opportunity to come to France Henri Seigner had offered her. She did not want to lose time or Seigner's interest. She had heard nothing from him since he'd sailed, even though he could have posted a letter from Panama. She walked up and down the steep San Francisco hills, envisioning a January trip, steeling herself to take the Panama route instead of going around the Horn. Despite the wretched memories of Martin's death, she would do it. She purchased a steamship ticket with the last of her gold money for a January 5th sailing. Between now and then she would paint non-stop, missing Bertrand desperately in Monterey, but determined to finish half-a-dozen landscapes and portraits to take to Paris with her.

Returning to the artist colony in town was stimulating. She saw fellow artists frequently and rejoiced in their conversations. After working nearly all one night, she was too stimulated to sleep. She visited Samuel Osgood in his studio and plundered his breakfast tray for sourdough rolls and pineapple from the Kanakas. He was finishing a portrait of Cousin John that flabbergasted her with its accuracy, except for the shoulders, which he made to slope like an Eastern effete, instead of the robust Army officer John thought of himself. When she pointed out this flaw, Osgood shrugged. He was more interested in capturing expression than precise physiognomy. And indeed, the face had a likeness so real, she felt Cousin John's presence. Rather unnerving. Osgood had captured John's coloring perfectly, the flush of his cheeks, the grey-blue of

the eyes. And all this he'd created from a sketch he made at the fort on his way back from the gold fields. What a prodigious memory! She asked about the canvas. Strange to say, Osgood used mattress ticking, which apparently held oil paint beautifully. She resolved to find some.

A week later, John Prendergast stopped in her studio to chat. While she'd been gone, he'd organized an artists's group of a dozen members, many of whom trekked back and forth to the rivers to sketch and mine a nugget now and then. Five or six artists met regularly in Prendergast's studio on Montgomery Street. They showed their work to one another and talked about color and perspective problems. Audubon was in the club as was Hall Martin, Samuel Osgood and the engraver Harrison Eastman. They were all still smarting from the disappointing critiques they'd received from Pierson and Seigner following their joint exhibition. Philippa mentioned, but did not dwell on the opportunity Seigner offered her to come to Paris, knowing that being singled out among her artist colleagues could cool her warm relationship with them.

Prendergast had interrupted her at work on a landscape. Even though she was desperate to get back to her painting, she had a Chinese maid serve them tea and fresh scones with strawberry jam. He sat back in a deep club chair in the gallery. Now that he'd shaved off his bushy mustache, he looked cleaner, more youthful. "John, I do believe your English reserve is at last receding," she said with a twinkle. "What do you really talk about at your artist meetings?"

"How to sell our work! Despite the fortunes being made around us, no one is buying serious art. All they want are souvenir drawings."

"That's because they're living like transients," Philippa said. "The most successful of them will sink roots here. Once their wives and families come and they set up homes in large numbers they will want to display paintings."

They talked awhile. Prendergast poured a rich Spanish port he'd brought as a wedding gift into their empty tea cups, and as the sun set they watched scores of purposeful men crossing the dusty square, heads bent as they hurry on their errands. "New artists are working in San Francisco now," he said. "Why don't we mount another joint exhibition in six months? We'll get the newspapers to advertise it, draw huge crowds. We'll raise money for a charitable organization." His dark eyes lit up. He looked closely at her and a wistful expression came over his face. "But you'll be in Paris."

She nodded.

"I'm very happy for you, Philippa," he said.

She stood and paced. "I'm torn about this journey. I want to show and explain my work. I want to teach my new technique, but I loathe leaving Bertrand, even for a few months."

"You love him," John said.

"I adore him. I am bewitched. I know his faults and strengths. I should stay here to guide him on his political career. Like so many entrepreneurs, he tends to surge forward without regard to scruples, but he will listen to me."

"I've heard rumors."

She stared at him. "What have you heard?"

John demurred, embarrassed to gossip until she pressed him. Finally he said, "You know how valuable lumber is in San Francisco. Hundreds of people are trying to build stores and houses. I heard Bertrand pre-empted a shipment of lumber from across the bay. When the ship tied up to his wharf he commandeered the cargo and threatened to levy an outrageous tax unless the shippers turned it over to him."

She was speechless.

"He was able to accelerate the construction of his warehouses by three months. That's nearly a hundred thousand dollars in rent for him."

She wrapped her arms across her chest.

"Don't lose heart, Phillippa. Your husband is no worse than many opportunists in these times," John said. "Concentrate on your art. You are at an important crossroads. You will have a lifetime to guide him. But be cautious. Do not let him corrupt you."

*Sacramento City, November 10, 1849*

*Dearest Philippa,*

*Our one night together in months has given me resolve to go on with this madness. I dearly wish I could have spent more time making love with you. You sooth me and give me the strength I need to fight the race for Governor. I am relieved to be released from Colton Hall and weeks of being holed up with delegates. It is odd to be in competition with your Cousin John, who is as determined as I to be elected first Governor of California. We campaign at opposite sides of the town, and much to my chagrin, he is getting bigger crowds at his stump speeches than I am. He is, of course, greatly loved, and better known. The election is only a week away.*

*At least I am able to manage one of my enterprises from this distance. I've had three meetings with officers from Adams, a financial company in New York. They're buying up small express companies doing business in the mining camps with an eye toward establishing an organization that would serve the entire territory. They've got connections in every major city in the U.S. and they hope to be able to shuttle money from any miner directly to his family back on the farm. They want to buy all sixteen of my gold camp tent shops, from Coloma on the American River to Stringtown on the Yuba. This is exactly what I positioned myself for when I set these up. I had no idea they would pay off so soon. They need conveyance between the camps and Sacramento. I convinced them they could use eight to ten closed carriages and teams of horses and mules. Last week I bought out the entire livery inventory of a Sacramento*

*stables on the edge of town in that oak grove you like so much. Its resale to Adams is part of our deal.*

*We dicker constantly on how much they will pay me for each camp outlet. Eventually they will accept my terms because I'm the expert. As speculators, the Adams representatives are canny, but uninformed. I make myself useful by explaining the vast distances between camps, the steep mountain trails and largely impassable roads, and local rules of doing business. Our negotiations are held over venison steak dinners in the best tent restaurant on the waterfront, where we drink whiskey and I tell them of their extraordinary opportunities, and the relative worth of the other small express outfits, who have been my competition up till now.*

*The Adams folk are aghast that Californians use no uniform currency, and find themselves completely at sea with all the Peruvian coins, Italian lira and French francs circulating. Part of my deal is that they buy their ten and twenty gold slugs from my bank. Profit from that alone will be substantial because of the volume they need to do business. Other Eastern bankers will try to get into the express game, but my hunch is that Adams will beat out its competition, at least for the next few years.*

*I am off now to address the Sacramento City Merchants' club on why I will best serve them as Governor. John gets a whack at them after me. We drew straws to see who would go first. All this sounds light-hearted, but I am deadly earnest. I want to see you enthroned as first lady of California.*

*Your affectionate husband, Bertrand*

*Sacramento City, November 18, 1849*

*Dearest Philippa,*

*The worst has happened. You've probably heard that Peter Burnett was elected Governor. God! An effectual judge from Oregon who doesn't know anything about California. Last night Sutter and I drank to our mutual failure. Due to heavy rains and plain indifference, fewer than fifteen percent of the population turned out to vote. I blame John Fremont for my trouncing. He promised he would campaign for me. No one has seen him for weeks. He's disappeared into his quartz mine, and sends word that he is even too distracted to meet with the bankers I send him.*

*On to the next race. If I cannot be Governor, I will be senator. I have one month to present myself as a senatorial candidate. It's a given that Fremont will be selected, but several of us delegates are in the running for the second senatorial position. Politics is a game of insiders and Fremont has let me down. I tell you it would give me great satisfaction to snatch the second senatorial position and ride all the way back to Washington, staring him down.*

*In December we legislators are to assemble to vote in our new capital, Pueblo San Jose, a God-forsaken swamp at the southern end of the bay. Cousin John isn't seeking the senatorial slot and will help me lobby the delegation.*

*I have had enough of business, money and politics for the moment! All I want is to feel your golden hair through my fingers, look upon your creamy skin, hold you in my arms and kiss you.*

*Your affectionate husband, Bertrand*

*Pueblo San Jose, December 22, 1849*

*Dearest Philippa,*

*It's over. A black day for me watching my fellow delegates inaugurate Burnett as Governor and then elect William Gwin senator, that pompous congressman from Mississippi who's harangued us at every meeting to hear the sound of his own voice. He's been swept in as the pro-slavery candidate. The legislature was convinced that to make an impact in Congress, we must have him to balance Fremont, our anti-slavery choice. So, being anti-slavery, I never really had a chance. These politicos stick together like molasses. Even though they have no validity until California receives statehood, they will circulate in the center of power.*

*I tried to have a word with Fremont, but he saddled his horse to ride through teaming rain to Monterey to tell Jessie the good news that they're going back to Washington.*

*Would that you and I could celebrate such a victory. I'm coming home to San Francisco. You may even find me in our bed before this letter arrives.*

*Bertrand.*

"Monsieur, Madame, hurry!"

Back in their suite at La Martine House, Bertrand, who had kicked off his boots and lain down in bed without even undressing after his long ride from San Jose, stirred awake and then bolted upright at the persistent knocking on their door. The La Martine House manager kicked open the door. "Get out. Fire!"

# Chapter Thirteen

"My God!" Philippa cried out. She reached for a dressing gown and threw it over her nightdress. Bertrand pulled on his boots, grabbed her hand and they ran down the corridor.

LaMartine Hotel guests, sleepy-looking men with slovenly women they hadn't planned on being seen with in public, rushed downstairs in their bare feet and crowded out the front door. They huddled on the porch. Bertrand stepped into the street and sank into a foot of mud. He pulled up one leg from the ooze, then the other. Smoke and ash clogged his lungs.

Across Kearny Street, the fire crackled louder and louder as it consumed the walls of Dennison's Exchange. Sheets of flame shooting to the sky took his breath away. He looked back frantically for Philippa. She stood on the porch step, staring at him in horror. All around them frightened people were slipping and falling into the mud. "We can't cross here," she called to him. He pushed back through the crowd and grabbed her by the waist. He hoisted her over his shoulder and carried her, stepping through the mud to higher ground in the square. Hysterical people shouted and wandered dazed in all directions. He hurried uphill, struggling through crowds of panicky people. He set her down heavily on the porch of the Custom House.

Flames jumped onto the roof of Parker House like lightning bolts. Philippa slumped against him as they watched the fire leap from Parker House to the El Dorado. Next in the path were Haley House and Bella Union. All the gambling establishments along Kearny would be caught up in the roaring fire.

If the fire burned west it would consume the dry goods store at the corner. His hotel was next in its path, then Philippa's gallery and studio. If the fire rampaged in the opposite direction toward the harbor, it would devour his bank. Bertrand was worried most about the bank. The hotel could be rebuilt, but an intense fire could melt the gold.

Shrieks and shouts filled the air. People carrying bundles rushed out of every doorway of the buildings facing all four sides of the plaza. Frightened by the chaotic scene, they stood still and turned their heads this way and that, wailing. Mules brayed. Children cried.

He felt Philippa pull on his arm. Her alabaster face glowed in the eerie light of the flames. Her crazed hair danced around her face, her mouth fell open in disbelief. "The fire's nearly at my studio," she cried over the roar. "I must get my paintings out!" She started to dart away.

He seized her by the arm. "No!"

She tried to resist him.

He held her close.

"Can't they bring up any water from the bay?" she cried. "What kind of city is this with no fire trucks!" Heavy smoke and fragments of ash in the air set her coughing.

He was wild with impatience. "Philippa, look at me, listen! I want you to stay here on the porch of the Custom House. Do not go back for your paintings. Stay here. You'll be safe. I've got to get to my bank."

He ran from her without looking back. Making his way downhill between the throngs of people struggling in the mud, he stopped to look at the buildings next to his hotel along Washington Street. An ember blew across his path. Another settled on the roof of the dry goods store on the corner. Then another. In a few minutes, the store was engulfed by fire. Flames licked through the windows, splintering the glass.

He rushed into the path of the flames and flying debris, across Kearny, down to his bank on Montgomery Street. Iron safes wouldn't keep the gold from melting. Any fool greedy enough could get in through burned out doorways could scoop up his gold deposits. He worried about his warehouse on the wharf, where he had a shipment of South American food products stored. Every building in the city, save for a few brick houses, was made of combustible pine, like coffins standing on end, one after the other.

Bertrand moved as fast as he could along the wood planks hastily laid over the mud of Montgomery Street. As the sun rose over the bay, its rays penetrated a dense cloud of smoke over the city. In the blood-red light, he saw looters helping themselves to merchandise through jagged glass of broken shop windows.

Aside from fire-damaged windows, LaMartine Bank was intact. Bertrand pushed open the scorched door and unlocked a shotgun from its glass case. He checked his timepiece. Seven o'clock. He stood at the door with his shotgun for an hour, then for another hour, watching the panicked people of San Francisco, pushing carts of household belongings, surge down Washington Street and across Montgomery, rushing toward the harbor. Finally one of his guards reported to duty, his clothes and face black with soot. Bertrand sent him to find a locksmith, carpenter and lumber. A hour later the guard returned with the workmen and supplies. Bertrand's rapid instructions to them were lost in a sudden explosion. Heads whirled around. Burning planks of pine shot skyward. The air was acrid with the smell of gun powder.

