

## DESTINATION MYAKKA

### CHAPTER ONE

#### THE GULF JOURNEY

BOSTON – APRIL 1864

"Charles, it's true. They joined a wagon train; you have to do something. Nellie's looking like a woman in love all over again and her only a widow seven months. They're talking about them from Boston to Lynn, and even over in Plymouth. All the Methodists are agog. And how's she going to handle a sixteen-year-old boy, having never had any children of her own? It's scandalous. You've got to do something."

"Roberta, now just calm down. I am doing something. I thought we could go with them."

"You can't be serious."

"Mama. Are you home? Mama, you have to do something."

"Yes, I know. They are just one of five families going. First they are getting married Sunday morning. You will have to be your sister's maid of honor. You can wear that new lilac dress. So stop frettin' and help me. I've written notes to friends and family inviting them to the wedding and reception back here at the house. You'll have to deliver them this afternoon."

"Mama, you don't mean it. Don't you know that Lent is headed to Alabama with a final destination some camp in Florida? Are you going to let my sister go with him?"

"Your sister has a good strong constitution and is a healthy young woman. I would never stand in her way to find happiness after the tragic life she's had. And you should be happy for her, too. They consider this trip their honeymoon. As to Lent's son, like Hannibal, he's going by raft."

TAMPA BAY – 1864

You could see the two towheads from shore working furiously to keep their raft right side up as they first twisted and then bobbed up and down in the Tampa current. Their goal was to get ashore quickly for supplies and then set out on the evening tide. The southern shore of the west coast of Florida was their destination. They never anticipated what happened that day in 1864.

On the dock, a boy their age who had been watching their battle to stay upright called out, "Come in closer to those trees. I'll throw ya a line."

By now two others had joined in helping them bring the raft of lashed logs into shore.

"How long you been out there? Your faces look like shoe leather. Where ya from?"

"Alabam. Came down to the Gulf in a wagon train, some cattle, horses and about five families," said Titus. "We built the raft in Tallahassee before we left our folks who headed southeast. If it's April 10th, we've been out two weeks. Yeah, the sun gets ya, scorches ya out here. The only shade we have is the sail."

A smaller boy came forward and offered them a drink from a canteen on his shoulder. "It's cool, clean spring water. Ma won't let me come down here without the canteen. The heat gets to ya if ya get dry."

Finally jumpin' onto dry land, Jim Bloodgood introduced himself saying, "Our folks are traveling inland. The war, our uncle's cattle, and your wild cattle here in Florida brought us into Florida. This is the first time we've been ashore since we left them south of Tallahassee. We have to get supplies and leave on the late tide tonight to stay on our schedule."

Titus Lent, who was traveling on the raft with Jim, was tying the rope to the tiller. Looking up, he extended his hand to the boy with the canteen. "I'm Titus Lent, Jim's cousin. That's a right friendly thing you're doin'. We need a drink. Ya meet many men coming down from the North?"

"I'm Eric Lawson. No, we don't see many folks on this side of the harbor. But a supply ship is overdue. If it's lost out there....," he didn't complete the sentence, but added, "It's a week late today. We all look for stuff, flotsam, if there's a wreck. But we don't know what happened yet. We just get to the dock each day hopin' to site it, or something interestin'.

"You're the first this week. But we've never had a raft, and we never had men your age neither. How old are ya anyway?"

Smiling, Titus looked at the younger boy and said, "Seventeen. We're cousins. The folks promised us our own land if we helped them. We've always had a river raft so they gave us different duties once we got the wagons and animals to Tallahassee."

They turned their attention to the workmen along the shore. Titus and Jim were impressed with the number of small cabins being worked on. Smoke billowed up from raging fires. They could see men burning brush. Others were sawing logs with two-man saws; still others were plowing fields with teams of horses.

Fishermen in all sorts of get ups, long mucky pants, some with rolled-up pants legs, others with creases razor sharp, some in white Panama hats, others with scarves like

turbans wrapped around their heads. All were casting for grouper and snapper, according to Eric.

Once the raft was securely moored, Eric volunteered, "Why don't you come up to the store? You can get all you need there. My Pa runs it. He's got some stuff you can put on your face and some shoes. You need better boots, both of you."

With that said, Jim and Titus followed the other boys, taking in the sights as they went. A large house made of logs, a few others, sort of lean-to structures, the store and a crude church that doubled as a school, according to Eric, or a courtroom for a trial. Wagons were everywhere. As the shoreline curved, they could see larger ships in the deeper harbor across the bay.

Very proud of his home and harbor, Eric said, "My Pa says the reason Tampa is growing fast is because it's such a deep harbor. Did you know the Gulf is over 10,000 feet deep in some spots? Big sloops come in with canons, Navy ships, from all over the world, but especially Spain. We sometimes get paid in gold. Did you ever see a gold piece?"

Arnold, Eric's brother, added, "I wish we had a raft. Maybe now that we see yours we can build one, too. Did it take much time? How thick do the under logs have to be?"

With Titus and Jim explaining, "You work with what you can get to build a raft," they walked on through the village. People called out to the boys, offered help if it was needed, and were very friendly. If this was what Florida was gonna be like, the boys approved.

At the store they explained in detail what they needed, who they were, and what their purpose was on that particular day, to Mr. Lawson, who set about getting their supplies. The only thing he wasn't sure of was the large needle they needed to mend the heavy duck sail.

"You young men have taken on a great responsibility. Lucky you ran into my boys. They'll put these things on the hand wagon and help ya load up. Why don't you stay for supper? The women in the family are just hankerin' for visitors. You can clean up. There's a basin, soap and water out back."

As the boys left, Lawson went around to the house to tell his wife and three daughters he was bringing in "two adventuresome young men" for the evening meal.

As quick-as-a-wink the four women got into action, set out food, changed their clothes and prettied themselves up for the first time in months. The isolation got to them

sometimes. If it wasn't for an occasional traveler going South, they'd hardly ever see a new face. There were only 40 families in the village.

They were used to hearing stories like Jim Bloodgood's, of families running cattle from northwestern Alabama or Georgia into the center of Florida in an attempt to save their herds from the military needs of both the Confederate and Union armies.

But more than likely, ranchers were coming South on the word of those who preceded them that they could build their own herds from just roping the wild cattle on the open Florida range. By now everyone knew how well the Confederate Army was supplied with beef and salt from Florida. That beef came from herds left behind by Indians emigrating North at the request of the U.S. Congress.

Further South it was rumored that some settlers allowed the Union Army to capture their herds, saying they were confiscated. The boys listened to the various tales about cattle rustling, wagon trains coming and going, and the Homestead Act offering free land for farming if you built a house and stayed awhile.

The Bloodgood plan, however, was a bit more adventuresome than others and had a scientific bent the others lacked. If their cattle and wagons traveled the good roads in Tallahassee to the lake country southeast of Tampa, they'd be safe, but they would be hacking their way through palmetto, ivy and vines that tangled as fast as it grew. It was the mosquitoes that were the worst obstacle though, according to those who turned around and came back. Some never got further than a short distance southeast of Tampa.

Lawson was amazed to hear the story as Jim told it.

"An Army Scout my Pa met sold him a map. With it as our guide, we plotted two routes: one by land and one by raft, to meet and settle wherever we found good dry pasture land. Good drinking water is our first concern. But these fresh water lakes and a couple of streams seem to mean we'll be settled easily."

Going on, he added, "My Uncle Lent wanted the two of us taking guns and powder down by raft to a section that had just been opened up in a place called Sarasota. The men didn't want the whole family on the wagon train in case of Indian attack. This way some part of the family would still be alive to carry on. That's why we are on the raft. If we cut east through the palmetto country, find good drinking water and good pasture land away

from Indian tribes, but close enough to other settlers, Pa plans to build a church. He's a Preacher."

Sarah Lawson saw to it that her girls looked their best; after all, it wasn't every day that the Good Lord put two nice young men from apparently good families on their door step. In this wilderness, one always had to assume that once met, people would remember each other and come courtin' when able, and wed quickly.

She reasoned that if Jim Bloodgood and Titus Lent were entrusted with the guns, black powder and ammunition of both families, someone was thinking clearly.

With tools and powder the boys could be building houses and damming streams for fresh water, which meant the families saw wives for the boys in that picture one day, too.

Listening carefully to the conversation as the boys approached the porch, Sarah was more than pleased when Titus explained, "The Johnsons, Carlsons, Hancocks and Albrittons had already left Tallahassee, according to the manager of the hotel. The Wilsons and Murphys were close behind. I know we'll have a good settlement of Christian folk who will work the land and raise the cattle so that we will have a comfortable life."

"Come in boys," called Sarah. "Mr. Lawson told me all about you and your great adventure. We are mighty happy you could join us. We have plenty of mullet, heart of palm and country corn. Ruth made a sweet potato pie this mornin' and Rebecca made ya all some lemonade. Have you ever had lemons before? The flowers on the table were picked by Rachel. We thought we'd fuss a bit since you have been roughin' it out on your raft."