"God Almighty, what's that?" one of the guards said.

"They're blowing up the wooden buildings with powder. It's the only way to stop the fire," Bertrand shouted. From cash reserves in the safe he paid the workmen an exorbitant amount to make plank coverings for the windows and doors and secure them with locks. He gave the bank guard his shotgun and triple wages to remain on duty for another twelve hours. Without looking back, he hurried down to the harbor to check on his warehouses.

The gun powder explosions dazzled Bertrand at first. He was amazed at how quickly he grew accustomed to them. People surged into a wine shop to be blown up in a quarter-hour. They grabbed bottles of wine. Bertrand took a bottle of French champagne. At the signal to vacate, they scattered into the mud-clogged street. With a mighty boom, the wine shop and produce store next to it went up. Refugees surged around him, fleeing from the flying debris of pine construction , broken bottles and smashed melons. They carried sacks of food and bags of gold dust. Many dragged their trunks through the muddy streets. The city was a war zone.

His warehouses were not damaged, but his pier was teeming with shop owners and draymen stacking goods rescued from their shops in the path of the fire. He went to his wharf office to handle the flow of people and divide up areas of the wharf to be cordoned off for temporary storage of their merchandise. Some enterprising merchants conducted business on the spot, selling fresh vegetables, lumber, boxes of ubiquitous carpet tacks, and kegs of beer, frothy from being rolled down the hill. The wharf took on a festive atmosphere as survivors, both intoxicated and relieved to be alive, milled around congratulating themselves and celebrating. With a start, Bertrand realized it was Christmas morning. It was late afternoon before he went to find Philippa.

Most of the crowd thronging the Custom House earlier had dispersed. But there were still a number of people, barefoot, wearing night clothes and an odd assortment of hats, resting on the verandah with nowhere to go. All around them lay bundles of possessions they had hastily snatched before fleeing their rented rooms. Several men sat on their safes.

Bertrand laughed to see John Fremont's oversized surrey waiting for the King of the Rockies. His liveried driver held water bags to the team of mules, who swished their ears and stomped, eager to be away. Philippa sat in the carriage's back seat with her head on Jessie's shoulder. She jerked up when Bertrand called her name.

"Thank God!" she whispered.

As he leaned into the carriage to kiss her on the forehead he saw her dressing gown was singed by ashes and stained with splashes of caked mud. "The bank made it through the fire," he said. "The saloons have burned to the ground, but the gold is safe."

"The gold is always first, is it not, Monsieur LaMartine?" Jessie Fremont said.

"The gold, the wharf, the warehouses. I've had many enterprises to see to," he said wearily. Jessie's riding skirt was muddy, but she still wore a feathered hat. Her small hands were sheathed in silk gloves. She had taken off her jacket and placed in around Philippa's shoulders.

"Where's John?" Bertrand asked.

"Inside, talking with custom officials," Jessie said.

Bertrand got in the front seat of the surrey and sank wearily against the Moroccan leather. Jessie leaned forward. Her hand gripped his shoulder. "How dare you abandon your wife in a raging fire?"

He glanced back at Philippa. She had turned her pale face away from him. "What happened?"

"She nearly burned to her death, and where were you?" Jessie cried. "Colonel Fremont and I saw the fire from our house in Happy Valley and came as quickly as we could. And thanks be to God we did, because you were long gone. We stayed with Philippa at the Custom House, but she was determined to save her paintings. She ran to her studio. John and I rushed down there and pulled her back. She struggled free from us with amazing strength. Her gallery and studio were in flames and she was frantic to save her work! We hung on to her, but she got away from us. You should have smelled it! Burning canvas and the oily odor of paints melting, varnish and turpentine combusting with loud pops."

He knew that smell well. "Are you all right, Philippa?"

"I was able to salvage some of them," she said. Her eyes on him were cold as ice.

Bertrand glanced toward the Custom House. Fremont stood on the porch, shaking hands. He turned, and waving to Jessie, walked quickly toward them. Bertrand got out of the surrey and stepped in his path. "John, I must talk with you."

"This is not the time. The ladies await us."

Bertrand leaned over the shorter man and grabbed his collar. "I won't be put off again.

For months you promised your support of my campaign for Governor, you raised my expectations, and then you abandoned me."

Fremont turned his hawk eyes on Bertrand. "This is no time to talk politics, man!"

"It's the only time. You're leaving for Washington in a few days. Why didn't you back me for Governor?"

Fremont eyed him. "You have no honest political aspirations. You're not the least interested in representing the people."

"I'm a member of the bloody legislature!" Bertrand said.

Fremont shrugged. "You were appointed because you're a name in San Francisco. You're a shrewd businessman. You rapidly accumulate wealth. But it's clear that laws and courts don't interest you, only the power."

"Then why did you encourage me?"

"I saw potential at first, but eventually realized that you're not fit to hold public office," Fremont said. "You have a ruthless streak in you, LaMartine. We want statehood to start out on the right foot. People can't trust you. Members of the legislature cautioned me against you. I've heard hair-raising stories from members of your consortium and worse from that partnership you formed to mine Dry Diggings. I liked you, so I overlooked their warnings. Then I heard more from Sam Brannan."

Bertrand laughed.

"And Stephen Farrell at Adams & Company. He's damned leery of the deal you made."

"As well he should be," Bertrand said. "I drive a hard bargain, but Adams is getting its money's worth. I don't give a penny away. John, you and I were business partners, friends, political colleagues. Suddenly you disappeared into the bowels of your mine. Why don't you trust me?" Bertrand saw movement out of the corner of his eye. Philippa was getting out of the carriage to listen.

"You boxed me into banking deals I can't honor," Fremont said. "I owe interest on loans you made without consulting me. I'm on the hook for two ore crushing mills at fifty thousand dollars each!"

"It costs money to extract gold from quartz," Bertrand said. "We discussed that."

"Yes, I agreed to steam compressors, blasting powder, but not stamp machines, railway carts and steam pumps!" John Fremont's hooded eyes flashed with anger.

"You're inexperienced with both mining and finance," Bertrand said. "Without the initial outlay, you'll have no profit."

"The scope is too great," Fremont said. "I won't be here to oversee it."

"But I will," Bertrand said.

"I no longer want you to finance my mine, La Martine. You're unprincipled."

Bertrand's anger flared. Fremont was so slight of physique, it would be easy to pick him up and squeeze the life out of him.

Philippa rushed in between them. "If Bertrand has failed to keep you informed of his dealings, Colonel Fremont, he apologizes and will absorb the loss. When the drilling and crushing machine equipment arrives, we will send it back. You owe no interest, no fees. The matter is settled. We will draw up a document to this effect and deliver it to you before you leave for Washington."

"Philippa, leave this to me," Bertrand cried.

Fremont turned to Philippa. "Thank you, Madame La Martine. If you can take him in hand you will save me a good deal of money." He looked at Bertrand out of the sides of his deep-set eyes. "No man has anything in life more precious than his wife and his integrity. You would do well to learn you cannot have one without the other. See that you make good on this deal."

Every steamer to Sacramento City the next day was filled to capacity. Bertrand paid three times the value of the tickets in order to reserve their places. He watched Philippa at the railing as she looked back on the smoking city. She was in shock after losing her studio and gallery. In a satchel she carried eight paintings wrapped in muslin, most of them singed at the edges. He put his hand over hers on the railing. "You will begin again," he said.

She turned to face him. He noticed for the first times fine lines around her eyes that would not disappear with sleep. "From now on we both make a fresh start," she said. "If you're serious about participating in California politics, you must adopt and abide by a set of ethics. Very shortly there will be courts of law here and you will be curbed by rules not of your making."

"Las Mariposas taught me a lesson," he said. "I'll never again team up with a man who has no vision."

"John Fremont is known as the Pathfinder, Bertrand. He's mapped the West for all of America. He hardly lacks vision."

"He's a coward. He hasn't the stomach for a long-term mining operation."

The steamship whistle blew and her voice rose above it. "You were deceitful to him. I will no longer be subjected to your treachery. I've warned you before." She lowered her voice. "You must separate yourself from your business colleagues for a time until you can build up a good reputation."

He looked into the distance. Waves on the surface of the bay surged with a reflected red sheen.

"Here is what you will do," she said. "You still have one or two partners. You will buy them out, and you will clear your accounts with John Fremont using the proceeds from the Adams & Company transaction. Then you'll have a clean slate to go it alone. Your bank is partner enough."

He gave her his full attention.

"What you need is a new project, Bertrand. One that will allow you to absorb all the risks. I don't want you involving anyone else's capital, at least until you turn a profit. The reason you overstepped your boundaries on Fremont's mine is because you wanted its success for yourself."

"You're right about that."

"Then go out and find your own quartz mine. Surely there is more than one fertile vein in the Sierras."

"I don't have a hundred Sonorans to work for me like Fremont. Quartz mining is a long-term venture. If I found a foot-wide vein tomorrow, I'd have to raise cash to hire a crew to drill tests on it. Then I'd have to buy ore-crushing mills. No fool goes into big-business mining as a lone speculator."

"You'll just have to sell something," she said.

He was reviewing another option. The two stamp mills he'd ordered for Fremont were due to arrive from Cincinnati in a month. As defaulted loan property, they would be owned by the bank. But he was the bank.

"What real estate can you sell?" she asked.

"I've got those Sacramento lots on Front Street," he said.

Her eyes widened in indignation. "Didn't you turn those over to the consortium?"

"These are different lots. I bought them from Sam Brannan."

"Do they turn a profit?"

"They do, but the risk may not be worth the income."

"Why?"

"When I campaigned earlier this month, I spent days riding up and down the waterfront. Driving rains lashed the wharf. Gusting winds knocked over a number of frame buildings. I rode out to where the Sacramento meets the American River and walked around testing the soil. I swear the water is rising. If those rivers converge in a storm and spill over, all of Sacramento City could be under water. I've been thinking about selling my lots now while they're high in value." He smiled. "I'll liquidate them before they liquify."

She was not taken in by his quip. "If the lots are in peril from flooding, what greedy fool would buy them?"

"I'll sell them back to Sam Brannan."

Finally he drew a smile from her. It faded quickly. "Will they bring enough to get you started on finding a quartz mine?"

"No," he said impatiently leaning hard against the railing. "That will take too long. I cannot go backwards."

She looked at him with her steady gaze. "It's time for you to go out on your own, Bertrand, no matter how long it takes. This is a time to rebuild. You can raise enough money to hire Douglas Campbell. He's a good engineer and he trusts your instincts."

"I will think it over," he said.

The grilling over, they stood side by side at the ship's railing watching San Francisco recede into a haze of smoke and fog. He led her around deck through the noisy crowds of people escaping the burned city, to look at the green hills visible along the east bay. He put his hand over hers until he felt her relax. They talked of other things. When she shivered, he led her back inside. He kissed the top of her head. "I wish you would set aside your painting and give me three sons."

"I must work day and night to make up the loss." She swung her foot at the satchel bag of her rolled up paintings. "These are barely presentable. I'm going to have to postpone my trip for another month so I can complete at least four good paintings before I sail for France. Thank God seven of my paintings survived and are on their way to Paris."

He felt his heart chill.

Bertrand and Philippa spent the next week in Sacramento, where he called on merchants and property owners, hoping to interest so many of them in buying his waterfront lots that he would have to hold an auction. The weather was clear and warm. Water from pre-Christmas rains had receded, leaving the streets muddy, but passable. The wind that had blown down frame buildings quieted. Desire for the lots was high, but when Bertrand realized no one could quickly raise the capital he wanted, he met with Sam Brannan at Brannan's City

Hotel on Front Street. After a beefsteak dinner and a bottle of whiskey, Sam was warming to the idea of buying out Bertrand's property. "Why the rush to sell, LaMartine? Do you know something I don't?" Brannan asked him.

Bertrand leaned closer in the crowded bar room. "I've got a lead on a quartz vein. I have to raise a quarter million for drilling equipment and labor."

"Where?"

Bertrand laughed so loud, heads turned.

Brannan looked at him skeptically. "What if we get more rains? That damn Sacramento River floods every year, but it's been particularly bad this winter."

Bertrand glanced around him. "I hear talk about building a proper levee to protect the embarcadero. The town's big enough now. We've got ourselves local government. Hell, talk to Peter Burnett, your governor. Get him to put up a bond to pay for it."

"A dike, you say. They'll have to build it ten feet high." Brannan was intrigued.

"I'm surprised you haven't heard. Our key businessmen are behind it." Bertrand smiled. It was a damn good idea even if he'd only just made it up. Brannan bought his lots.

Bertrand spent the next week cheering up Philippa. They attended a performance at The Eagle, the first theater in town. A dramatic actress arriving from New Zealand recited passages from various tragedies. She was so absurd, Philippa could not stop chuckling to herself. When her stifled giggles turned to guffaws, Bertrand escorted her out. They went back to the Crescent City Hotel where they dined on oysters and champagne in their room and turned to each other for the consolation and ecstasy that always repaired the hurts that tore at them.

The following day the weather turned. That evening a raging storm from the south rampaged across the city. High winds tore down the streets and around the buildings. Heavy rains pounded the soaked soil. Philippa lifted her head from the pillow. Bertrand listened. They went to the window and looked down. A man walking the dark streets ringing a bell yelled, "Water's rising! Get a move on!"

"Stay here," he said, dressing quickly. He pocketed a bag of gold coins and threw on his Indian rubber poncho.

She tried to hold him back. "You can't go out in this!"

"I know a shed stacked with fishing boats. I can pick up some of the men in the tents before they're flooded out. Dress warmly, Philippa. You may have to go up to the roof. Bring blankets."

He saddled his horse, then realized the roads were impassable. On foot he slogged down the streets through heavy rain toward the waterfront. Runoff rushed in every direction to form rivulets, flowing into channels. Pools formed and expanded into streams that rushed across the embarcadero. The swollen Sacramento and American rivers, battered by rains and streams converging on them, overflowed their banks. The waters met, swirled, grew deeper and surged down the streets. Shouting and moaning, people waded through knee-deep water and crowded into buildings with second stories.

When Bertrand got to the shed of boats, two men had broken the lock and were lifting out row boats, passing them to a group of men behind him. Bertrand quickly took charge. "All right," he shouted over the wind and rain. "You fellows are now engaged in a rescue operation. I'm assigning two rowers to each boat. Any man who tries to take a boat for himself answers to me." He took out his pistol and fired a shot. Three men holding a boat, dropped it. "I have gold pieces for each rower," Bertrand said. "Double that for each team that makes it through the night." The men paid closer attention.

"Show us this gold you say you'll pay us," one of the men shouted.

Bertrand held up his sack and flipped a gold coin at the doubter. The men looked at each other and nodded. Bertrand said, "I want you to row into town and pick up shop owners and their families, and any merchandise you've room for. Take them to the two-story hotels and go back for more people. When the hotels are full, head for higher ground." He pointed toward Sutter's Fort hill three miles off.

Six boats rowed down Front Street. Bertrand sat in the back of the first boat, shouting directions. They stopped for tent merchants and their wives, making room for their belongings. In Bertrand's boat, two children shivered in their nightclothes. One boy held a Swiss clock, the other a base violin. Bertrand took off his poncho and placed it over the boys. He stopped the rowers long enough to lean down and haul in a small dog swimming frantically. There was nothing to be done about the braying cattle floating by. All around them boxes and crates bobbed in the rising water, some so full of soggy merchandise, they sank. When the first load of passengers was discharged at the Elephant House hotel, Bertrand directed the rowers to turn around and go back to the waterfront.

Other vessels appeared on the night water, including whaleboats and rafts. Rain fell so hard it pelted the rising water at an angle of ninety degrees. Across a gust of wind Bertrand heard a rower calling over, "Who's that standing in your boat?"

"Bertrand LaMartine. He's running this operation. I bet we've rescued a hundred people so far, three dogs, too."

"Isn't that the fellow who ran for Governor?"

"That's the one, right here. Follow us. We've got space reserved for folks over at the Missouri Hotel."

"He's saved a hundred people, you say? I'll sure vote for him next time." A cheer went up.

An hour after dawn Bertrand directed rowers in his boat and one other to the Crescent Hotel. The rain had finally stopped. In the growing light he was stunned by the vastness of the of the instant lake that stretched nearly a mile in every direction. He was more alarmed to see the water had nearly risen above the second story of the Crescent Hotel. On a balcony outside a window, Philippa sat in a cane-backed chair, reading the newspaper. He ordered his rower over to her. "Why aren't you inside?" he called.

"With sixty people in three rooms?" She pinched her nose.

"They'll have to make space for fifteen more." He tossed her a package. "I brought you sourdough rolls."

She stood up to catch it. The newspaper fell to her feet and drifted into the water. "I'd rather have flowers, Monsieur LaMartine."

He took over the oars. Maneuvering the boat to the balcony, he stood up and climbed over. He took her into his arms and kissed her.

The weary people in the boats looked up in surprise. "That's the way, Governor," the rowers laughed.

She held him away. "Haven't you heard? The Governor's office is filled."

He pressed his lips to her ear. "There's always next time."

"Can't you get me out of here?" she asked.

He took her hand. Without answering her, he directed the people in the two boats to climb through a third-story window. "I'll be back tonight," he told her. "We'll go up to Cousin John's. You'll be safe there."

"You're not finished campaigning, I take it," she said.

"Damn right! A crisis is the time legends are made."

That evening they had rowers take them to high ground. They passed scores of flood survivors in makeshift shelters as they walked up to the fort where John Sutter, Junior welcomed them and gave them her old apartment. Bertrand thought he would fall asleep instantly in the old straw bed, but instead, he lay awake listening to wind whistling through the chinks in the chipped adobe stones. Philippa made a fire on the hearth and lay down beside him. He held on to her the way he imagined older married people did. When he drifted off he dreamed of delivering a speech from a white marble balcony on his inauguration day.

The next morning Bertrand was restless to begin prospecting. He was putting together a team to help him find a quartz mine. "I've sent for my engineer Douglas Campbell," he said. "He's bringing up his donkey cart of gear. Can you get along without Patrick O'Reilly?"

"Yes. But why Patrick? He's a sailor."

"He's a canny sleuth and a smart Irishman. He tells wonderful stories. I trust him."

They talked about where Philippa should go. His hotel in San Francisco would be under construction for fire damage for another two months at least. Sutter's Fort was a shambles. She refused his suggestion of going up to Hock Farm. "I'll stay at the St. Francis Hotel," she said. "I'll use John Prendergast's studio. I must get to work and complete new paintings."

"Who will look after you when you go around the city painting?" Bertrand asked.

"Prendergast will keep an eye on me," she assured him impatiently. What he heard was, 'I can take care of myself.'

On the steamer back to San Francisco they clung to one another. "I will miss you," he whispered in her ear. Her kisses stirred him.

"Go find your quartz vein," she said in a husky voice. "You're much better on your own.

He laughed. "Having made cat's paw of naive businessmen, I will now exploit the crust of the earth."

*Grass Valley, February 28, 1850*

*Dearest Philippa,*

*You would barely recognize me as we ride north through the rains. I am growing a bush of grey-flecked whiskers to keep my face warm, and I hunker down in my rubber poncho and wide-brimmed hat in search of securing our future. Whenever Campbell's cart stalls in the mud, Patrick and I shove from behind while Douglas yanks the bridle of his donkey, both beast and man swearing vigorously.*

*We stopped at our old camp at Dry Diggings. It's now being called Auburn. You'd scarcely recognize it. A number of public houses have gone up to accommodate the influx of miners. These combination gambling, boarding, and drinking establishments are hot beds of flaring tempers as the men loll around day after day, waiting out the foul weather. They put me in mind of bears in their caves. The smell of unwashed skin, alcohol, wet wool and effusion from sickness is enough to overcome even my sensibilities. A fellow from Limerick, Ireland approached me as I headed toward one log house, called the Empire Hotel, and cautioned me not to enter. He said he's not seen such rampant typhoid since leaving his home during the potato famine. As he put it, "They ain't at all well." In addition to dysentery they suffer*

*scurvy from a lack of fresh vegetables and fruit. But I've noticed ample shipments of laudanum and whiskey get through.*

*Traveling north, despite sleeting snow and lack of sleep, we reached a settlement in a valley, pitched our tents and slept for ten hours. This place was originally inhabited by emigrants from Oregon, who moved off with the cold weather, then was rediscovered by a group of prospectors. Apparently, while camped on Bear River, their cattle wandered off to chew on grasses. The prospectors tracked them here and liked it so much they constructed a log cabin on a rise they call Badger Hill. Last September another group arrived headed by a minister, Reverend H. Cummings. They're wintering in several cabins they built on the side of a ravine. You may write to me care of Boston Ravine, or Grass Valley as the crossroads is known by both names.*

*I think of you working long hours in Prendergast's cramped studio and worry about you going about the city as I know you must to find new subjects to paint. Be careful, my love. You are all my happiness. I imagine Portsmouth Square is ringing with the sounds of hammering and sawing as the gambling dens are rebuilt. Write to me about progress on our hotel. I've had no word. Down through the frozen valleys and streams of the Sierras I send you all the heat of my heart.*

*Your affectionate husband, Bertrand*

*Grass Valley, March 8, 1850*

*Dear Philippa, my love,*

*Rock walls and caves abound in this valley and each day Douglas, Patrick and I search in a different direction. I have a feeling for this terrain. I ride out along the river, following various tributary creeks. I poke through ice with my stick. I guide my horse up slippery rock hillocks and site the ridge lines. I keep a slow pace, and with my head bent under my Quaker hat, I probably look to an observer to have fallen asleep. But no. I am in a trance of desire, as electric as lightning streaking across the sky. I dismount and walk. I know the gold is here; I feel its power radiating up through the earth. In my obsession you walk with me over these hills. We stop and kiss. The magical place where I imagine we make love–this is where I will detonate my blasting powder and blow away rock to release my vein of gold.*

*Yours, Bertrand*

*Grass Valley, March 10, 1850*

*Dearest Philippa,*

*Three days ago I examined rock formations along a stream bank. Douglas and I set explosives. Water thundered into the air, fell back into the streambed in fountains. Rocks tumbled, revealing nothing. We tracked south around a narrow creek to set more dynamite. Bursting rock and dirt erupted into a transparent blue sky, shattering peace. Nothing.*

*Douglas convinced me we were not being bold enough. The next day we packed heavier loads of explosives, placed two inside a crevice, lit them and ran for our lives. An eternity of waiting passed in two seconds. The cave mouth exploded in bursts of leaping fire. The blast ricocheted around the granite cliffs. The earth shook, laying bare a shattered cliff. Shards of glittering rock shot into the air and showered to earth. I rushed forward and picked up still hot pieces of quartz, holding them to the sun. Sharp as polished glass. Gold threads glistened amid the whorls of reddish orange. I cracked a chunk of quartz against a rock and released a nugget of pure gold. God Almighty, we've found a vein at last!*

*We are tense with the need for secrecy. Blessedly no other prospectors in the area came running at the sounds of our blasts yesterday. No one came to watch as we staked and roped off six fifty-foot claims. No one saw as I wrote on boards with burning charcoal "LaMartine Quartz Mining Company" and nailed the boards to the stakes. With Douglas and Patrick standing guard with their shotguns, I rode like the devil to the camp at Rough and Ready since we have no assayer's office at Grass Valley. At the sight of the first shanties on the edge of town I stopped. I drew a deep breath to quiet myself, tipped my hat back on my head. The registering of a claim must be done with nonchalance. Then, rushing back to our gulch of riches, I walked it until the sun evaporated behind the cliff, and crawled over lose rock deep into the night, holding my lantern high. Oh my darling, I have found a rich vein, wider and deeper than Fremont's. With my last bottle of French wine I christened it The Philippa.*

*Your loving husband, Bertrand.*

*Grass Valley, March 26, 1950*

*Dearest Philippa, listen! Do you hear the shouting? It resounds down river and across the plains, over the bay to echo around Portsmouth Square.*

*The word of my strike is out. They know about it in Sacramento City. A Spanish-speaking mining engineer visiting California from Mexico hustled up here through impassable mud trails. A mineralogist, Mr. Larimer, was hard on his heels. Yesterday an entourage of locals dropped their picks and axes and trailed after the experts as Douglas, Patrick and I led them over the terrain of LaMartine Quartz Mine. The sun shone brightly on our expedition. We were soon accompanied by several packs of noisy, whiskey swilling miners enjoying a rare outing. They crowded about us all afternoon, superstitious–and desperate--to the point of believing that luck is contagious.*

*After the curious sight-seers departed, we dug a few shafts, they called 'coyote holes,' and set more explosives. As additional shanks of cliff fell away we were able to test the depth and breadth of the vein, which is situated on the side of a hill, runs at least seven feet thick, from northeast to southwest for close to 2,000 feet. We've found calcite and ankerite as well as gold in the quartz. My quartz mine has been pronounced the most bountiful vein discovered since Las Mariposas. That it the only one recorded in the past half-year is of little consequence to these enthusiasts who deal readily in superlatives.*

*An overdressed lawyer, alerted by Larimer, our mineralogist, arrived this morning by donkey–two asses for the price of one. He presented me with legal forms spelling out title to*

*mineral rights, which I promptly read and signed. He will file them in Sacramento. I am particularly pleased to have this phase of the operation in hand because Fremont never did secure title to his placer minerals rights and was overrun by prospectors. I've hired the self-important lawyer to conduct research, write, and file a document verifying that my claim is not on land owned by anyone or part of any floating Mexican land grant. It pays to prospect the hinterlands. Eventually some bloke will boast a deed for every gulch in the Sierras. But this is ours, my darling. And by God, it's the miracle we've waited for.*

*Your affectionate husband, Bertrand*

*Grass Valley, March 30, 1850*

*Dearest Philippa,*

*I have memorized your letter. As I repeat your loving words to myself, I hear your voice. Your sweet scent still lingers on the pages when I hold them close to the candle. Being away from you is a penance I do not deserve.*

*A loan from my bank has released a gush of money, which I'm spending on rock drills, steam compressors and salaries for miners who'd rather work for me than themselves. There's a fellow called Collis Huntington who is selling me blasting powder out of his tent mercantile on K Street in Sacramento City. He's an ambitious chap, who hangs around, asking a lot of questions. I suspect selling picks and pans has lost its interest for him, and he wants to venture into the more profitable financial side of quartz mining.*

*Fremont's two defaulted stamp mills have arrived all the way from Cincinnati. They were loaded on freight wagons, sent upriver to Sacramento, thence here. Thanks be to God the vein has finally ceased and the muddy roads are passable. You can imagine the weight of these mighty ore crushers. Each one is a framed mechanism, standing nearly a story tall, with gigantic metal shoe-like stamps. As a camshaft lifts and drops, it drives the stamps down to grind and pulverize the ore. This we wash along wide sluice-boxes and treat with mercury to enhance the gold-separating process. The machines are powered by steam engines. In order to oversee all this activity I've set up a tent in its midst. My ears and sanity are assaulted by the constant pounding of metal plates on rock, hiss of engines, grinding of machinery, snorting of mules, and shouts of men--so different from the simple mining operation at Dry Diggings a year ago. But what profits! By the end of the month we will have crushed and separated $50,000 worth of gold from the ore, more than enough to keep up loan payments and meet payroll. The Miwok boys from Dry Diggings have followed me here. Some say Indians don't deserve equal pay. Since it's up to me I pay them slightly more–just to be contrary.*

*I have a team of carpenters constructing a wood-frame house for us on a rise above a meadow, away from the bustle. I burn with desire for you.*

*Your passionate husband, Bertrand*

Fierce pounding on the door to her room at the St. Francis hotel awakened Philippa.