Titus and Jim just stared at the girls. It was hard to tell who was blushing more, the boys or the Lawson girls. The blonde-haired, blue-eyed Scandinavians, with skin so fair and figures so perfect, were almost more than the boys could endure. The sixteen-year-old twins, Rachel and Rebecca, were more than either boy could tolerate at that particular moment.

They never expected to take in something like this, all in one evening. They were having difficulty with the heat, their eyes were watering, and their breathing was noticeably deeper.

Sarah, watching all this, reckoned they were like little bear cubs wanting to play and not knowing how. She guessed they were tongue-tied, too, for they could not speak.

Watching the boys' reaction to her younger sisters set Ruth off. She was really laughing at them, which they did not appreciate one bit.

They looked at all three girls. First one and then the other again, and again. This was more femininity than they had been exposed to since reaching 'manhood'; they were dumbstruck.

As Sarah came in with a much needed cool glass of lemonade, Titus conjured up some words he heard his Dad use once when they had visitors: "We are honored to be with you, M'am, and with your delightful family."

Sarah was sure she saw Ruth just "wiggle" with enjoyment. They had not seen any boy like Jim or Titus since settling in Tampa three years ago. She was just beginning to realize now, how the girls lacked a real social life in Tampa. They were just girls in an adult population. There were very few young ones their age. This was too risky a journey for more delicate folk like females. They were in short supply among those newly arrived settlers.

Everyone moved to the big kitchen table. Lawson, getting the nod from Sarah, said grace:

"We thank you Lord for our daily bread  
and the safe arrival of these young men.  
We pray for the supply ship Captain  
and crew and all those a sea. Bless us  
and all who chose to settle the wilderness,  
including the boys' parents and bring love  
to the heathen. Amen"

Neither boy had ever heard such a prayer and were appreciative of Lawson's thoughts.

Dinner went smoothly as the boys ate everything that was offered to them. They were only interested in eating, not talking. But from time to time they took shy, upward glances at the three young ladies who had so fortunately been put in their company and were sitting directly across from them. And the girls were not missing a thing they did or said.

While the girls helped clear the table, Lawson brought the boys out on his back porch overlooking the Bay and offered them cigars.

With a backward look to see if the girls were watching, Jim and Titus took their first cigars, rolled them between their fingers, let Lawson cut the tip, and then lit them up.

Within a half hour after smoking or trying to smoke the vile smelling things, both boys were out in the campo, leaving their dinner behind. It was not a good experience.

As they emerged, green and shaky, Lawson in sympathy offered them a whiskey. Accepting the drink with thanks, they sipped the warming, anesthetizing liquid, grateful for its comfort as it branched out and down, into and over their sore bellies. The short tiny glasses, the likes of which they had never seen before, were empty too fast. Realizing their thin capacity for drinks and smokes, Lawson "closed up shop for the night."

Both boys could see themselves in their own homes like this one day. They were not to forget this evening ever and would retell the story to anyone who'd listen for years to come.

As they sat in the glow of a west coast sunset, the boys admired the wild life.

"Hey, Ti, look at that strange bird. It's got a sac under its bill."

"I'm a watchin' it. Watchin' it! Look how it dives and always comes up with a catch."

"That's a Pelican," Mr. Lawson told them. "Don't shoot them. Just drop your line where ever they fish and you'll never be hungry."

"Now that you're both relaxed, the girls asked if you would tell your family story and how you got to Florida. I'm interested in how you traveled this far. Now that the ladies have joined us, will you tell us your story?"

"I guess we can do that to thank you for your hospitality," said Jim, warming up to being a special guest in this home.

"We had already learned how to rig a sail for the raft when we used to play at bein' pirates on the river. We were warned to get into the Gulf in April, and head south before the hurricane season set in between June and October, or we could lose our cargo of tools, powder and guns.

"The coastal road from Alabam into Florida was traveled by many folks doin' just what we were doin', herdin' cattle. Tallahassee was the end of civilization, that's what my Pa said. So we worked on making a raft, while the men folks got the supplies they needed.

"We spent hours goin' over the map, learnin' to read the compass and the heaven's stars. An old sailor man gave us a few tips on navigation in the Gulf and told us to stay close to the shore line, never to lose sight of land. The prevailing breeze from the southeast would turn west and north when it hit the shore. So settin' sail would be a challenge."

Titus took over the story telling, "We spent some time regulatin' the rudder and the learnin' to use the tiller correctly. We left before our folks, but we both had an idea where we were to meet inland about twenty miles from the coast. Our Uncle Gus is a surveyor and had figured out our routes. We just had to follow his directions. It's all very scientific. When you use longitudes and latitudes like he can inland, it takes the mystery out of traveling.

"Obeying the sailor's guidance for stayin' upright, we sailed away but stayed close to the curving shore line. A strong breeze brought us to Tampa and this harbor. The Gulf in April was like a big silver mirror with an occasional rainy day. We made our best time at night.

"Tryin' to sleep in the shade of the sail during the day, one at a time, we managed to stay away from the mangrove-covered shore line. Now, with more supplies and the huge kettle settin' on a bed of broken clay pots we purchased from Mr. Lawson, we will be able to build a fire to cook our evening meal. It's the unforeseen things that worry us, like good water. Even though we have glass-lined water barrels, water doesn't stay cool for long in this heat."

Titus, explaining again how surprised they were by the calmness of the Gulf waters, added, "I guess if a ship is missing, the Gulf must have some treacherous ways, but we have not witnessed anything threatening. For now, if we can avoid stormy weather, Indians and heat exhaustion, mosquitoes and snake bites once we have landed, we are sure to build up this new land."

Before taking his leave of Lawson's, Jim mentioned, "Our fathers are both learned men, Mr. Lawson. They are always debating the need for Democracy and the dangers of it, the rule of law to tame the uncivilized savages, and the bringing of Christian ways into the tribes in the wilderness. They are great readers of a Frenchman who has new ways of governing.

"After we left Alabama, Pa became our tutor, so he's told us a lot about new policies men are thinking about that will give us a fair government. Uncle Gus has taught us surveying so we will have a way to earn a wage."

Nodding in agreement with their remembrances, Lawson issued an invitation, "Some day when your families are settled, I hope you will bring your fathers up to visit me. We



need a State Constitution. I am active here in establishing a local government, but when the war is over there will be much to do. Your fathers' opinions will be valuable." With that remark, the boys thanked their hosts and explained their need to get back to the raft in time for high tide.

"When we do come back again, Ms. Lawson M'am, may Titus and I call on your daughters while our Pas are talkin' government?" He wanted to say something to the girls but couldn't figure out what, but Titus beat him to it.

Smiling at Ruth he offered, "Next time we meet I hope to be ridin' one of our famous Kentucky purebreds. If you ride, we can travel around to see more of Tampa than we did today."

Delighted with their mannerly ways, Sarah said they would be "Welcomed at any time to visit with the girls and to bring their mothers and sisters with them."

Sarah added, "You didn't tell us how your family came to settle in Alabama."

"We don't know everything, but our Grandparents came to Boston from England. We are Methodists. It had something to do with building churches in a new land. When our parents married, they left Boston for Memphis, Tennessee. That's where they built up the first herd. It's where I was born and where I had my first raft playing pirates on the Missisip.

"I never knew why we moved to Alabama, but we were on another river, the Alabam. As this war started and my Uncles and older Cousin were killed at the Battle in the Wilderness at Spotsylvania Court House, the family wanted to move further South.

"Both families sold off herds, except for breedin' stock, to have enough money to buy new land. Both armies wanted the meat our cattle could provide.

"As it turned out, neither of the wagons had trouble getting to the coast and to Tallahassee. Uncle Gus needed more land and less expensive than he could find in either Tennessee or Georgia to build the size herd he dreams of.

"We built the new big raft and agreed to travel down to Sarasota. Friends from other states wrote and told my Pa we couldn't go wrong going deeper South. If we wanted to herd cattle, it was ours for the findin'. Pa was against slavery. So we listened to all the arguments and left anyway.

"The risks were great. Others told us not to make the trip until roads were open, or that the heat could kill us without water, the mosquitoes could give us a fever that would do the same, and the Indians could scalp us. Pa prayed and we left once again going in two separate directions: one by wagon going south and east, and one by raft heading due south.

"I'm not sure I know exactly what my Pa was thinking, but I suppose he figured if he met with an Indian attack, we boys would keep the family name and goals goin'. I don't know if that makes sense?"

"God bless you boys. Yes, it makes sense for a far-thinking man. Have a safe trip," said Lawson. Just before they parted, the boys came over closer to Sarah. She kissed them both goodbye.

In a prayer circle she prayed, "God watch over these brave young men and bring them back to us again one day. Amen."

The three Lawson girls walked to the water's edge with them and waved them off. It was hard to tell what they were all thinking, but their eyes indicated a sort of sadness. Perhaps it was losing something they had just identified, a fragile thing called "hope and happiness."