"Who is it?" she cried out.

"Bertrand."

She opened the door, still slipping her arms into her dressing gown. The sleeves were turned inside out, like silken butterfly wings. Bertrand pressed her close to him. "My God, you feel good."

Gently she released herself from his arms and stepped back, drawing him to the bed. She ran her fingers over the frown etched in his forehead. "I didn't know you were coming," she said.

"I didn't know either. I couldn't stand being away from you a minute longer." He gazed at her. "You look wonderful."

"I'm working well in John Prendergast's studio. He shares a large space with Etienne Godchaux so we have plenty of room to work. We have easels up everywhere, pictures in various states of being finished against every wall and window." She stood up and walked to the dresser to light an oil lamp against the pitch darkness. She held it up and turned toward him with a wide smile. "I've finished four paintings to bring to Seigner in Paris.

"Come, my darling, I'll help you take off your muddy boots," she said. "Shall I call for hot water? They'll come with it, even at midnight. We can take a bath together and you can tell me why you're here."

He scooped her into his arms, kissing the sweetness of her neck. "It's been too long. God, so many long months without you." He kicked off his boots. Her hands were everywhere over him as she removed his clothes. He whispered in her ear, more like a sigh than words. "Give me, give me, give me."

She pulled back. "Give you what?"

"Give me a child, Philippa." She knew that he knew she would not travel to France if she were pregnant.

# Chapter Fourteen

Bertrand paced in his manager's tent. Stacks of charts, maps and invoices awaited his attention, but he could only step restlessly between his makeshift desk and the canvas flap he'd thrown wide. Finally he heard the signal he'd for waited six hours to hear and ran outside. A guard posted on a cliff blew his bugle, another down by the bend in the river answered it. Minutes later Philippa came along the path on her mare, followed by a mule and cart driver bringing her possessions and painting supplies. She waved and urged her horse into a cantor. Before she could dismount, Bertrand swept her off her mare and into his arms. Her hurried her into his tent where they stood kissing for what seemed like an eternity of happiness. "Bien-aimee, bien-aimee," he murmured. "You are so beautiful." Her smell drove him mad with desire. He ran his hands over her fleshy hips. Even though they'd made love in her dingy hotel room six weeks earlier, it was as if she had been away from him for months. In the heat of traveling she had unfastened the prim navy silk bow and the top button on her blouse and he caught a glimpse of her bosom surging as she breathed heavily. They both heard the shouts of his men, wanting to see her. He was aware of a shadow at the opening of the tent as his most trusted Indian scout came near. He forced himself to let her go. "Philippa, the miners have not looked upon a lady in months. We must agree that when I am not with you, a man I have selected will stand at your side."

She leaned back and studied his face. "You are serious? Who is this poor soul who will have to suffer through interminable hours watching me paint?"

He put his arm around her and introduced her to Wolf, a Miwok. Philippa stared at Wolf, who stood erect, eyes forward, like a soldier on parade. She regarded him with such intensity, Bertrand tried to look at the Indian

objectively. Wolf resembled Elk Horn, whom he'd trained earlier. Both were tall, clear-eyed, and muscular, but Wolf 's face was less flat than his tribesmen's, the rounded contours suggesting a European parentage. His black eyes held a tint of green. He was young enough to spring in a quick-trigger response, yet old enough to possess wisdom. Wolf's intelligence superceded that of any Miwok Bertrand had encountered. Wolf now spoke both English and French. He could be trusted to deliver the large leather pouches of gold to the assayer's office. Any man who could handle $10,000 worth of gold could handle Philippa.

"How do you do, Wolf?" she said.

The scout looked at her and bowed. "Madame, I am at your service."

Philippa smiled slowly at him, turning her head slightly, coaxing Wolf until he rewarded her with a tentative smile. They shook hands. "As Monsieur may have told you, I'm an artist. I wish to begin a portrait right away. May I ask you to pose for me?"

Wolf glanced at Bertrand, who nodded. "What do you wish me to do?" Wolf asked her.

She stood at the entrance of the tent, assessing the hilly site. So fiercely did she concentrate, it was as if she did not even see the dozens of men who lingered along the creek and stood in the doors of the machine shanties watching her. "I want you to pose by the river," she said. "We'll find a quiet pool somewhere. I want the reflection of water on your face. You are to look steadily at me."

"What did she say?" the closest miner asked.

"She wants Wolf to pose while she paints his picture," another miner said, addressing the crowd of them.

Shouts went up from the miners. "I'll do it!"

"Take me, I'll look at you all day long. I'm a right patient man."

"Oh, Missus, do my picture."

"Lordy, Lordy, who needs gold? Let me spend days looking on you."

Bertrand put his fingers in his mouth and whistled until they quieted down. "Gentlemen, I present to you, my wife, Mrs. Philippa Stuart Sutter LaMartine."

He thought their shrill whistles, cat calls, and sustained clapping would embarrass her. Instead she took Bertrand's hand for support and stood on a boulder, resting her hand on his shoulder. "I am pleased to make your acquaintance," she said. "All of you are far from home. You miss your wives and sweethearts, your mothers and sisters. When your work here is finished, your pockets will be full and you will be able to return to them. Think of me as your sister. Think of how you hope to find her upon your return." She paused

to let that image sink in. "I will look upon you as my brothers. I know we will afford one another the same respect." The men nodded and murmured. A few of the younger ones punched at each other. Bertrand savored her voice, supple, musical, with overtones of her cultural Philadelphia upbringing. Irresistibly feminine. His heart soared.

"I'm a painter," she said. "I invite you to observe me at work, two or three at a time. I will teach you a thing or two about art, so that your families will know you have been up to more in the West than digging." She stepped down from the rock amid their laughter and held tightly onto Bertrand's arm. She was invigorated by the crowd, flushed from speaking loudly.

"You can paint every face before you, my darling," he said into ear. "But first we will go off by ourselves."

They took advantage of a spell of warm May weather. He packed food, blankets and a small tent into saddle bags, and rode with her into the hills, where wildflowers blossomed in patches of the last snow in the alpine meadows. They lay in the grass and he fell asleep to her sighs. When he awoke she was staring at him. She had a pad of paper in her lap. "What are you doing?"

"A sketch of my husband."

He sat up and rested his chin on her shoulder, studying the drawing. Her skin smelled of grass and sunlight. The resemblance she'd drawn was uncanny. "Where's my beard?"

She looked at him sideways. A small smile.

"Hmm. You would prefer I shave. Is that it?"

"Yes."

He ran a hand over his face. "I have become a bit gray and wooly. All right. What will you do for me in return?"

Her expression grew very serious. "I will tell you this: it's taken months, but I've learned to believe in you again, Bertrand. For a while I thought my trust was gone forever. But mining on your own like this was the answer. You're beholden to no one except Douglas Campbell and Patrick." She paused. "Are they still here? I haven't seen them," she said.

"They are on their way to other projects," he said. "I paid their contracts and added a bonus. We got rip roaring drunk and danced around the fire to celebrate the end of our collaboration. Patrick told Irish stories until he passed out laughing." He was silent. For several moments he looked out over the hills. "I can't do this alone. I need you at my side, Philippa." He cleared his throat. "Would you consider postponing your voyage again?" He pulled her into his arms. "Oh, don't go at all. Stay with me."

Her voice was firm. "You have me for a few weeks and then I'm gone. I was able to redeem the first class ticket I had for the January sailing. Now I leave July 1st. I must do this, Bertrand." She kissed him as if to make up for the months when would be separated. "I think that when John Fremont returns in the autumn he will find you far different person. Perhaps then, he will reevaluate your political aspirations."

He put his fingers on her lips. The pale skin of her face was flooded with color from the sun. He wanted to touch all her softness. He wanted to see her flushed with desire for him. She kissed him until all that existed was their kissing. He heard the steady pulsing of her sighs and the sound of the wind overhead. As their lovemaking grew steadily more intense, his blood roared in his ears in the same rhythm of the pounding stamp mills.

Bertrand was astounded by the degree to which Philippa transformed the miners of LaMartine Quartz Mining Company. Not that the food was better cooked, or that the men's shirts were washed in the creeks more often. Philippa had no interest in domestic chores and, in fact was oblivious to them. She painted from early morning to dusk every day. Disdainful of the camp cook's fare of beans and jerky, she'd quickly sent to San Francisco for Jung Le from Bertrand's hotel to cook for the two of them.

With her artistry she generated high spirits among the men. Most had never made an association between art and their own lives. Paintings were spurned as ornamental and superfluous. Now they began to see that images could authentically represent, even illuminate, their own lives. They did not know enough about art to be put off by her strange style. They asked questions and she answered, explaining her technique. That was good enough for them. They saw something noble in themselves worthy of being pictured. In groups of twos and threes, they stood around Philippa as she stood at her easel and painted landscapes and figures of the men at work. At first Bertrand grew angry at the down time. He was behind schedule. But when he saw how the men's interest and respect for her improved morale, he acquiesced.

One morning she asked Wolf to pose for his portrait. He was barefoot, wearing native buckskin instead of his usual flannel shirt, pants and boots. Bertrand watched with interest as she placed Wolf under a tree beginning to leaf out, on the bank of a rivulet running into the stream where the water pooled and eddied. The Indian knelt on one knee, as if he was about to drink, but looked up, warily. Carefully she waded back through the water and set up her easel directly across from him. A handful of miners assembled.

"Gentlemen," she said, addressing them. "Today Wolf and I are going to give you a performance. Usually a portrait requires many days of tedious sittings for the subject. I propose to complete this one before twilight. I will need one of you to bring me tea and something to eat at noon."

Three men offered. Bertrand chose the youngest, Billy Sims.

"A portrait is a dialogue," Philippa continued. "The painter and the subject tell a story. This story is about a tracker who pauses to drink, when he senses danger approaching. Does he smell bear? Does he hear a mountain lion snapping twigs as he advances through the forest? Or has a hunter emerged from behind a tree, holding a rifle to his shoulder? I'll paint it and you decide."

The men murmured. Over the next few hours Bertrand returned several times to observe her progress. He was dubious about the success of the project. She was working on a large canvas, stretched over a pine frame, three feet wide by four feet in height. Surely it would take two days.

She painted swiftly, yet with an economy of movement, as if in a trance. The miners congregated in the woodsy area, squatting along the riverbank and up the hillsides. They spoke in hushed tones. When Billy Sims brought her tea, bread and meat, Bertrand realized that more men were watching performance than were at their posts. His anger flared, then he let it go. She held them in her spell. They would talk of this for the rest of their lives. She would become a legend.

One of the Miwoks came, splashed across the brook, and stood on the embankment. He offered to take Wolf's place.

"He does not need to be replaced," Philippa said quietly.

Bertrand wondered about that. The man hadn't shifted position in four hours. Yet, one look at Wolf's eyes told him the man had put himself into his own trance.

From time to time she stretched out her legs and arched her back, calling lightly to Wolf to do the same. By mid-afternoon everyone in the camp had assembled in the glade, as if for spiritual worship. Bertrand listened. The stamp machines had stopped. He could hear the river gurgling at his feet. Suddenly her voice rang out in the quietude. "I need more linseed oil and rags." He sent Billy Sims back to their house for what she wanted.

At twilight she put down her brush, stood up, weaving a little from the cramps in her legs, before steading herself. She smiled toward Bertrand. He looked at the painting. Despite the jarring technique, he saw that she had captured a spontaneous moment, fleeting yet eternal. The look of fear in the man's eye did not diminish his dignity. Her composition was controlled and balanced, except where the colors sparred, which, he guessed, was for dramatic effect. Vigorous brush strokes contrasted with areas where the surface of the paint was so smooth it appeared to be poured on. She said to Wolf, "You may get up now. Thank you."

"Let's see it!" a miner said. The chorus rose. Men stirred and moved forward.

"Is it finished?"

"Did she do it?" They were in a jovial mood.

Philippa picked up the canvas by its edges with the palms of her hands, fingers back so they would not smear the wet paint. "I have finished. Tell me, what has frightened the tracker?"

"Bear!" one miner shouted.

"Nah, it's cougars. They've come down to the river," another said.

"White man, he gonna shoot red man." Jung Le stepped from behind several of the men. He still wore his white chef's smock.

"You're closest to the truth, Jung Le," she said. She paused until she had their attention. "The tracker has seen his own reflection in the pool, and he realizes that not only he, but all of his tribesmen are in peril from white men who kill his people and seize their lands."

The men stared at her. Some looked defiant, others puzzled.