On the raft once more, Jim and Titus looked out at the great expanse of water. They were surrounded, but they knew more than half the five hundred mile trip was behind them now.

The barrel of water was tied down close to the rudder. The sail was rigged, the moon was coming up; they were bedazzled by the deep blue of the sky, the puffy white clouds and the glow of the moon's reflection on the calm waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

Along the shore many fires were reflected in the waters that lapped at small boats, rudely made piers of rocks, or coral breakwaters. They angled out into deeper water. Having agreed to take turns sleeping and fishing, at this particular moment, they were both loving what God had created.

They had never seen palm trees, nor trees the height of those on shore. Deer could be seen grazing near the salt marshes, magnificent white birds flew all over, and the big beak birds they learned were Pelicans flew head of them diving for fish.

Their excitement at being able to go off on their own was still what motivated them. This was an adventure few seventeen year olds would ever have. But they had trained for

this adventure and so far the training had paid off. Titus was whistling and Jim reading the map in the fire light.

A slight breeze filled the sail ... the last leg of the Gulf journey was just beginning.

The raft was traveling smooth and even. Titus had lit a fire in the copper kettle to take the chill off the night. More importantly, it also identified them to other vessels, not that they expected any other crafts to be afloat and so close to shore on the Gulf this night. But they had learned that to be seaworthy you should always be identified fore and aft where they had kerosene lanterns hung on strong posts. The story of the missing boat was still on his mind.

Jim checked his watch. It was just before midnight. They had been sailing for two hours. From time to time they could hear a splash. The moonlight picked up large fish under water around the raft, but the boys had no idea what they were looking at until they saw a gigantic turtle.

Titus was keeping the daily log of the journey. He said, "Do you think anyone will ever believe all this stuff we've been seein'?" He'd no sooner gotten the words out of his mouth when a Dolphin came crashing down alongside his perch. He jumped, but it was too late. He was soaked. Jim laughed so hard he almost fell overboard. It was one of those incidents that now had them wide awake and a good thing, too, and none too soon.

"Titus, there's somethin' ahead in the water. It looks like, gee, I'm not sure what it looks like. But it's hairy. Oho, and it's movin'."

Clearly afraid that the raft would sail into whatever it was, Titus turned the tiller so that the rudder would steer the raft toward shore and around the hairy object.

At the same time, Jim dipped one of his pre-made flares, sticks with cotton-wrapped tips, into the hot ashes to act as a torch with which he could look at the object as they went by.

He found himself yelling to Titus, "Don't hit it. O Lordy! Be careful. What do you know. Titus, you are not going to believe this and neither will anyone else. Titus, guess what! You will never guess. It's a dog! It's a half-drowned dog. A big Setter, half-drowned way out here. Give me a hand. Lordy, he is a big one. Titus, we got to get it on board. Give me a hand. Careful, it's all water-logged, swollen. Poor thing."

Laying flat on their bellies, both boys reached for the dog, nearly being pulled off the raft by its weight and the current. Once they had hold of it, Titus used the sail line to tie him tight around the middle and drag him aboard.

"Hey, look at that. He wagged his tail," said Titus. "Let's get him over near the fire so he'll dry out. We can take turns watching him tonight. By mornin' we'll know if he's gonna live. Gee, ain't this somethin', findin' a dog? Now we've got another helper. No one's gonna believe all this stuff, no one. Why would a dog be out here like this?"

Jim was at the tiller now, but he couldn't turn off his mind.

Titus had found a big old blanket to cover the dog. He couldn't help wondering how ... he stopped thinking, trying to just relax ... he didn't want to finish his thoughts.

At about the same moment, both boys turned and looked at each other and said, "Do you suppose there could be other creatures or even humans out here?"

They turned, staring out over the moonlit path they had just traveled, dark waters with a few white caps now showing. There was nothing else to see but the sea.

If it had been a large boat that went down out further on the Gulf, the flotsam would come alongside, not fore or aft. Their thoughts did not progress beyond that inaccuracy.

Suddenly there was a new sound from the third passenger on the raft. They were interrupted by a whimper. A whimper from the water-laden dog peekin' out from under the blanket. The sodden mass looked up, eyes pleading, it wiggled toward Jim, taking in both of them. Then crawling back under the blanket, in seconds he went right back to sleep.

"What will we call him?" asked Titus.

"Better make sure it's a 'he' before we name him," laughed Jim.

Moving over to the tiller, Titus took over his shift as Jim rested. During the night he was aware of more whimpering sounds from the Setter. By morning, however, the Setter was standing, shaking water over everything. He was wagging his tail and kept nudging Jim toward the blanket.

Bending down for a look see at the blanket, Jim howled with laughter.

"Well, Titus, get your log out for this is an auspicious day. We are parents. Write that down right now for our dog, our 'he dog' of last night is definitely a 'she dog' this morning and the mother of three little Red Setters lookin' just like their Mom."

Titus could not believe what he was looking at, but started to smile real broad.

"Better get the Mom some water, Jim. And maybe make her some gruel. We have gruel, don't we? She needs nourishment."

The entire day was spent watching over the mother and her puppies. The guys made gruel for themselves as well as their animals. Taking turns at the tiller, each had time to stroke and pet the Mom as they watched her clean and feed her pups.

Jim, who was always the most practical, said, "Let's just call her Mom!"

Titus smiled. "I like that. Yes, Mom she is."

Looking at his pocket watch, a gift from his Pa before they set sail, Titus said, "It's getting mighty dark for one o'clock. Those black clouds out further in the Gulf may be tellin' us to get ashore before that storm comes rollin' over us. What da ya think?"

Jim added, "There has to be wind in those clouds. We don't know much about controlling the raft and sail in a wind storm. I guess we should get ashore now, quickly."

With Jim at the tiller and Titus at the rigging, they swung the raft around and headed in toward land. Just as they attempted to reach a short open beach, more sandy than rocky, the Gulf waters heaved upward lifting the raft as it headed for land. The swirling waters and the unexpected height of a wave swept them in and over the rocks, leaving them on shore about ten feet above the waterline. They crashed onto the sand and heard the splintering sounds of the rudder breaking up under the raft from the power of their landfall. No damage to themselves, Mom, or her pups.

Looking about, the boys and dogs headed as fast as they could for the shelter of some pines and palms up the beach before the storm got worse.

They were amazed at the storm's path: first blowing them ashore coming in from the southwest, then turning northeast as it approached landfall, leaving them untouched, just wet.

The howling wind and crashing surf created a noisy environment that neither boy had ever experienced before. They had to shout to each other to be heard. Their hoarse voices gave rise to the use of sign language.

Titus, pointing to the palm leaves that were falling from tree tops, began bringing them into their shelter for additional warmth and a shield from the wind. Jim followed suit, stacking some around the puppies to keep them warm. Luckily, the wind was strong

enough to loosen a few large coconuts from the trees which fell within easy reach of the shelter.

Jim, with his knife and two rocks, managed to smash a hole big enough to let the coconut milk pour into their mouths. They drank as though they had had nothing in days.

Saturating a handkerchief with milk, Titus attempted to get each puppy to suck some milk for nourishment. With his finger in their mouths and the cloth, he was fairly successful. Licking her pups, 'Mom's' tail was wagging in grateful thanks. Tuckered out from all their new responsibilities, too little food and water, the boys were getting edgy.

The storm continued throughout the day and into the night, but the two boys, the dog and the puppies, snuggling close together, finally fell asleep as the storm raged on for a second day.

## CHAPTER TWO

### NO INLAND TRAILS, JUST TRIALS

Watching their boys go off on the homemade raft into the waters of the Gulf of Mexico took more courage than either Greta Bloodgood or Nellie Lent had figured on. While it had all seemed a good idea in the planning stage, the day they actually sailed off caused them to wonder.

It was the difference in their situations, I guess, the parents and adults traveling by land, inland, and the boys going by water, out over that huge expanse of water. They wouldn't be able to drop in on people out there the way the parents would be able to do inland.

"Lord, Greta, I suddenly feel like I am abandoning them."

"Nellie, we kept saying it would be good for them, but it sure don't feel good to me right now. This is worse than sending them off on the first day of school. But like their Pas said, 'they got to have time to grow to be men.'"

They strained to see the last speck, the tiny raft bobbing up and down on the outgoing tide just south of Tallahassee. It was slowly disappearing now. Even in the bright sunlight, they were gone, over the horizon.

"Greta, the next big event in their lives will be the day they wed. We keeping thinking of them as boys. They aren't any more. This trip begins by our losing two boys and gaining two strong young men. I will venture that both will have beards when we see them next."

"Come now," laughed Greta, "You know, Nellie, our men were in their twenties before they had beards. You're exaggerating."

"Perhaps! I just need something else to think about besides them being out there all alone." It was more than that, though. The women could not foresee that their sons could pull ashore as they had in Tampa and meet a good family. The two mothers could only see the vastness of the Gulf and its absolute isolation from a helpful community if they ran into a storm or some other trouble.

They had completely forgotten the closing argument that helped grant the boys permission to travel alone – "they wouldn't be fighting alligators, mosquitoes, nor Indians on the Gulf."

Prayers were said as they held hands, but the mental reservations were still there. The warm breeze blew their hair astray as they stood searching the waters for the raft again and again.

Until the raft had gone out of sight Nellie kept turning over and over in her mind why she had approved this trip.

"Greta, if anything happens to him, I will never forgive myself. But if I hadn't let him try to do things along, he'd never forgive me."

"That's right, absolutely right. And the men told us that, remember?"

"Yes, I do, especially what the Pastor said, 'You have to let your sons become men,' he had reasoned. And in this wilderness, in this new land there were more reasons than ever to let them learn the consequences of their own actions, to make their own decisions. They have to know their capabilities. Of course they will always learn faster from their mistakes as long as they aren't life threatening."

She remembered everything people told her. Tonight it was not helping her.

Greta Bloodgood turned to her dear friend and sister-in-law, putting her arm on her shoulder she said, "Why do I feel so bad? I was so proud of them, and now I'm so afraid for them. They are so young. They look so small way out there, like a dot on that tiny raft, so unprotected."

Fletcher P. Brown, their Wagon Master, came up behind the two women. He second guessed what they were going through and said, "Now don't you get too worried about those boys. When you see them again in Sarasota, they will be young men, grown and experienced."

"They will have tested their minds, their courage, their faith and physical strength in a way that will give them a self assurance that will last for the rest of their days. Stop fretting now! Belief in themselves is vital to their manhood. You made the right decisions for them."

With tears welling up in her beautiful green eyes, Nellie said, "We know you're right, but..." she was unable to finish the sentence. Greta couldn't even speak, she just shook her head in agreement and went back to her family wagon.

Time for tea, she thought. Funny how she always sought tea for comfort. Taking the new orchid handkerchief from her pocket, she looked at the G embroidered into its corner. She dabbed at her eyes trying to get control of herself. Looking at the hankie, she remembered how the ladies in her church had sent her off to Florida with 13 hankies, each one made by a friend. She kept one in her pocket at all times to remind her of home. She



never had anything she owned initialed before; it gave her a sense of value, of being someone who could make a difference.

There were no other green-eyed, red-headed women making the trip. Greta was a stand out. Wherever she was, Greta was remembered for her beauty, wit and tenderness, and that perfectly smooth, flawless ivory skin of Irish women. A statuesque figure after four children. And strength that most men could not compete with. Her faith could move mountains. Thinking to herself, she reasoned that she liked to be in control.

That's what's wrong, Greta Bloodgood. You are not in control. You were never in control over the boys' decision to go it alone on that damned raft.

Sipping her tea, she calmed down. She ran her hand over the silk embroidered G. What a fine gift to give someone going into the wilderness. She went back into the wagon, rummaged through her trunk and found the tiny bottle she wanted. Quickly taking off the top and turning the bottle upside down, she put a splash of Lilac scent on her hankie, instantly feeling more secure.

Before noon, the men had plotted out what they believed to be a good path out of Tallahassee, east and then south to Ocala.

Fletcher called out, "Lent, we have to remember that we will be crossing two rivers, not one, if we don't come out at the right longitude. We have to get east of that curve on the Manatee River where it is at its narrowest."

They had taken the advice of others they met while in Tallahassee who had made the trip several times either herding cows, carting supplies to forts during the Indian Wars, or just traveling between settlements to conduct state business.

Circuit Riders were the newest group of travelers now that the Methodists were setting up Chapels in the largest of the settled areas. They rode from town to settlement and back baptizing infants, burying, marrying, blessing children and bringing communion and forgiveness as needed to those who worried so much about their souls.

Hellfire and damnation had been preached so much they needed peace, solace and comfort; they took it wherever they found it from these traveling ministers, the now famous Circuit Riders.

Brown, the Wagon Master, came up to the first wagon. "You men ready to pull out? We want to get going so we won't stop before dinner on the trail. We'll use the daylight to

travel and then rest up for the next day. We will have it easy till we get into that palmetto and brush near the river. Let's make every minute count. Tell your women to prepare cold food for the noon meal. We'll rest the horses then, but take right off again. Any questions before we pull out?"

"I expect you and Lent know our destination but I think we all ought to know," said Carl. "Just in case we get separated for any reason. What longitude and latitude do we shoot for?"

"Good question, yep, a good question. Lent, why don't you call all the wagon drivers together. We need to answer that one to everyone's satisfaction," Brown said without hesitation.

Lent rode down the wagon line, calling all the drivers forward.

The thirty members of the wagon train traveled in eight wagons, with a ninth for supplies. The supply wagon worked well as chuck wagon at meal times, something the men had learned while herding cattle with cowboys.

Brown traveled with his three sons, John, Walter, and Paul, and a grandson, David. The boys' mother had died the winter before of consumption. They were good boys, plenty of self assurance, like their Pa. He could count on their level-headedness in emergencies.

The second wagon in the train was the strongest, a covered Conestoga belonging to Greta and Carl Bloodgood. The wheels could be taken off this wagon so that it could ford a stream as easy as a boat. The Bloodgood children, Amos and Hildegard, traveled well and were looked after by Moe, their slave. Amos, at nine years of age, was in love with this whole adventure. At 16, Hildegard, who had been keeping company with Otto, was absolutely certain she would never be married now and never see Otto again. Often depressed, being on the raft with her brother would have been more satisfactory, she was sure, since there was always the possibility of a shipwreck and being rescued at sea by handsome, dashing pirates, a far better fate than meeting Indians inland.

Next came the Johnsons, Alexandria and Charles, with children Frank and Hugo, 12-year-old twins, and a friend, 20-year-old Bo. The twins had been studying magic. They were great entertainers and at any moment would show you their newest trick. They came along for the ride and brought two books on magic with them. Alex and Charles had the patience of saints and encouraged their boys in all that they did. They were strict and also

saw to their education while traveling. Bo played the jews harp and guitar, adding a wonderful lift to the whole company as he sang old cowboy songs, hymns, and vaudevillian numbers.

The Rudolphs, Fredericka and William, with children Junior, Missy, and sister-in-law Liza, could be spotted anywhere. A family of towheads with blue eyes, they were all tall and walked erect as though they had come straight out of an Austrian war college. Deeply religious people, they read the Bible together at evening meal.

The Schultz family consisted of Johanna and Bill, brunettes with blue eyes, with children James, a redhead, and Jacquelyn, a blonde. They were a quiet, happy, relaxed family. They needed few others to be happy. Not necessarily loners, just self-satisfied and contented.

The Ericksons and Norbergs traveled together in two wagons, helping each other as the need arose. The three Norberg sisters, Tillie, Minnie and Lillie, and Mabel the maid came from Boston.

After the fever killed their parents, the girls bought a Conestoga wagon with their inheritance and sought out a Company to travel with. They were sure their prospects for happiness would be many in Florida where women were reported in short supply.

There was absolutely no similarity in any of their make ups. Tillie was a huge woman, a comic, and the oldest. Minnie was as thin as a rail and the most logical person on earth. Lillie was short and all business. And Mabel, God bless her, for no one knew how she ever found her way into this family, emoted through life. Actually she would probably be a good actress some day.

Related to them were Margaretta and Jerry Erickson, Scandinavians who spoke with heavy accents. Margaretta was a great cook, had dark hair and eyes and a voluptuous figure; her husband, tall and svelte, was handy with tools and had a wonderful knack for whistling. Martha, Helen and Robert would have preferred to stay at home with their grandparents. They were city kids, liked school and music lessons, and loved to play games like checkers and chess.

Jeremiah and Nellie Lent brought up the rear. Newly-married, having both lost their partners to the fever, they were enjoying getting to know each other on this trip. They let

Titus go on the raft so they could be alone. They needed space. This was, after all, their Honeymoon.

The men in each family had all known each other from school or the army. Each had their own reasons for choosing Florida as a destination. Free land entered into each family's decision to relocate. But the underlying reason in each case was the desire to start over again, the need for a second chance.

Mistakes had been made! Death had hurt others who needed time to heal. Failure in business spurred others to go back to what they loved, farming or herding cattle. And still others were leaving overbearing parents who could not give them the freedom they needed to find out who they really were, a strange thing for people in these times.

Freedom to speak out, to preach from the heart, to love and be loved by a person they chose, not someone chosen for them. They could face anything as long as they were together. In Florida they could set their own standards, establish a new way of life. And if all reports held true, they would be healthier, especially those who suffered from lung disorders in the North.

As the men came forward, some accompanied by older sons, there was a sense of expectation in the air. The journey they had planned for over the past eight months was finally going to take off. They hovered over belongings, making sure everything was tied down.

Brown called them all together. "I want you to write down a few things. If for any reason we get separated, we are headed east, southeast to Gainesville, then due south to Ocala. From there we will follow the surveyor's instrument path to cross the Manatee at its narrowest point.