"I thought we was to be entertained by this performance, not get preached at," a miner said sourly.

Bertrand sensed a shift in the mood of his men. "You have had the best of both," he said. "Great art, like Shakespeare's plays, leaves us with a moral lesson. That's what makes it noble."

"The boss is right," one of the men shouted. One or two laughed. More cheered until they were all cheering for Philippa. She'd given them a day off, by God, and that alone was worth a huzza.

Two days later Bertrand sat down on the side of the creek and took off his boots. As he untied the laces, a flap of leather peeled off in his hand. His expensive boots were disintegrating from standing in the water, hauling rocks and boulders and stowing sand bags to form a dam. His quartz mining operation required tons and tons of water. When it didn't flow down from the mountain snowmelt fast enough, they had to dam it up until the next rain. Occasionally he did the work himself because he didn't want to take the miners away from their tasks. He liked the physicality and simplicity of building a dam.

He rested a few moments, legs, bent, flexing his toes. He looked up and watched a hawk circling in the azure sky. He could see their house from the creekside. It was well situated on the top of a rise, constructed of split clapboard nailed to the frame. Inside, the heavy cotton fabric stretched across the wall had been irresistible to Philippa. She'd painted murals of woodland scenes across the parlor into the dining room.

He relished how the morning sun poured through glass in their bedroom windows on the second story. He'd even had the carpenters build a separate smaller room for Philippa to take her frequent baths.

Downstairs, the kitchen boasted a cooking stove manned by Jung Le, who considered his post in Grass Valley a promotion over his duties at La Martine House, which, after rebuilding, was once again filled with travelers. Often Jung Le cooked outside over the brick kiln in the laundry yard, swapping recipes with the cook who came up with the Mexican miners.

Bertrand lay back, arms under his head. The hawk flew lower. A red tail–unusual in these parts. He closed his eyes listening to camp noises, the thumping of the stamp mills, calls of the men in the still air, gurgling of creek water. Philippa absorbed his mind's eye. Often she would lie later in bed in the mornings. He'd heard her singing. Her skin glowed honey-rose. She was not one to wear a bonnet; she said she liked the sun on her face.

She'd completed six portraits for what she called her Californio portrait series, selecting as her subjects one man, each of a different nationality. At dusk one evening, as they shared a bottle of wine, she lined up each of the portraits against the wall for him to examine. She beamed at him. "These are even better than the ones I did of Quartermoon and the Tahitians on the wharf. I believe I will be known in France for this portrait series." She spoke with confidence, as if a series of paintings with a common theme was a recognized style of art. He heard an edge of pride in her voice that boarded on pomposity. "These faces and the stories they tell will serve as a unique perspective on gold mining in California and record the history of the social changes brought on by greed and wealth. "

She'd composed them in such a way that only the man's face was pictured as he stared straight at the viewer, prideful, even arrogant. The expressions in their eyes were disarming and disturbing. Each painting's background had a dominant color field, which enhanced the character of the face.

The portrait of the clean-shaven Miwok boy, a nephew of Wolf's, was done in warm shades of tans and browns. The picture of the Mexican miner, resplendent in his elaborate mustachios, vibrated with the reds and yellows of his serape framed behind him. The Yankee she'd picked was of German descent, an austere gent with a strong, square-shaped face. His background was rendered in a steel silvery blue. She'd painted the Irish chap from Dublin with his cocky smile and rakish sideburns, and framed him in lime greens.

She'd captured Jung Le's flat face in shades of pale yellow. His queue was shiny black, the background, the thick, rich red of Chinese lacquer. The swarthy Peruvian, who was an expert in dynamite blasting, was depicted as a manic framed in dark reds and purples.

Stretched out on the grass by the creek he looked up at the hawk circling lower in the sky and wished to God she just give up her bizarre painting and

concentrate on helping him in his political career. "We each want what the other cannot give," he said aloud. "Yet, what we can give to one another still nourishes. Perhaps it is enough." When he built the mansion in San Francisco, when they had a child, things would be different.

Bertrand heard her calling his name. He got up and walked toward her through the hot, dry grass. He waved. She did not wave back. She ran down the hill with such urgency, he felt panicky. Something was wrong. As she drew closer, he saw the paper she was carrying was a letter.

"What does this mean?" She was in a fury.

He tried to take her in his arms to calm her, but she pulled away, thrusting the letter into his hand. He glanced at the signature. Henri Seigner, the art critic. Bertrand began to sweat.

*"On board New World Glory, Buenos Aires, February 25, 1850*

*Madame LaMartine,*

*By the time you receive this letter you will be about to embark upon your trip to France. Do not come. I am no longer interested in promoting you.*

*"I have spent months on this miserable ship, enduring tedious long days of inactivity followed by terrifying storms. I have employed crew members to try to locate the paintings you packed for me. We finally found the crate sealed in a cupboard in the box room. The captain is unable to explain how they came to be misplaced. In my opinion they were hidden there. But in any event, I opened the parcel with great excitement. I was appalled! The paintings are not the ones I selected. These oil landscapes exhibit hopelessly inferior work. No doubt, you grew agitated about sending me off with your more experimental paintings and decided to give me your earlier, "safer," work. Not only is this cowardly, it is rude. You put me in a terrible position. I have already written ahead to the French Academy of Fine Arts and the organizers of the Salon to expect to see the work of a sensational artist from El Dorado in the New World.*

*Madame LaMartine, you insisted on wrapping the paintings yourself. I do not understand why you would ignore my carefully chosen selection. Truly, Madame, even a rank amateur would have been more gracious.*

*My entire sojourn in the Gold Country, especially under the primitive conditions of the camps, was a time of hyperbole and anxiety. In retrospect I believe my enthusiasm for your work was an over-reaction. In fact, I can barely remember what you showed me or why I liked it.*

*I repeat, do not come to France or seek me out for further discourse.*

*Henri Seigneur."*

Philippa glared at Bertrand. "I am incapable of inferior work!"

"Let's go to the house," he said in a low voice.

"Did you deliver my work to Seigner's ship?"

He threw his head back defiantly. "I delivered seven landscapes I found leaning against the wall. They were not yours."

She stared at him, blue eyes darkening. "You sent him off with the paintings of some other artist? Why?" He started to walk toward the house. She seized his arm. "Bertrand!"

He stopped and faced her. "I did it for your own good. You and your paintings do not need to be discussed in France. You are my wife. You belong here."

Her mouth dropped.

"That letter from Seigner brings an ending to an unfortunate episode," he said. "At one time I thought it would be helpful to have your work evaluated. I thought you would benefit from advice on how to make it more appealing. But I see I miscalculated where it would lead. Now I've put an end to it once and for all."

"No, Bertrand. Your mistake was in not believing how good I am. You didn't make a provision for my success. You only planned for my failure."

"Ah, Philippa, your painting is a failure." He shivered in disgust.

She stood very still. "You've thought that from the beginning, haven't you?" She could not have looked at him with more horror if he had swung an axe at her.

"Your promise has not grown to fruition."

She eyed him in fury. "I see. I was a bad financial investment. What you really want is an admired wife who paints pretty landscapes."

"I want a wife who puts her husband first."

"Stop it! You grind me down the way you crush ore." She backed away from him, one step, two steps. "You don't believe in me, and yet you deceive me into thinking you do. "You're a first class swindler. You've cheated me just as you cheated your consortium partners. Luke Blacker and Edmund Rose, they never got their gold back, did they? They walked to Utah, penniless, because you bilked them out of their fortune. And Mr. Naglee, there's another victim. His bank never received the gold from that second mining site in Dry Diggings. Yes, I can see from your expression."

She glared at him, then looked around frantically, down to the river, up to the house. The sudden realization struck them simultaneously: they could no longer go on together. Her hand went to her mouth. Her eyes were stricken.

A calm came over him. She could not leave him because he held fast to her soul. Still, he would have to watch her carefully.

# Chapter Fifteen

Six, then eight weeks passed without her monthly bleeding. Early in the mornings she was nauseous, then violently sick. To conceal it, she took walks and wretched in the woods behind the house. Despite her precautions, she had given Bertrand what he wanted that night in early April. Her misery was complete. The child would come next January. She would be unable to undertake a long voyage.

She was trapped in Grass Valley seething with anger at Bertrand. He knew she did not harbor any illusions for a reconciliation and did not expect her to be civil to him. They avoided one another scrupulously. He considered her his possession, but he did not know about the child. He would never know, her only consolation during her exile. She would leave him before it showed, disappear into to San Francisco or Monterey. She watched him watching her. She spoke pleasantly with Jung Le about kitchen and housekeeping matters and answered the miners brightly as they approached her with their courteous greetings each day. Everyone in the camp was puzzled as to why the LaMartines were locked in a bitter feud and kept a respectful distance. She held herself with a steel grip, determined to remain impassive around Bertrand, hating him more deeply each day for his monstrous deceitfulness.

Her fatigue surprised her. In the afternoons she rested in bed, her hand warm on her belly. She felt a swelling in her breasts, a soreness of the nipples. Gradually she began to experience a modicum of joy about bringing a child into the world. She would not be alone. Dusk brought darker thoughts. Bertrand

was dangerous. He would stop at nothing to get what he wanted, and once he knew of the child he would covet it. She considered her options.

She awoke abruptly one night with the light of a full moon bathing her face and knew. Despite the hardships of pregnancy during the sea voyage and the arduous trek through Panama, she would go home. In the folds of her lingerie she hid the $400 ticket for her first class berth on a Pacific Mail Steamship Company voyage to New York on July 1st. With favorable connections through the Panamanian route, she could be home in eight or ten weeks. On June 30th she would leave before dawn and have Jung Le take her in the wagon to Sacramento, board a paddlewheel into San Francisco and then lock herself in her cabin aboard the Pacific Mail Steamship, where the captain held jurisdiction. Not even Bertrand would stop her.

*Grass Valley, June 15, 1850*

*To my dear friend John Prendergast,*

*When we last talked you mentioned that you intended to sail back to England this summer. I pray this letter finds you still in San Francisco and not yet embarked upon your journey, for I have a favor to ask of you. I would like you to bring ten of my canvases to Paris to Monsieur Seigner, the art critic who visited us last fall. There are the four landscapes I did in your studio and six portraits I've done in Grass Valley. It is important that he see more of my work as soon as possible. After repeated delays I find I am unable to make the voyage to France myself, and I dare not entrust my paintings to anyone less reliable and supportive than you.*

*I hope you can perform this great act of friendship. In anticipation of your consent, I have already packaged my paintings for the journey along with a letter of explanation. Considering the possibility that your sailing is imminent, I am taking the liberty of having my courier, Wolf, bring them to you with this letter. Here also is money to cover the additional cost of your travel to Paris, and for the courtesy of your time taken in the errand.*

*Your colleague and friend,*

*Philippa LaMartine*

*San Francisco, June 25, 1850*

*Dear Philippa,*

*It is most fortunate that you packaged up your paintings and had Wolf bring them to me, because my ship sails in two days' time. I will be pleased to personally carry your work to Monseigneur Seigner in Paris. I will appreciate the opportunity to meet with him and show him my new work as well.*

*Wolf is an impressive young man. A Miwok Indian with his veneer of civilization is a distinct curiosity. I introduced him to fellow colleagues at our artist group meeting last evening.*

*Etienne Godchaux wants to do a studio portrait of him. After that William Smith Jewett wants to pose Wolf out on the hills overlooking the bay, so it may be some time before young Wolf returns to your fold.*

*My dear Philippa, I opened your package and studied your paintings. The Californio Portrait Series is superb. I saw immediately what you are after, yet your imagination astounds me. This style you are developing deepens in maturity and richness. What you are creating is not only revolutionary for our times, but will also stand as a monument of achievement for the ages.*

*If you need a correspondent while I am away, write to Etienne at his studio on Clay Street. Although he may not understand your art, he cares for your person as deeply as do I. Farewell.*

*I remain as ever, John Prendergast*

Bertrand left the hill top house at dawn each day, occupied with his latest enterprise, mining a placer claim in the hills beyond the quartz mine. When one day he road up the path to their house with a well dressed man driving a wagon, Philippa was instantly on guard, fearful he suspected she was pregnant and had summoned a doctor. As the man stepped down from his wagon and straightened his frock coat, she recognized his slick salesman type. Addressing her directly for the first time in weeks Bertrand introduced him as Stephen Lanford, a daguerrean. "Because of your love for portraits, I've bought equipment so you can make daguerreotypes. Mr. Lanford will stay one week to instruct you." Bertrand looked to see how she would react to his peace offering, but she only gazed into the middle distance, refusing to reward him with a response.

Mr. Lanford was a wily South Carolinian who'd made his way to New York to learn the daguerrean trade. He had protruding brown eyes of a yellow cast and moist lips. He sat on the edge of a gilt chair in her parlor and told her he'd taken more than five hundred portraits of important business personages and their ladies. His gaze roamed the room. "The southern window exposure will lend itself perfectly to portraiture," he informed her. "I will hang white cotton drapes in the corner and invite up each of the miners to have his portrait done."

"I think not, Mr. Lanford. I am a portrait painter. I am not remotely interested in making daguerreotype likenesses of our miners as souvenirs."

"But, Madame LaMartine, I don't mean for you to give them away. You will of course charge each man a fair sum, let us say five dollars."

"Of which, you will receive how much, sir?"

"All I ask is one dollar per portrait, which is my fee for instruction on the process and the use of these expensive materials," he says.

She allowed her eyes to rest on his for an inordinate amount of time. He squirmed. "It is my understanding that Monsieur LaMartine purchased the camera, plates and chemicals from you."

His popped eyes blinked. "Monsieur purchased the camera and a supply of plates, but we will necessarily use up some of the materials in our lessons. These I charge for."

Her outrage flared. Yet she wanted his knowledge. "This is what we will do," she said. "Beginning tomorrow we will go out in the meadow, set up a portable stand, and you will instruct me on how to work the camera out of doors. We will then use a back room of one of the machine shacks, where you will teach me how to develop the plates. I expect this will take only a few days. After which, you are free to go, sir. You will receive a fee commensurate with the value of your tutelage."

"But, Madame, you have not heard what I have to say."

"Nor do I care to. Jung Le will now escort you to your living quarters. He will bring you your meals while you stay with us. The weather is mild enough. I'm sure you do not mind living rough in a tent."

Philippa soon grew fascinated by daguerreotype. Once the unctuous Lanford departed, she realized how much she'd learned. Over the past decade, the most significant development in the process had become the reduction of time required for exposure. She had no idea she could capture an image in less than a minute. She concentrated on developing her pictures, trying to avoid the blurring as the men moved. She found the glimpse of motion was much the same effect she tried for in her painting. The two disciplines were much alike.

Her new passion was a godsend in that it kept Bertrand at bay. She had carpenters build a shed with shelves and sinks in which to mix chemicals. "Missus dark house," Jung Le called it. She worried that the mercury, nitric acid, iodine, and hyposulphite of soda she worked with in the shed would make her sick, especially since was pregnant, and had one of the carpenters install high narrow windows to ventilate the shed.

She felt endowed with magical power, like an alchemist, able to summon up images of reality impressed onto silver slips. After the first two months she no longer felt her pregnancy sapping her strength. With renewed energy she realized that not only did she want the child, she loved him. She would teach him all her wisdom. He would be her ally. She imagined how her mother would welcome this child and how she would look with him in her arms.

Less than two weeks remained before her departure. She became obsessed by a desire to leave, but did not want to make Bertrand suspicious. She flinched at his sidelong glances. He was as wary of her calm as of her simmering anger.

He was furtive, all instinct, trained as a trapper of wild animals. She passed the time and put him off her scent by devoting herself to her daguerreotypy.

In the evenings Philippa retired early. Bertrand sat up late over whiskey with Collis Huntington. Ostensibly on the scene to sell blasting powder to Bertrand, Huntington talked at length about his other ventures such as building a railroad through the Sierras. Good Lord, she thought, closing her bedroom door against their loud voices, a herder could scarcely lead a goat over some of the mountain trails.

Often Huntington and Bertrand rode their horses into town and drank in the tavern, where Huntington kept a suite of rooms. When Bertrand returned, unsteady on his feet, singing Irish ditties off key, he emptied his pockets on his desk, scattering bank notes and double eagle coins. She rose before dawn and stole his money, hiding it in her purse. John Prendergast had been right. Bertrand had corrupted her.

In need of an enthusiastic investor, Bertrand brought Huntington in on his placer mine claim in the hills. They spent a week setting explosives to blow up the boulders in the river, then mobilized a crew to set two rows of stones with sand bags between them to build a dam.

The more she experimented with daguerreotypy, the more intrigued she grew with its artistic possibilities. Soon the finished images on bulky metal plates became cumbersome. In the newspapers Collis Huntington scattered around their sitting room she read about a system invented by William Fox Talbot by which the daguerreotypist produced paper negatives, then in another step, made paper prints. She sent Jung Le to Sacramento City to make inquiries at several daguerreotype studios. He found a Fox Talbot system, which the owners made available on loan to her for a month. She worked day and night, determined to master it and was intrigued by the possibilities of painting the prints she produced. She would start a new portfolio to take to France after her baby was born, combining tinted daguerreotypes and oil studies of the same subject in a series.

Holding an oil lamp Philippa stood over Bertrand's desk. Her fingers roamed over the gold coins. Several slipped from her grip, fell and rolled along the grooves of the plank floor.

"What are you doing?" He came up behind her.

She jumped in fright, swinging the lamp wildly. "I'm looking for the letter from my mother," she said.

He ran his hands over her hips. "So you're the night thief who's stealing my money. You're planning to leave, aren't you?" He kissed her neck, leaving a trail of saliva. She pulled away in disgust. "You won't get away from me. I'll kill you first."

She placed her hands over her chest to calm herself. He was drunk. He wouldn't remember in the morning. "Go to bed, Bertrand. You're a drunken bully. Get out of my sight."

In the early mornings Bertrand began to work at the dining table, sketching drawings of a new invention. When he left the house, she examined his notes. With typical arrogance he wrote his invention would revolutionize mining. He was fabricating a hose contraption to shoot water at the sides of the cliffs he'd blasted away, an operation far more efficient than chipping at the cliff with pick and shovel.

Now she understood why he built the dam. It served to create a reservoir of water, which spilled into a flume and coursed downhill. The water was sucked into the hose. When the nozzle was aimed at the vertical embankment, the forceful stream of water loosened earth and gravel, which then slid down the cliff. The hose was then turned on the soil to wash it though a sluice box at the bottom of the cliff.

Only a man would invent such a mechanism!

Several fire hoses in varying sizes arrived by freight wagon from San Francisco. Surely the hoses were sorely needed there, now that the city had finally assembled a fire department, but Bertrand had his ways of getting what he wanted. At night he laid out the hoses on the dining table, where he stood over them, cutting long sections of the duck, then stitching them together. He brought the blacksmith up from the village to fit up collars, couplings, and nozzles out of sheet metal.

She'd alerted Jung Le that she wished to make an early a trip into Sacramento City in four days. She concealed her packed satchel behind a dresser.

The next morning Bertrand called to her through the open door of the house. "Philippa, get your camera equipment. I'm using my canvas hydraulicker for the first time and I want you to make a record of it."

She shut her eyes and breathed deeply. She summoned her mother's voice and good counsel. Be patient. He mustn't suspect.

Jung Le saddled her mare. She rode up the hill, balancing all her equipment in sacks slung over her shoulders. The miners, as curious as they were eager to take time off, trekked up the hill from the river and the stamp machines to witness the proceedings. At the top she set her camera on the stand and inserted glass plates.

Bertrand was poised at the bottom of a hill where the flume narrowed into a funnel, which fit onto one end of the hose. He stood with legs apart, like a Colossus, reveling in his dramatic moment. At his signal, a miner opened a dam above and water rushed down the chute into his hose. He lifted the nearly hundred feet of hose, steadied its weight across his thighs and aimed it at a

chasm. Instantly a powerful stream of water leapt into the air in a graceful arc, and hit the side of the rain-sodden cliff, dislodging tons of rock and earth, which slid downward in a thunderously loud rumble. The men cheered. Philippa threw the black cloth over her head and put her eye to the lens.

The scene has a tableau quality to it, with its two dozen or so participants standing still in anticipation. The image of the spurting water, blurred by its velocity, was in sharp contrast to Bertrand's static stance. Pleased by the composition, she took four daguerreotypes, each requiring an exposure of only forty-five seconds: two of them of Bertrand spraying with all his might, first with a scowl from effort, then with a smile widening at the success of his invention.

The third exposure focused on Collis Huntington standing next to Bertrand with his weight back on his heels, cigar in mouth, hat perched at the back of his head. She turned the camera toward the miners for the fourth picture. They jumped up and down and punched each other, joyful at the prospect of having their pick and shovel time cut dramatically, oblivious to the fact that Bertrand's new invention would put most of them out of work.

Word quickly spread about Bertrand's hydraulic invention. Miners and claim owners from as far as Marysville came over to see it. For the next two days visitors tramped through her house. To avoid suspicion she let Bertrand engage her in conversation in the evenings while he downed three glasses of whiskey. "These onlookers are a damn a nuisance," he grumbled.

"Let Huntington deal with them," Philippa said.

He raised red-rimmed eyes to her.

"What else?" she asked, sensing trouble.

He drank deeply. "We've been hosing the banks north, around that bend in the river. A fellow named Reynolds from Nevada City says I'm trespassing on his claim."

"Claim jumping is a serious offense. Are you trespassing?"

He sighed. "So much earth is being hosed down, it's impossible to say where my land ends and his begins." His face took on that steely, stubborn look she recognized.

So, the swindling was to begin again. "Next time he confronts you, ask to see his deed," she said. "Then show him yours. Get it settled. We don't want the sheriff out here."

Afternoon cloud formations intrigued Philippa. She contemplated a series on clouds. When framed and exhibited, her daguerreotypes, both metal plates and paper prints, tinted with colors, would alternate with realistic charcoal

sketches, water colors and finally impressionist oil paintings, leading the viewer through various moods, colors and texture of experiencing clouds.

June 28th was bright and hot. She decided to take her camera up on the hill and study the rain-filled clouds that rolled heavily over the ridge each afternoon. Some of the clouds might drop their rain. They would be difficult to capture on paper negative, an interesting experiment. She put her camera into a bag she carried on her back, hoisted her wooden stand across her saddle, mounted her mare, and started up the hill. She worked all afternoon, stopping only briefly to eat from her waxed packet of ham and bread and to drink water from the stream.

Around six o'clock, when the sun began to sink and spread its colors through the horizon clouds, she hiked to the next ridge and set up her camera in a new place. Below her she saw Bertrand working the hydraulicker against the cliff. Loosened by the velocity of the spray, soil shifted and fell down, taking stones with it. A whistle had blown half- an- hour before, signaling the work day was over. The miners had returned to their tents or gone into town. Bertrand stood there alone, silhouetted against the spray of water, like a lesser deity. The pose would make a quintessential picture of him–the arrogant swindler of the Sierras. She would make a print of it, tint it with the changing colors of light, and keep it as a reminder of why she hated him.

Philippa ducked under the black cloth. She couldn't define the detail on his face. She picked up her camera, moved down the hill to another spot, and refocused on the scene in her lens. The expression on Bertrand's face was ecstatic. From this angle she was able to include him, the stream of water, its target, and the soil tumbling downhill. Before she could complete the exposure, she heard shouting. A man she didn't recognize appeared across the canyon on the far ridge. She realized he looked impossibly tall because he rode up the hill on horseback. As he came closer he dismounted and shouted again. Over the noise of the water from Bertrand's spray, she couldn't make out what he said. The man was agitated. He paced back and forth at the edge of the cliff. Dressed in frock coat and beaver hat, he looked as if he had just come from town. He meant business. "Get off my claim, LaMartine!" he cried.

Bertrand continued to spray his hydraulicker. "Move back, Reynolds, or you won't have a clod of earth to stand on."

"You saw my deed." Reynolds said.

"You saw mine," Bertrand said. His voice echoed across the rocky chasm.

"Your deed's a forgery. That's a phony notary seal and you know it."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I'll send for the sheriff."

Bertrand laughed. "I can buy that donkey off with a single sack of gold."

"You're clearly in the wrong. I'll tell every man in town," the man said.

"I'm sick of your bellyaching. There's plenty of land. Go dig somewhere else."

"I'm warning you for the last time!" Reynolds shouted.

"And I say, move off now!" Bertrand lifted his hose as a threat, waving it in anger.

The man raised his arm. "This is my claim!"

Bertrand lowered the hose, adjusting it, until he carefully aimed the nozzle at the man. Reynolds screamed in agony as the spray hit his face, instantly knocking him off his feet.

Horrified, Philippa snapped her exposure.

Reynolds fell headfirst, arms outstretched down the cliff, out of her composition. Philippa's heart was in her throat. Independent of her will, her fingers flew. She adjusted her camera to focus on the bottom of the canyon, where the man lay writhing. Seconds went by. Bertrand continued to spray the man, turning him over and over amid clogs of dirt and boulders. She snapped a second exposure.

Still under the black cloth of her camera she moved her camera to watch Bertrand slip slide down his side of the cliff and slog through mud to Reynolds. He lifted the man's wrist to test his pulse. Philippa's third exposure, just as the sun disappeared behind the ridge, captured Bertrand rolling the dead man into a narrow crevice. He kicked Reynolds's limp legs, and shoved the feet from view. Laboring intensely in the darkening light, Bertrand dislodged boulders from the side of the canyon and rolled them up against the cave opening. Glancing around, satisfied that no one observed him, he turned and climbed back up the embankment. As he neared the top, something caught his attention. He glanced in her direction. Philippa snapped the fourth exposure, then yanked her camera off its stand and ran.

# Chapter Sixteen

Panic drove her down the ridge, slipping, sliding on the loose gravel. Philippa ran across the uneven surface of the meadow carrying her camera equipment. She whistled for her mare, swung into the saddle, and thundered down the hill, digging the heels of her boots into the horse's side. Hot wind rushed at her face. She must get away from Bertrand, but first, there was something she must do.

She galloped into the yard, gave her mare to Jung Le to care for, and closed herself inside the daguerreotype workroom. She went to work.

She lost track of time. Startled by voices outside, she looked up from the trays of chemicals. She heard Bertrand's voice as he moved across the yard toward the house. Her heart thudded.

"Jung Le, where is Madame La Martine?"

"She in darkhouse, Sir."

"Tell her I've gone into town to the hotel. I'll be in the barroom."

"Yes sir, I tell her."

She breathed a sigh of relief and returned to her trays. He didn't know she had watched him on the ridge. Now she had time to achieve the clarity she wanted in the daguerreotypes. With a rag she wiped the perspiration from her face in the close, dark space.