"Our final destination is Latitude N27 16.808, Longitude W82 33.404. That should bring us into Sarasota. Once there we will head east for Myakka, fresh water and good pasture land.

"We will travel about 500 miles if my calculations are correct. We've been through the highest uplands, now we go down through the peninsula, across several rivers, skirt some swamp land, and hopefully have no run ins with Indians. Any questions?"

Johnson came forward asking, "I've wondered what kind of animals we might find for food, and what wild animals we might be threatened by. Also what kind of guards will we have as we travel and when we camp at night?"

Brown's oldest son asked, "Are the guns we are carrying fast enough to hit a running animal, one that may charge us?"

"What about rain? I've heard we can get flooded in an hour's time and have to stay on high ground away from rivers from July on," Lent commented.

Brown put up his right hand as a signal to let him answer the questions asked before any more were thought up.

"From what we know, the wild boar will be our most common enemy. Shoot to kill them, but don't plan to eat them. Natives tell us you get sick if you do, perhaps from worms. For food look for turkeys, coons and squirrels, and especially deer.

"Black panthers will be plentiful the further South we go; Black bears will be in the forests we enter. Both animals are dangerous. Their skins are valuable. I have no information on how tasty their meat is. That's a question we can ask as we meet up with other settlers.

"Talk among yourselves about who can handle nighttime guard duty. I want good riders as Scouts up front, equally alert riders in the rear, and a few about the third or fourth wagon down. I expect to be on fairly dry land from Gainesville south, but if we run unexpectedly near swampy inland water ways, watch for gaiters. Be prepared to shoot. Normally they don't bother humans. Watch all the children near forest areas; wildcats will drag off anything."

He could see his remarks did not go over well.

"Your women folk need the same information I have just given you. Don't shield them. Lack of knowledge can cost a life. Give them each a gun and let them practice if they haven't handled one before. I expect by now they are all good shots by now.

"You all have army rifles. They are fast enough; a few pistols for close range should keep us prepared at all times. As to rain, yes, it is torrential. People easily drown."

Lent came forward at this point to add a few words of advice.

"We do not expect to meet Indians. Those that have been in the area are mostly farmers and hunters. Although they may not be over friendly, they know better than to shoot a white man today. I have not had enough news from the Ocala area, or for that matter from any of the settlers on to how to handle natives who may confront us. They tell me they are always interested in trading. If you ladies have a favorite piece of jewelry, comb or scarf you don't want to lose, don't wear it as we go South. Some Indian chief may take a likening to it for his squaw."

Lent, looking thoughtful, gazed off; watching the movement in the brush and wooded area, he added, "And, oh yes, there are mounds of dirt in some areas, small hillocks. Avoid them. They are ceremonial burial sites considered sacred by all Indian tribes. Don't dishonor them by walking on them. Especially don't shoot an animal or spill its blood on such a mound."

Looking at his watch, he turned to Brown, who said, "Be ready to leave in 30 minutes at ten o'clock. Make sure every wagon has water, Walter," he called to his son. "Paul, check to see that every family has someone who knows how to shoot traveling with them and that their gun is loaded and up front. John, you might want to help the girls by driving their wagon."

Rubbing his chin and squinting into the sun, Brown called out, "One of you men see to it that Mabel is sitting with the smaller children. William, make sure all wagons with trailing cattle or horses have them tied securely to the back boards. Schultz, come up front with me."

In a matter of minutes everyone was ready. The wagons were in the same line formation they had traveled from Alabama to Florida. William, Carl and Paul agreed to be first-night guards.

Holding his whip high over his head, Fletcher Brown cracked it twice, the signal to roll out. His horse reared once and then trotted out and over the ruts ahead of them.

Fletcher glanced over his shoulder. Everyone was on the ready.

John and Walter shared the responsibility of getting the Brown wagon out behind their father. Behind it were three Kentucky-bred riding horses, one for each of the boys, on loan from the Bloodgood's stock. As things evened out, the boys took other designated

positions and Fletcher took the reins of his own wagon. You could tell by the set of his jaw that Fletcher did not expect trouble, only challenges.

Carl Bloodgood and nine-year-old Amos were on the buckboard seat, Greta and Hildegard peeking out over their shoulders. Moe was standing at the back carefully watching that the two Herefords followed. The Conestoga was higher at the front and back than it was in the middle.

The Rudolph wagon, a new John Deere, was next. Missy and William sat forward while Fredericka rearranged things to make more sleeping room for her sister-in-law Liza Jane and ten-year-old Junior Rudolph. Liza was riding her horse Bachelor, with the three Norberg girls on their Australian Waler mares, two of which were expected to foal within the month.

Johanna Shultz held the reins in her hands with James and Jacquelyn on either side of her. The wagon had been made by her father-in-law who specialized in two-wheelers, a much smaller wagon than those ahead. Her husband was forward, leading the party as Scout, his army position, too. Behind the wagon were three Black Angus steers, the best breeding stock the family owned.

John Brown and Mabel brought up the Norberg wagon, another smaller John Deere, with four-year-old Robert Erickson playing jacks with his 18-year-old sister Helen in the rear.

Jerry and Margaretta Erickson and 15-year-old daughter Martha were singing church hymns as they rode out following the others. Tied to their Owensboro one-ton wagon were the female counterparts of the Black Angus stock the Shultz family owned.

Bringing up the rear came the Lents, Jeremiah and Nellie, who joined in the singing; he singing the base, she singing the alto to the girls' soprano. Lent and his brothers had made their four-wheeler after one designed by their grandfather with bent willow frames to hold the tarp.

"Lord dismiss us with thy blessing fill our hearts with joy and peace  
Let us each thy love possessing triumph in redeeming grace.  
O refresh us, O refresh us, traveling through this wilderness.  
Thanks we give and adoration for thy gospel's joyful sound

May the fruits of thy salvation in our hearts and lives abound.  
Ever faithful, ever faithful traveling through this wilderness."

Jeremiah leaned over to kiss Nellie. She smiled, still humming the tune. "I can't think of any more romantic way to spend our honeymoon than this."

"You are such a special woman, Nellie. Most women would not leave their homes the way you have to come into this wilderness. I really admire you for your spunk."

He added, "Fletcher should have started the journey with a prayer, Nellie. I'm going to have to admonish him. He is forgetting important things. He promised us when we hired him that we would start off each day with prayer."

"Well, perhaps he knows each of us say our prayers as we awake for nourishment each morning. But it would have been nice if he called us all together for prayers requesting safe passage through this wilderness. Next time we stop, why don't you just go forward and ask Preacher Bloodgood if he won't take over that responsibility. Wouldn't that be more fittin'?"

"Yes, you are right. Fletcher has too much to do and is actually doing an excellent job. We are two days ahead of schedule thanks to his preparations and good calculations. Not many men would want to be so scientific on this journey into a wilderness. Using the sexton to survey our path was a stroke of brilliance on his part. I do admire the man."

After the first few hours on the primitive road, it narrowed. Trees were hitting the side of each wagon; wheels were getting stuck from time to time in muddy ruts filled with rain water. The beautiful Spanish moss made travel even more treacherous as all types of flying insects flew from the moss into wagons.

The women had cut netting to cover all their hats and added some to the men's helmet-type head coverings too. Fletcher Brown rode back to talk to each family as the day grew hotter.

"Remember to roll your sleeves down and keep your arms covered as the sun goes down. The mosquitoes are wicked at dusk. Shultz said there is a clearing up ahead and a small stream to water the horses. We'll eat there and stop for a half hour at most."

Just as he was about to turn his horse around, there was a yell from up front. He couldn't tell whose voice it was.



"Look out. We'll tip over. Watch the wagon now. Oh, no. We're going to break the axle. WE NEED HELP. OH, We Need Help."

Fletcher recognized Johanna Shultz's voice as he rode up the line. The Shultz wagon had pitched over into a rut, and the right wheel had gone into a three-foot hole. As he bent over the rut to see how bad the damage was, thousands of ants came streaming out of a hollow log. They were crawling over everything, his feet, pants leg, the back end of the wagon. They moved faster than anything he had ever come against before.

"ALL MEN FORWARD. ALL MEN FORWARD," he called out as he raced up front. Reaching in to his own wagon, grabbing two iron pry bars and still yelling to all the others, "We need help." The men knew exactly what to do, except for the ants.

"Get some kerosene, Shultz," called Brown. "It's in the front of every wagon in red cans. Everyone needs gloves. GLOVES EVERYONE." Fletcher was at his best when fighting the unpredictable. He was the fastest thinker in a crisis any of the men had ever worked with. His leadership was undeniably the best and easiest to follow.

"Get some kerosene on that log; you need gloves to fight those ants. As we raise the wagon, pull the log out of the rut and set it afire, Carl." Three of the men were pushing the pry bars under the wheel, Bloodgood standing on the bar to give the leverage he needed to lift the wagon out of the hole. As the ants began to crawl over each of the men, Carl grabbed the log and tossed it in the grassy area off the trail and set it afire. The wagon came crashing down on his arm.