Test prints flew around her, fell to the floor. She would pick them up later. She judged the final prints were sufficiently distinct for a sheriff to determine the act they recorded. She wrote a hasty note to Etienne Godchaux and one to John Fremont.

*June 28th, 1850*

*Dear Etienne,*

*I need your help. My courier Jung Le is delivering to you a package of daguerreotype prints and negatives. Do not open the package. I beg you to keep it hidden. As I remember, the walls of your studio kitchen are brick. Put the packet deep behind the bricks. When Colonel John Fremont returns to California in the autumn give him this packet, which contains a letter of explanation to him. Circumstances dictate that I leave California and return to the East immediately.*

*Our mutual friend John Prendergast has appointed you as his surrogate liaison for me in his absence. For that I am grateful. You and I have disagreed about art in the past, but I respect you and hold you in high regard. Do not fail me.*

*Philippa La Martine*

She gave instructions to Jung Le to ride to San Francisco and deliver the packet to Etienne Godchaux at his studio on Clay Street. "We go to Sacramento City in two days?" Jung Le asked, puzzled.

"No. My plans have changed." She took hold of both his hands. "Thank you dear friend. I will not forget you." At her urging he saddled a horse from the barn and left immediately.

She hurried into the house, shoved Bertrand's hyraulicker equipment off the table and kicked aside the canvas hosing and bits of cut rubber and metal. Quickly she assembled her eighteen paintings on the table, covered each one with paper, and rolled them up. With a knife she cut out the side of a leather bag and stuffed the paintings in it. She dressed in her riding outfit and a wide-brimmed hat, and filled three saddle bags with her packed satchel of clothes and her painting box of oils, canvas, brushes, charcoal, and varnish. She hung her purse, filled with banknotes and coins by its strings around her collar.

She rode her mare holding a swinging kerosene lantern to illumine the road. She would not go south. As soon as he saw she had fled, Bertrand would overtake her, looking for her first in Auburn, then Sacramento City, then San Francisco. Instead she traveled northwest, seeking dark paths. Inevitably she came to a settlement and rode in and out of Rough and Ready as fast as possible. She paused at Sucker Flat, where the Yuba River branched off from Deer Creek, then continued north. She reached French Corral an hour before dawn. An innkeeper looked to be walking in his sleep, arms outstretched, as he

answered her knock on his door. His eyelids flew open as she handed him a ten dollar gold piece.

What would tomorrow bring? It was already tomorrow. She had not seen Bertrand on the road. She could sleep.

At noon she left the tavern in French Corral and followed the road north. A canopy of oaks hid the hot sun. She stretched her neck and breathed normally for the first time in hours. Behind her she heard a wagon lumbering up the hill. A man yelled at his mules. She tensed at the cruel snap of his whip, her heart lurching in fear. She was stranded on a bridge over a creek. She turned her face away as the delivery wagon passed. The driver slowed, then stopped on the other side of the bridge. An old man, he turned to look at her. He was hauling kegs of beer, crates of whiskey, and a stack of lumber.

"You all right, Miss?" the driver asked. "Looks to me like you've seen a ghost."

She nodded. He paced her along the road. The kegs and crates jostled as he negotiated the ruts. Glass bottles clanged against each other. "If you like, you can hitch your horse to the back of the wagon and git a ride in the wagon."

She stopped. He stopped. They looked each other over. She recalled a proverb of her father's: Before you run in double harness, look well to the other horse. The driver regarded her with a slow smile. His complexion was very dark, his eyes blue. She saw he was part Negro, a fellow victim. It was unlikely that she would be recognized riding on the front seat of a wagon with a Negro, especially with the brim of her hat pulled down. She packed her saddle bags in his wagon, covering them with tarp, and tied her mare behind. Her only risk was that if Bertrand rode up behind them he would recognize her horse, but that couldn't be helped. "By what name my I call you, Sir?" she asked.

"Mr. Moon. I'm from Georgia."

The sun beat down on her shoulders. Birds call to each other. The transparently clear air smelled of resinous pine. She dozed, then jerked awake as the wagon wheels rumbled over a deep rut in the road. At North San Juan she waited under a stand of oaks while Mr. Moon distributed most of the liquor to the taverns. At Camptonville he offloaded the lumber and remaining liquor, except for one crate. They pressed on. They stopped in a clearing a few miles from the North Fork of the Yuba River. Mr. Moon removed a bottle of whiskey from the last crate, and disappeared into a cabin. She waited, listening to the low voices and bursts of laughter of robust storytelling. She watered her horse and led him to a delapidated barn and let him chew on moldy hay stacked in a corner. Finally Mr. Moon stepped unsteadily off the porch of the cabin,

emerging with a darker Negro. "This here is Nigger Kent. I'm staying here. You follow the ridge road up to Downieville, and you'll be all right," he said.

"I'm not in trouble," she said. She threw her saddlebags over her mare.

"Yes, you be," Mr. Moon said softly. "Any damn fool sees you be runnin' away. If he's following you, the folks in Downieville will take care of him."

She whirled her head around to scan the road behind her. Mr. Moon shook his head. "Go on with you and God speed."

Downieville with its shacks and shanties stuck to the side of the mountain like burrs to the shanks of a mule made her vertiginous. The town teemed with miners crossing the main street to the taverns. Men crowded on the porch of the assayers office watching her as she rode by. Along the banks of the Yuba the miners squatted with their picks and pans, shouting over the noise of the river that rushed over boulders, following its course right through town. They looked like the first grubstakers of three years ago. She continued up hill over a gorge. She rested her horse often on the mountain trail, which snaked along the side of forested cliffs. Looking down, she was amazed at how high she'd climbed. The Yuba tumbled and swirled far below in its deep chasm. A cool breeze soothed her. The air felt crisper at this altitude. She lifted her face to the last remaining rays of the sun, forcing herself to think of anything but Bertrand.

The steep trail leveled off to a plateau. She rode into a settlement of tents and cabins perched on the precipice. In the gathering darkness the Yuba thundered below. She came to a two-story building fronting the road, its thick, masonry walls made of plastered stones and brick. The door and heavy shutters were fashioned from iron. A fortress. She dismounted stiffly, holding her horse's reins, and knocked. After a substantial delay a rumpled old man opened the door and stepped into the road.

"What is this place?" She asked.

"Summitville. This be the inn. Ain't nothing past here 'cept mountains where the Donners ate each other."

She shivered. "Who owns the inn?"

"Adams and Company built it for the stage coach what passes through here with the miners' gold and mail." He moved his head left, looking uphill. "Every two weeks from the north." Then he looked right, down the hill she had just ascended. "Every ten days from the south."

She had finally abandoned civilization a thousand feet below. "Do you have a guest room available?"

He gave her an appraising look. "Can you pay?"

"Yes."

He nodded his head toward her saddlebags. "What's in them cases?"

"Paintings. I'm a traveling artist. I want two rooms for a week, fitted with locks, on the second floor, over-looking the road."

The inn keeper examined the gold coins she placed in his open palm. His smile was a lear, revealing over-sized teeth that jutted out over his lower lip.

"Name's William Wyatt." He scooped of his slouchy hat. "Meals at seven, noon and six. Whatever I can scare up. When the Adams coach comes through, the driver do like to spend the night, so you'll have to move out of one of your rooms."

She handed him a banknote. "I would like you to board my horse in a warm stall with fresh water and clean hay."

She threw open the double windows of the upstairs rooms and listened to the sounds of the swiftly-moving river. A cool north light fell through the windows of the larger of the two rooms. She started to unpack her paints and brushes, then looking at the plump quilt tossed over the wide bed, she fell across it and slept.

At dawn she awakened with a start from a troubled dream. Dry leaves blew through an open door across the yard of their hilltop house in Grass Valley. The leaves piled high against the front door stoop. Not leaves, paper prints. Anxiety blossomed, crystalized into heart-stopping fear. In her haste to leave she had not destroyed all the test prints of Bertrand on the ridge. She'd dropped them on the floor and had forgotten to throw them away. He would search her dark house, find the discarded prints and know she saw him kill Reynolds. Bertrand would not scour the Sierras alone for his runaway wife. He would send his crew of miners after her. He would order them to search in every direction.

She put on a dressing gown and hurried down stairs, finding Wyatt in the kitchen. "When is the Adams and Company representative due to arrive from the north?"

"In five days."

"How long will it take the rider to reach San Francisco?"

"Another two days."

"I wish to accompany him south. Do you think I would be safe traveling with him?"

Wyatt looked at her queerly, admiring the contours of her silk gown. "If it's Leonard, he's a honest enough bloke, but he don't travel in no comfort, Madame. Usually he don't bring no wagon. You'll ride rough."

She nodded. All that mattered was escaping from Bertrand.

"Will you have a cup of coffee with me, Ma'am?" Wyatt asked. He buttered a piece of toast and set it on a plate. "Then I'll show you around the inn."

She took a seat at the table and forced herself to relax.

"It's a curious building," Wyatt began. "Adams & Company constructed it like a castle. The walls are fire-proof, seeing as they're packed with layers of dirt between the first and second floor to stop the flames. Come look at this. There's a secret room off the main room. He showed her an odd-shaped, two-paneled iron door about a foot-and-a-half off the floor.

"What's behind it?" she asked.

He leaned down, opened the door and took her inside. "Watch yur noggin."

To her surprise she found herself in a space forty-by-fifteen feet. Light streamed from above where one section of the roof was open. "What is this for?"

"When it snows, as it do mightily up here, workmen shovel the snow off the sloped roof through the opening into the pit, where it lasts all summer." He showed her where iced snow was packed against the walls in sawdust.

Intrigued, she moved ahead. "What is this compartment?" It was cool, but separate from the ice pit and remained dry.

"That ain't used for anything," Wyatt said. She kicked at the iron door and saw it swung open easily. God forbid, if Bertrand tracked her down, she would hide here.

Rain and wind. The mining camp of Summitville was an apt metaphor for the way she lived during the next few days: a fugitive hiding in the Adams & Company coaching inn high in the Sierras. The slopes loomed over and under her. Morning light delineated their sharp angles. She could go either up or down. She took careful steps not to fall into the abyss.

She arranged her paintings against the walls of the rooms. Seeing them displayed gave her confidence. She warmed her hands on her belly. Soon she would feel her child moving, stretching his tiny limbs. Soon she would be home. She had missed her July 1st sailing and would have to redeem her first class ticket for one on another steamship. She'd have to hide from Bertrand in San Francisco, waiting for the next ship to sail. She'd stay with the couturiere Mademoiselle Courbet in the small apartment above her shop. Bertrand would check all the hotels and rooming houses. He would seek out her artist friends, but he wouldn't think of the seamstress.

The waiting was agonizing. Philippa paced between the windows in the two rooms and looked down at the road, fearful of what she would see. Wyatt

no longer questioned bringing meals to her room on trays. He saw her paintings through the open door. They spoke volumes of her eccentricity.

By the third day she had an urgent desire to exorcize Bertrand from her mind and the depth of her dreams. She would paint his face. One painting would not suffice to capture his betrayal. She set up four canvases, one on her easel, the others against the window, on a chair, on the dresser, primed them with undercoat and began.

Energy charged her body like electrical bolts of lightning. She moved quickly between the canvasses, working on all four portraits. She raced to outrun her demons.

How well she knew Bertrand's face. No need for charcoal sketches. She mixed colors right on canvas. Four seasons of Bertrand stared at her. Spring greens for the freshness of their first desire. He looked so young! In the background she painted small figures of men panning gold, on the gravel bar on the American River. The colors shimmered, capturing their passion.

The expression on his face in Bertrand, Summer, suggested the budding entrepreneur. The background was their wedding day in Monterey. Shining primary colors of summer described the intensity of their happiness, the gradual deepening of love.

His ruthlessness emerged with Bertrand, Autumn. She streaked his thick-bristled whiskers with gray, painted his black eyes, hard and cold. She slashed dark purple shadows of autumn over the cruel mouth that once gave her so much pleasure. The sketch in the background portrayed him on horseback, thundering downstream past miners, a whip in his hand.

Finally she was inspired to paint the last portrait. She set Bertrand, Winter on the windowsill. As she moved about the room with her oil lamp, his menacing eyes followed her. The Adams postrider was due in the morning. She dressed in her riding habit and sat on the on bed, waiting for first light.

# Chapter Seventeen

Philippa awoke to hear rain thrashing at the open window. Bertrand's winter portrait fell to the floor. She put on shoes and rushed downstairs to the inn kitchen. Unbelievably it was ten thirty in the morning, a filthy dark day, raging with wind and sleet. "Where is the post rider?" she called to Wyatt.

"He be delayed, Ma'am. With this weather he's probably holed up in some cave till it blows over."

" No," she cried. "I must leave immediately."

"You'll have to wait. Have some coffee. Calm yerself."

She sat on the edge of a chair at the table and sipped from a cup of coffee. Returning to her room, she set Bertrand's final portrait on her easel to dry. The canvas began to curl from the bottom. She watched the edges move imperceptibly, then suddenly spring at her. She jumped in alarm. His bruised eyes bore into her soul. Despite painting franticly, she had not cast out his spirit. He bedeviled her. Did it take a priest or a shaman to exorcize him? She went to Wyatt. "I wish to frame one of my paintings. Do you have a toolbox and pine board? I'll need a saw, nails, a hammer and a vise."

Wyatt took her to a pantry off the kitchen and showed her where he kept his tools.

The vise was oversized, its two jaws opening wide enough to embrace several roof tiles, but the screws were agile and she could make it work. She cleared a space on the desktop in her room and sawed four equal edges of pine for the frame, hammering the edges together. She stretched the still damp canvas of the portrait over the pine board and fitted the frame around it. Lastly

she unscrewed the clamps of the vise and fastened them over the frame to secure it. She felt enormous satisfaction as she turned the levers tighter.

She heard shouting in the street and ran to the windows. The Adams post rider had arrived and was banging on the inn keeper's door. Wyatt let him in and took his horse back to the shed. She came downstairs and watched the rider as he stamped his feet and took off his greatcoat, shaking it out. Balls of hail rattled to the floor and rolled under the tables and chairs.

"I have urgent business. I'm going with you to San Francisco," she said to the exhausted man.

He was young. Long wet hair fell over his collar. He glanced at her with red-rimmed eyes. When Wyatt returned from the barn, the post rider said, "get me some soup. And bring in those bags. I'm carrying a lot of gold."

She followed him into the kitchen. "Are you Leonard?"

He slumped into a chair and yanked apart of piece of bread from a loaf on the table. "Yes, Ma'am. Leonard Bowie from Michigan. I ride for Adams & Company. You say you want to go with me to San Francisco?" His mouth was full and bits of bread spewed from his lips.

"Yes. I want to leave as soon as possible."

"We'll have to overnight along the way. It will cost you."

"I'm prepared to pay," she said.

Wyatt slammed the kitchen door against the wind, kicked the saddle bags into a corner, and went to the stove to stir a pot of soup. The smell of fatty beef and stale cabbage made her nostrils flare with nausea. He dished up a bowl for Bowie, who bent over it, slurping noisily.

Philippa stood over him.

"Sit the hell down, lady. You're making me nervous."

She sat with her hands folded in her lap. The clock ticked.

Bowie wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "I ain't setting off again until I sleep. He scraped his chair back and walked unsteadily into the next room, where he flung himself on the parlor sofa. In a moment he had fallen into a deep sleep. She brought down the quilt from her bed and laid it over him.

Philippa packed her clothes, but not her paintings, not yet. She looked out the windows, watching the freak summer storm gain strength by the hour. Lightning tore across the sky. Sheets of rain and hail battered the glass panes. At four o'clock she sat in an over-stuffed chair in the parlor and drank a cup of tea, listening to Bowie snore. Wyatt had built a fire in the hearth. She dozed, awakening with a start when she heard a pounding on the front door.

"Jes a damned minute," Wyatt shouted from the kitchen. He threw a towel across his shoulder and shuffled across the room, using both hands to open the door. She glanced toward the door as it opened admitting a feeble light. Rain lashed in sheets across the transom. A tall figure blustered through the door, scooping off his drenched hat. Bertrand!

She sat immobilized by hot fear

Bertrand stepped inside and shook off his coat. From this angle he could not see her in her chair. He rubbed his hands and blew on them for warmth. "Can I shelter my horse in your barn?" he asked.

"Yes, Sir. Name's William Wyatt. This here is the Adams coaching inn. I got no rooms to let, but you can settle at the bar. I got strong whiskey. I'll take five dollars from you to see to your horse." Wyatt threw a poncho over his head and went outside.

Bertrand went behind the bar and helped himself to a glass of whiskey, chasing it with a second shot. She shrank back into the shadows. He looked up at the high ceiling as if he could see through it to her room. He sniffed at the distinctive smell of turpentine. Her heart beat rapidly.

He glanced toward her. "Hello, Philippa," he said in his low voice.

She gasped.

"I want the daguerreotypes and the negatives." He came from behind the bar and stood over her. He pinched the bones of her wrist. "Let's go upstairs and get them now."

He held onto her arm as he led her up the staircase, tightening his grip as they turned at the landing and then toward the first door. He shoved her into the room, spinning her around, forcing her to step backwards.

In a glance he took in the clutter. Paintings and drawings lay askew on chairs, tables and propped against walls. He shook his head at the dizzying mass of color and confusion. He gazed at her standing before him. She turned away from him, instinctively crossing her hands across her belly.

"My God, you're having a child! You'll never get away."

She stepped back, stumbling against the desk cluttered with tools.

"I know what you saw, Philippa. Give me the prints and negatives."

"I watched you kill Reynolds. And yes, I took daguerreotypes. Four of them. I caught the hatred in your expression as you turned your hose on him. If you think I would keep the proof of a murder, you're a fool! I sent the daguerreotype prints and negatives to John Fremont. You're finished, Bertrand. You'll never rise to political power."

He slapped her hard across the face. She staggered backwards, holding her stinging cheek with both hands. She couldn't help whimpering and despised herself for it.

"No, this can't happen," he said, thoroughly rattled. "I'll talk to Fremont. It was an accident. I was provoked. I'll make him believe me."

She turned to the desk and unscrewed the levers of the vise, opening the frame. Taking out the final portrait of Bertrand, she thrust it at him. "John Fremont will believe this."

Bertrand glanced at the picture. Distorted and hideous, he recognized his portrait. The face was transparent, a cadaver-like skull covered in thin skin, painted in a greenish tinge. His hair was wild, his eyes red. The wide mouth hung open, pulled down in a grimace. Hectic brushstrokes shrieked violence. The background showed him standing on a cliff, the hydraulic hose in his hands, aiming the powerful stream of water at Reynolds until he fell to his death in the ravine.

Bertrand lunged at her.

She jerked back. "You are the same as your father, a traitor and a killer. Get out!"

He came after her, grabbed her wrists, struggling against her manic strength until she fell forward, her hair swinging across her face. He pulled at the shanks of her hair. His hands pressed the bones in her shoulders. His fingers found her throat, squeezed and squeezed. All his fury and strength flowed into his hands. She choked and panicked, knowing he would kill her.

She brought her knee sharply up at his crotch, and in the moment before he could catch a stunned breath, she reached back for the hammer on the desktop. She slammed it against his temple, once, twice. He moaned, staggered, and fell to the floor. Blood oozed from the wound. Not enough blood. She stood over him shaking violently. With trembling hands, she pulled down the heavy iron vise and sat on the floor. She opened the hinges as wide as they would go. She pulled his head inside the ragged jaws of the vise, clamped down and twisted the screws until she heard his skull crack.

She jumped as lightning streaked across the sky and thunder roared. The wind wailed and blew shards of icy hail against the windows. She sat leaning against the wall until her strength returned. Rising slowly, she opened a window a crack and peered outside. She had to go now. She couldn't take her paintings with her. No matter how well she wrapped them, they would be soaked and ruined.

She yanked the bedclothes to the floor and, one by one, packed her canvasses in sheets and blankets and rolled them into secure bundles. Soundlessly she carried them downstairs to the metal door fastened into the wall behind the bar. From the parlor sofa she heard the snores of the post

rider. She opened the cubical, ducking her head to walk through to the entrance of the large snow pit. Rain fell from the opening above her. By the feeble light from that patch of stormy sky, she found her way to the dry, airless compartment Wyatt had said was not used for anything. She stacked her bundles of paintings against the walls and shut the iron door with a clang.

She walked out of the inn into the storm.

# Chapter Eighteen

**The California Star**

**August 13, 1850**

After six weeks, police are no closer to finding the intruder who murdered Bertrand La Martine, a successful San Francisco financier, entrepreneur and politician, on July 2nd at the Adams & Company coaching inn in Summittville. According to Mrs. La Martine, an artist, who was in their suite at the time, an intruder burst into their rooms, tied her to the iron bedstead, killed Mr. La Martine and took a sack of gold he was known to carry when he traveled. After an hour, Mrs. La Martine was able to gnaw through the rope binding her hands. As there is no police department in Summittville, she walked down hill in a driving rain storm to report the crime to the Downieville Police. Officers describe the widow as distraught and soaked to her skin.

Mrs. La Martine showed police burn marks on her wrists from the rope used by the intruder to tie her to the bed. She described the unknown assailant as six feet tall, husky, and of Spanish heritage. Police suspect the perpetrator was hired to kill Bertrand La Martine, who was known to have personal enemies because of his many questionable dealings.

Apparently the two men struggled, fighting hand to hand, until the intruder reached for and struck Mr. La Martine on the head with a hammer. The hammer had been used earlier by Mrs. La Martine to frame one of her paintings.

The killer added a particularly vicious element to his crime: He inserted Mr. La Martine's head into a vise, also used for framing, and turned the screws until La Martine's skull cracked.

The Adams & Company post rider, who was at the inn at the time, testified that he slept on a couch on the first floor throughout the incident. The innkeeper testified he was feeding and watering the horses and mules in the coral behind the inn during the break-in and did not hear the intruder or the struggle that ensued. Both were questioned and released within twenty-four hours as there was no evidence to hold them.

Mrs. La Martine was questioned a number of times by police in Downieville and in San Francisco before being released. She held funeral services for her husband and departed a week later for New York by U.S Mail Steamer The Oregon.

# Catalogue Introduction to Exhibition at the Louvre

## "Lost Works of Philippa La Martine"

September 2004

The French Academy of Art is proud to present the lost works of a painter recently deemed by critics throughout the art world as the most astounding artist of the 19th Century: Philippa La Martine. Decades before Monet's painting, "Impression: Sunrise," startled the French art community in 1872, a young, female artist, emboldened by the energy and entrepreneurial spirit of the Gold Rush in San Francisco, invented the school of art known as impressionism.

Her historic paintings were found several months ago in a locked cubicle of a 1849 coaching inn in Summittville, California. The paintings, wrapped in disintegrated shreds of bed linen and the artist's underclothes, were preserved over the span of more than 150 years by the airless cold of the bricked cell, which was insulated by an adjoining pit where snow and ice were stored.

In April of 2003, the Lewis Morgan family of San Francisco began renovations on the 19th century coach house to restore it. While bulldozing the cellar they were astonished to come upon a sealed room containing the paintings.

The artist's identity was made known from a remnant of a draft of a letter

dated in September of l850, which was affixed to the back of a frame. Madame La Martine was a good friend of John Prendergast, an English artist who painted watercolors during the Gold Rush. He was planning to return to London and she asked him to make a side trip to Paris and bring four landscapes and eight of her portraits to French critic Henri Seigner in Paris. Seigner is known to have contacted cholera after passing through Panama on his journey home from California. In 1850. He died soon after returning to Paris.

The discovery of Madame La Martine's paintings in Summittville, California was widely reported in the art news. John Prendergast's great-great grand daughter made an exhaustive inventory of his works, and found, wrapped in blankets, four landscapes and eight paintings, known as the "California Portraits." Each was signed by Phlippa La Martine. According to the draft of Madame La Martine 's letter to Prendergast, the eight portraits were to hang in a series to augment their impact on one another.

Madame La Martine painted a poor Mexican trench digger, a proud Chinese cook, a Peruvian dynamite blaster, a Miwok Indian, divested of his native land, a cocky Irish miner, a Yankee in despair over news of his infant son's death received in a letter from home, a prostitute elbowing a drunk customer in a saloon, a Negro slave. According to the artist's notes, each portrait reveals the character of a person caught up in the greed and chaos of the rush for gold. As a series, they form a history of abrupt social changes inflicted on whole groups of peoples swarming into California from all over the world.

In her other paintings, the artist chose subject matter of everyday life as it was lived along the rivers of the Sierra gold camps, on the San Francisco wharves and in Portsmouth Square, the throbbing center of the city. She employed layers of dazzling color in rough brushstrokes. In her unique style she advanced beyond any influence of the Barbizon School to which she may have been exposed, to anticipate the works of Monet and Pissaro, which were not even exhibited in San Francisco until 1891.

Not much is known about the artist's life. She grew up in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where she was considered a drawing and painting prodigy, exhibiting her portraits and landscapes and winning prizes at early age. She graduated from the Pennsylvania Academy of Art and was married to Martin Sutter, cousin of the famous John Sutter. She traveled to California, where she later married Bertrand La Martine, financier and gold mining entrepreneur, who was killed under mysterious circumstances.

When she returned to Philadelphia from San Francisco, she taught at the Pennsylvania Academy. Both professors and students found her to be an eccentric but fascinating instructor.

In 1869 Madame La Martine and her daughter Amanda traveled to Paris with examples of her early and later paintings in an effort to introduce her work to the French Academy of Art to be considered for the annual Salon. Her paintings were summarily rejected. The artist did find enthusiastic support for them from art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel, who consigned a dozen of her paintings for his Paris gallery, but was unable to find buyers for them. Durand-Ruel introduced her to Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, and Pierre Auguste Renoir. One can only imagine the thrill she must have experienced to learn other artists had developed and believed in this new vision and technique in painting she had pioneered in California twenty years earlier. Madame La Martine's plan to remain and work in Paris was canceled when she became ill and sailed home to Philadelphia. She had been in Paris less than a year. In 1871 she died from a recurrence of cholera she contracted while crossing the Isthmus of Panama on her return journey from California.

In 2003 The French Academy of Art named Philippa La Martine as The First Impressionist.

**The End**

## About the Author

A native of White Plains, NY, Molly O'Donovan Gorman studied French and English literature at Trinity College in Washington, D.C. In her early career she worked in New York City for the publications department of the Archdiocese of New York, *Look* magazine, the children's division of Random House and the public-relations department for Pan American Airlines. She and her husband Joe raised their family in San Marino, CA. Molly returned to her public-relations career while taking fiction-writing classes at UCLA, later retiring to pursue her passion of novel writing.