"Walter, get up there and grab those reins. When I say 'go', get going, ride those horses hard. Rudolph, fill the rut with anything you can find so other wagons won't get stuck. All of ya now push, pry and pull. It's movin'. Go, Walter, Go." Fletcher was yelling.

"Rudolph and you others fill that rut. Bloodgood was directing to avoid more trouble.

"Watch it ... Now go."

"Watch it, the wagon's shifting." Bloodgood moved in and put his shoulder to it.

"Walter, get those horses movin' faster," with that Fletcher ran forward, grabbed his whip, cracking it out straight in front of him. The horses groaned under the weight of the wagon but pulled it forward about twelve feet. At last, the wagon was on level ground.

Bloodgood, tearing his shirt off, called out, "You men, check for ants on your clothes. Get some Witch Hazel from the Chuck Wagon, Greta. Get it around their necks, wrists

and ankles. Anywhere the ants could enter and get on their skin. I don't feel anything biting me but let's treat it before it happens." He went back to check the two-wheeled wagon for any damage.

The old log was ablaze and the ants made a path into the woods. Shultz, looking at the half filled in rut, called out, "Hold back. Let's get more dirt and rocks in this rut. Fill in on both sides of the roadway before the other wagons come forward."

Greta, still washing the men down with Witch Hazel, looked at her husband's arm. She said nothing in the presence of the other men, but when she could she asked Carl, "Did you feel that arm break? I think that bruise indicates something happened. Let's let Johanna look at it. She's a nurse." Bloodgood was holding his arm up. It was painful to let it drop.

Everyone was double checking supplies. Lillie, Tillie and Robert had been walking toward a small creek to fill their water jugs. When they were about 50 feet from the wagon, they spotted three armadillos.

"Don't make a sound, Robert, but go up and get one of the men to catch these armored beasts. They will make a wonderful meal. The meat is very tasty. But don't scare them away. They burrow into the ground if they think they're trapped or cornered."

Robert, though over educated and a brilliant child, had never been asked to do anything important in his entire life. Racing now as fast as he could, and very surprised at his own speed, he looked first for David, Fletcher's grandson, who was double checking the rim and axle of the wheel that had been stuck in the rut.

"David, David. We found those 'armored' things. Three of them! The girls said they are good to eat. Could you come and capture them now, please? But we have to be quiet or they'll burrow into the ground and get away from us. We found three of them, David. Isn't that a great accomplishment? Three of them." Completely out of breath from running and pleading, Robert sat down right on the ground at David's feet waiting for his answer.

Laughter was one of David's most charming idiosyncrasies. When he laughed it was contagious. Everyone laughed with him. He looked at little Robert, whose face was covered with beads of perspiration, running down his neck, too. The sweat showing through his shirt at chest and neck streaked his shirt. David just laughed at his earnestness. Robert didn't like to be laughed at, but he too started to laugh with David.

"Pa," he called out, "Robert tells me some of the women folk have cornered three 'armored things' that make good eatin' down at that creek. If you go quietly and know how to trap them, he says we can have a tasty supper."

Half the wagon train had turned to laugh with David and Robert. "Well," said Fredericka, "You men catch 'em. I'll fry 'em up."

Schultz, Rudolph and Lent, armed with guns, nets and pitch forks followed Robert and David to the creek. As they got closer to the girls, Robert turned and put his finger to his lips. The girls pointed in the direction they had last seen the "armored things." The men went into the bush. A few shots were fired, a lot of thrashing, and finally they came out carrying the beasts.

David, looking at Robert and ruffling his hair, said, "Now to further your education and to help you learn about Florida, remember A is for Armadillo. You can start a new Florida Alphabet Book. Each day, see if you can find another animal or plant for that book."

"You are a good thinking person, David," young Robert remarked. "That will help the next 26 days go faster, or at least be more interesting. Thank you."

With that he ran back to tell his parents about his new "education project" suggested by David. Robert went into his part of the wagon to find some blank paper. In big bold double letters he wrote: A IS FOR ARMADILLO. His father had spelled for him.

While Fredericka was getting supper cooked, other women came over to help her, all but Greta and Johanna; they were assessing the damage done to Carl's arm.

"I can't be sure that it's broken, Carl. It could be a bad sprain," Johanna advised as she once again turned the arm to look at the bruise. "It's so bruised it's difficult to tell why you are in so much pain. The best thing to do is make a strong sling and immobilize your arm."

As she looked around for enough cloth to make a sling, Fredericka came over carrying the armadillo shell. She asked, "Have you ever seen anything like this, Johanna? It's hinged in nine places. I thought if you needed a sling for Carl, we could line the shell and then put his arm in it."

"Well, I must say I would not have thought of it, Fredericka. But then you are very inventive. If someone could watch the supper that's cooking, perhaps you could help me make up what it is you envision."

Mabel heard the discussion and volunteered to oversee supper. The two women began tearing strips of cotton cloth to make a sling and to line the shell. Putting up with all the twisting and turning, Carl said, "Thank you. I guess you two know what you're doing. It feels better close to my body and supported by the shell."

The smell of roasting potatoes, the armadillo and cinnamon carrots indicated supper was ready. As everyone headed for the makeshift table, Carl Bloodgood thanked the Lord for the day: "We praise your name, thanking you for food, drink and strength. Bless us on our way. Amen"

### CHAPTER THREE

#### STORMS, WRECKS AND SURVIVORS

With a puppy licking his face and the larger dog tugging at his pants, Jim Bloodgood woke up to the sun drying out his water-logged shoes, sunbeams drying his already salt

water cracked lips a bit more, and wondering as he sat up where his first mate and partner in this adventure, Titus Lent, had gotten to so early in the day.

He picked up some remaining pieces of coconut. It was cool and still moist. It helped his lips as well as his hunger. He swirled around as a cow came crashing through the brush, a white egret riding on its back. Laughing uproariously, he had never seen this companionship between animals before and took to laughing at its simplicity. One at least got a free ride and food, but he couldn't see immediately how the cow gained from this friendship.

Following close behind egret and cow came Titus. "Ready for breakfast? I found a squirrel in someone's trap. Got lots of berries in my hat. Should we start a fire? I don't see anyone who can hurt us, but it might bring the trap owners out to talk to us at least."

"You're better at starting fires than I am, Titus. I need to see what's happened to the raft and how we can fix the rudder. But I am hungry! If we have some coffee, wouldn't the smell of its civilized aroma, in this wilderness of greenery where birds ride on a cow's back, remind you of Boston? I need to think, to remember that I am an intelligent male from a proper family and that all this is just an adventure. I come from a society that is socially acceptable, that birds fly and cows were not meant for transporting anything. However, that was one amusin' sight, that egret on that cow! If Ma was here, she'd say, "That's one you'll tell your young'uns."

"I think we have some dry chips in that big can, Jim, and some fine wood sticks. You could bring them up from the raft, too. Or should we stick together? I'm a bit afraid of leaving this squirrel lest someone steal it back."

"You got a point, stay here!" said Jim as he wandered down to the Gulf shore looking for a way to fix the raft. It was tilted to one side, further up on the beach than he remembered.

Pulling himself up over the floor of the raft, he looked for the kindling Titus needed. To his absolute amazement and surprise, there in the bottom of the box lay the parts he needed to replace the rudder, complete with hardware and large screwdriver. His Pa had thought of everything.

He looked around for the coffee and also found some hardtack he had forgotten about. They could have berries, coffee and biscuits while waiting on the squirrel to cook.

Titus piled the dry palm branches they had slept on into the middle of the clearing. Setting the kindling near the center of it, he used his stones to ignite it and got a blaze underneath the coffee pot. The squirrel was soon roasting on a spit he made from yellow pine.

The berries and hardtack soaked in honey were a taste of civilized Boston breakfasts, something they both needed to recall that particular morning.

"I wonder how my Ma and Pa made out their first meal in the wilderness. I'll bet they had more than squirrel to eat. But I think we're doin' just fine, don't you?"

Laughing at his friend's thoughts, Jim realized for the first time how very different they were. But then he had not lost his mother and his father hadn't remarried. That would make someone rethink the past and be curious as to how "they were getting along" as a newly married couple.

"Titus, you and I will always get along," Jim said in an unusually deep voice. "Yes, you and I will get along fine as long as we're dealing with logical people."

Jim didn't finish his thoughts. He was suddenly pale and just stopped talking as he stared at something behind Titus. "If you turn around right now, ever so slowly, you'll see a woman with rage in her eyes pointing a big, a very big double-barreled shotgun at us. She may not be that very logical person we were just talking about, so be careful."

"You may have to give up that squirrel you relished so much. Remember now, easy does it."

"You're joking, aren't you? Every time we get into a serious discussion you have to play a joke. Well, I'm not fallin' for this one." It must have been Jim's expression 'cause Titus did turn around, easy like. Looking at this very beautiful, particular young girl, he also saw it was no joke. He looked over at Jim. He was ashen.

No, this was no joke. The short and very beautiful young woman holding the gun on them couldn't have been more than 18 or 19 years old. She glared at them and then at the fire and spit. Before she even said one word, they both knew this was one angry female.

"You will share your breakfast, no?" she asked with what seemed to be a heavy French accent. "You will host me and offer me coffee, no?" She used the gun to motion toward the coffee pot.

"Oh yes, sure," said Jim as he came to his senses, offering her a tin cup of coffee. He filled another cup with hardtack, berries and honey and gave her a very primitive spoon.

"The squirrel needs more time on the spit, M'am. I'm sorry if I took your food. We were starved after surviving the storm last night. I couldn't find anyone or I would have offered to buy it," Titus half pleaded and half apologized.

"'Tis not my squirrel. It's the German's trap you raided. You stole my berries, all my berries. I need to keep some for seeds, too, you know. The bushes are strong, but I want to plant a new patch on the east side of the house. We try to live peaceful here ... you make trouble in two houses when you come. You will have to face the German alone. Berries and coffee will not squelch him. He fight you." As she spoke, she spied the puppies.

"Let's eat before we have to fight," said Titus, being his usual logical self as he tested the squirrel for tenderness. He thought it was sufficiently cooked and tore off a leg.

Mom and her pups headed for the hot meat, but were pushed aside by Titus who said, "Now listen, we eat people food first. If there is anything left, you can have that. Now sit." The dogs obeyed and sat, their tails were not wagging. They were hungry and wanted meat.

"How's it taste?" asked Jim.

"I think we have the makings of a fine meal if we eat fast before this German finds us."

A gruff voice coming up from behind them said, "The German's found you."

Spinning around, dumping coffee and dropping the leg of the squirrel, the second unexpected guest of the morning was more frightening than the first.

"Offer him breakfast," said Titus as he nudged Jim.

The German howled with laughter, "Yes, offer him breakfast. And fast. He survived the night and storm looking for two children and an elderly woman."

Eager to know his story, the boys fed him the best that was left, including two cups of hot coffee, biscuits, berries and plenty of honey for energy.

"How did you know the children were lost?" asked Jim. "Were they settlers' children or from the lost supply ship? We found a dog two nights ago. Is the elderly woman able to walk and swim?" They waited as the man ate expecting him to share his news about the ship and its cargo.

But it was the French woman who spoke up first. "German found the woman on the sand." She came over to them and added, "The woman was washed ashore in the storm. Then the children came on a long plank."

The German said, "Tied to it by someone unknown. They were unable to talk clearly, sort of maundering slurred speech and actions, kind of wild. We tried to get them to talk. No luck. They slept the whole day through. Once when they awoke in the evening they took some water and went back to sleep. So we covered them and started a fire to give them a feeling of safety if they woke in the middle of the night."

The woman picked up the story. "In the morning, children and woman, they gone. Footsteps led into water. Then disappear. We can think only that they were picked up by others. Or by one. But who? We do not know."

Titus had hung on their every word. "Did they have anything on them for identification: jewelry, letters, clothing with a name on it? Did the plank seem to be part of a ship's deck?"

"No. None of that. It's a puzzle. What do you know about this supply ship you asked about? Since that is the only boat we know to be in these waters, it must be supply ship passengers we saw. Logical conclusion, yes?"

"Yes, it's logical!" To answer the previous question, Jim said, "Mr. Lawson, who runs a supply store in Tampa, was looking for a supply ship that was overdue with a cargo for others in the Tampa area. When we found the dog, we just assumed it came from that ship. But there has been no sign of a boat anywhere."

"Perhaps the woman and the children were kidnapped by someone not related to them. Do you have marauders? Any pirates left in this area?"

"No, they are long gone. But if a ship broke up, enough of its planking could drift ashore, or a small boat it carried could have found its way to shore. Or perhaps someone with food and water in such a boat found them and took them back to wherever they belonged. It is a mystery."

Looking out to sea and checking the sky for indications of stormy weather ahead, Jim found only clear skies and calm seas. "It's time we were off again. If we can trouble you for clear water to fill our canteens and barrel, we would be much obliged for the help. And let me pay you for the squirrel."



"I, Oscar Kerr, enjoy coming to shore to cooked breakfast. No charge. Just keep a lookout for the woman and the children. And if they are found, please, you let me know some day they are safe, yes?"

"Yes," said Jim as he and Titus shook hands with Oscar.

They filled their canteens and prepared to shove off. It had been good to be with others for a meal. The boys appreciated the unexpected kindness they had found in the wilderness. They were beginning to see everything differently. These folks were like the early settlers on Cape Cod, maybe not as religious, but certainly glad to see other human beings and in need of news of the surrounding settlements.

Watching the woman with the puppies, Jim asked, "Would you like to keep the puppies and the big dog? You could sell them for hunting dogs soon. It would pay you back for all you have done for us."

"Oh, yes, yes. You really mean this? No joke?"

"No joke. From now on you own the dogs." Jim laughed as she hugged him. To avoid any more affection, he ran to the raft and jumped aboard. Titus was laughing uproariously at his predicament.

Oscar gave them a push out into deeper water and they waved, calling out, "We'll get word back to you. Take care of the pups. Say, what's the name of this place?"

"Kerr's Landing. We are a trading post: with settlers and Indians, too."

With water lapping at the raft, Titus put up the sail, Jim was at the tiller, and all was well again as once more they headed south to Sarasota. The day was warm and breezy. They skimmed over the Gulf waters, making unusually good time as they flew over the low breaking waves.

It was late afternoon when they caught a large grouper, the first they'd seen, skinned it and cooked it over the open fire in the big copper pot. The coconuts were running out. They decided to save them for a future when they could not so readily catch a meal from the Gulf.

As the sun went down and night began to fall, the ashes sent off a warm glow. Both boys were ready for a restful, peaceful night. Jim took the first watch. It was just as calm as could be. But from time to time as he looked ashore, he could see the profile of someone or something walking along parallel to the raft. It was unnerving. The eyes

glowed once in a while at the height of a child or an animal, but not of a full grown man. They'd walk ahead of the raft and then wait for it to catch up. After an hour of watching this, he was so unnerved that he decided to wake Titus.

Crawling alongside Titus' bedroll, he shook him gently, whispering, "Titus, don't move. Just open your eyes and look out at the shoreline just ahead of the raft. Do you see anything?"

Rolling over, they were both straining now to identify what they saw.

After a long silence, "Yep. There are two of them, eyes about three feet off the ground. Eyes wide apart. They can walk without looking at the ground. They don't take their eyes off the water. What do you suspect? Small humans, like missing children? Or animals?

"I don't know. That's why I woke you up. I thought two heads were better than one."

"Slowly get up and take over the tiller," said Jim. "I have to sleep. But if anything gets closer to us, shout. I'll wake immediately."

Titus kept watch for several hours and then found he was nodding off from time to time. Suddenly, waking with a start and realizing he'd lost sight of the "eyes" he had been following on the shoreline, he was frightened. As he tried to relax again, he wondered what had awakened him. He listened carefully ... a bit more ... something was splashing near the raft. Then he heard something coming their way fast. Another splash, but he couldn't see a thing.

"JIM, JIM, WAKE UP! Something's coming at us."

"Titus, grab the lantern on the post closest to you. Wrap some of those old rags around it and make a torch by slipping it into the hot ashes. Fast. I'll take the tiller."

With the lit torch in hand, Titus came to the far side of the raft and looked out over the Gulf's calm waters. With no moon, he only saw a vague shadowy figure moving very fast toward them. It had a white mark on it. Straining to see what was out there, he raised the torch higher.

Suddenly losing his balance, the torch was knocked from his hand, making a sizzling sound as it splashed into the Gulf. They were crudely pushed toward shore for a moment and then swung sideways as this unknown thing hit them broadside.

"Jim. You standing? It's the same pattern as those following us."

"Yep, but I sure don't know what attacked us, or who." Thinking about the shoreline followers, he said, "To be attacked by something I can't define, it's baffling in the dark! You are right. They are following the same pattern all the time; they get ahead of us and then wait for us to catch up. Let's not play that game. Let's just sit here and see what happens."

The two boys spent the next hour watching the shoreline creatures, turning every now and again to look out over the waters of the Gulf, and then looking dead ahead to make sure they didn't hit anything. The figures on shore stopped when the boys did.

Neither of them said a word. Both were beginning to nod. They were tired. Far more tired than they expected to be. The unexpected visit had taken its toll on their nerves. Young or not, they were scared even though they hadn't admitted it to each other.

The raft seemed to know its way as Jim, from time to time, woke up enough to check their course. They were still parallel to the shore; the breeze was soft at about 5 to 10 knots, perfect sailing weather. He dozed off again, wondering how his folks were doing as they headed east.

Boys and raft slid into another day without even knowing it. The sun had been up for hours before they awakened. Titus shook himself and then Jim. "Come on, wake up, it's daylight, Jim."

Jim rolled over, stood up and faced south.

At first he wasn't certain what he was looking at.

Then he realized it was the mast and sails of the biggest boat he'd ever seen.

"Lord, will you look at that ship."

"I never saw such a lopsided frigate in my life. How could anything that big get itself beached like that? It must have been that storm the other night. It could have been worse at this latitude, more wind and heavy seas, worse than we had."

"Titus, this must be the explanation for some of what's happened. The dog could have been on this ship, and the woman and children, too. Although I can't understand why someone took them away from us when they were dry and safe. But we may never know unless, of course, there are still people on the frigate or wandering on shore."

Reaching for his rifle, Titus pointed to shore.

Just coming from around the south side of the frigate were three uniformed men with rifles, accompanied by two children and an elderly couple.

As the boat people walked toward them, the boys steered for shore and beached the raft.

"I am Captain Jack Cardillo, at your service. We have been beached by a storm. My crew, in bringing help to us, has been tracking your near tragic demise as that Orca whale attached your craft. We have no idea why a mammal used to cold waters would come into the Gulf of Mexico's warm waters. Did you know what you were fighting?"

"A WHALE! A whale, no sir. No one said we would have whales to contend with. Are you sure it was a whale and not a manatee? Whales come into New England waters but not into these waters. It could not be a whale," assured Titus.

More interested in the children, Jim asked, "Are these the children who were with us one night on the beach and walked away by morning?"

#### CHAPTER FOUR

#### AN UNEXPECTED HELPER

He couldn't tell anyone his fears. Nope, Fletcher Brown just had to keep his mouth shut and run the operation. There were times in this journey that, as manly as he was, he

could have torn his hair out. Not only had he no idea whether his map was accurate, he was not sure anyone really had mapped the area he was to travel to: destination Miakka. And after the 1848 hurricane season had smashed the coast, many inlets had changed. But worst of all, he had no one to confide in, no one to talk to who was even remotely familiar with the area they were about to move into.

To his sons John, Walter and Paul, he said that morning, "From the Suwannee, southeast to the northern shores of the Manatee, down to the south shores of the Miakka, it's a mystery. We're going to have to set up the sextant to survey some areas as we go because we will be traveling uncharted river land. Anything we map will be valuable to others."

"Fletcher, we've been traveling southeast from Tallahassee now for a week and a half. This has got to be the duller part of the journey." It was Bill Schultz, the calmest member of the company, the one who never complained but pitched in to help without being asked. Here he was grumbling. Lack of excitement was his complaint at nine o'clock in the morning. No rain storms, no wind tearing the wagons apart, no lightning cracking into the metal casings on the wagon wheels to keep him busy, so now he was bored.

"This is a downright boring ideal, Pa," announced his son James. "You told us this would be the most exciting days of our lives and we'd never forget it. You told us that, Pa. Remember?"

"What do you want me to do? Go wrestle a gaiter for ya?" snapped his Pa.

Johanna Schultz came over to the men in her family and suggested they take two horses and ride the lead position, become Scouts for the morning if Fletcher would allow them. She knew how they felt.

They saw wild beasts, but none attacked. Snakes writhed across the trail, birds flew low enough to be caught in their bare hands. It had been an uneventful ride except for mosquitoes. They had learned to carry smoke pots near the front of every wagon to protect the drivers. Indian lore recommended rubbing herbs on the skin to defy mosquitoes. At nightfall thousands swarmed. The more mosquitoes, the more they quarreled. Mosquitoes did that to you, ruined your disposition. The closer they got to the river, the worse things got.

Recognizing the various problems, Fletcher Brown called all the drivers up front to form circle.

"Other drivers told me they burned citron in their smoke pots to ward off insects at night. I don't know if it will work. But if you want to try it out, just shave some into your smoke pot." With that said he called for a look at the map they carried.

The teenagers who had been listening ran back to their wagons to find the citron. Each one vied to be the first to be mosquito free.

Meanwhile, Fletcher, pulling himself up to his full height, and with a very authoritative tone of voice that was to be a reassuring stance, said, "A lot has happened since this Coast and Geodetic Survey map was printed in 1856," Brown admitted. "It was accurate." As everyone looked over his shoulder at the seacoast and its inlets, each one was looking for rivers and other hazards they would need to cross to get into the newly organized Manatee County.

"Well, our first crossing will be of the Suwannee near Fort White. You will meet settlers who are staying close to Forts."

Jerry Erickson asked, "Is that because they are so terrified of the savages?"

Looking askance at Erickson, Fletcher said, "No, not because they fear Indians, but the economics of the area leaves the settlers dependent on the troops. The employment of women to do washing, baking, sewing, in other words to be useful in the Fort, helps each family ... or the men help as civilian Scouts."

"You need to know now that we're leaving Middle Florida. It is disease infested. Here, Yellow Fever has wiped out whole families. Former Gov. DuVal said he had never seen such 'swarms of horseflies and drinking water alive with insects.' And I agree with what I have heard of Manatee, when he named it ... 'the most wretched tract of country I have ever seen'."

Mabel asked, "Would it be a good idea if we boiled our water? My neighbor's French maid used to do that for 'purity.' She said her grandma taught her that."

"If heating water kills flies and other insects, why not?" Fletcher replied, thinking as he did, it would keep the women busy. "Now I need to say a few things to all of you. Planters and settlers will be able to help us when we reach the Manatee River, but the Little Manatee has to be crossed first and will be a challenge. Remember that when you meet

Southerners, they will think of you as Yankees and may not be too friendly. Until you prove yourselves, you may not be accepted."

The women in particular were listening carefully to Fletcher's words. He could tell from their facial expressions that this was not going to be an easy adjustment for them. They would be more dependent on their present friendships than they had originally thought.

"Two things you must remember about this Florida society. In some areas a farm is called a plantation if they own three or more slaves. And slaves have been made of anyone captured in war, so expect slaves to be Indians as well as Blacks."

While the men were talking, Amos and Hildegard Bloodgood were walking with James and Jacquelyn Schultz. "Do you worry about your brother Jim out on that raft in the Gulf of Mexico? My Pa said those boys are very courageous. Was your brother always like that, Amos?"

"I think so, James. He was brave, and I know that's the same trait. But I think Hildegard would be able to say better than I would."

Taking her cue from her younger brother, Hildegard said simply, "That is a trait of the Bloodgood men. What has to be done, they do, no matter what risk it entails; at least that's what my mother says. And Titus Lent is the same way. He is our cousin. His mother is a Bloodgood. So I guess these things run in families."

"Do you really think so, Hildegard? I would say you can learn to be courageous by watching how courageous people act," said Jacquelyn.

"Well, I sure hope I can learn from them," said James. "Even if I'm not a Bloodgood, I could have good blood. My Pa told me that one night." That caused them all to laugh as they turned to go back to the wagon circle.

"Did you hear that last thing they were talking about, boiling water to kill the flies and insects. That sounds very logical, doesn't it?"

"Hildegard, I can't say anything against it. Just look over there where the water is swirling around in that stream. See all that froth? It's got all kinds of bugs and twigs in it. Boiling should kill the bugs and they leave other stuff behind, too; every critter does."

"Oh, what a disgusting thought! James, you do think differently than anyone I know."

The men were still discussing the issues and had covered many subjects, like building their herds. "If our information is correct, we will be able to buy cattle before we cross the Manatee," Lent was saying. "The stockman already here are William Whitaker, Samuel Knight and Jacob Summerlin. They made claims under the Armed Occupation Act.

"The cattle they have raised are a large breed, valued for dairy that thrive on high dry grass but it doesn't increase their milk. But they are sought after, so if we want to raise calves for breeding stock, these are the men we have to meet. I'm not sure if they are in Manatee."

Johnson called out, "Let's get back to these rivers you said we have to cross after the Suwannee and before the Manatee! You also said something about a missing ship."

"One other thing," said Fletcher, picking up where he left off, "the supply vessels that ran the Manatee during the Indian wars had been able to go inland over twenty-five miles on that river. That's where I expect we'll make our crossing. I forgot to tell you, we had word out of Tampa that a supply ship is missing. On the bigger rivers that empty into the Gulf, debris from a wreck could be washed inland. So watch for anything large enough to tip a wagon because the missing ship was a large frigate. One of our retired Ambassadors and his grandchildren were traveling aboard that ship. People are worried about it."

Walter Brown came forward. He was keeping track of miles covered. "Now, at about 30 to 35 miles a day, in 16 days we will have covered 500 miles, give or take a few days for bad weather, mishaps and just being plain weary. If we stay east, and our compass should keep us on the right course, after crossing the Suwannee, we only have a few minor streams to cross.

"Not until we are south of the Little Manatee and further east will we pick up the Peace River. There we turn west till we find the Miakka, a river which wanders for miles through a jungle and out into the Gulf. It is the land along the Miakka we want to buy for raising stock, according to the letters my Pa got from the Carltons. Any questions?"

"At the Manatee is it possible the boys will join us?" asked an anxious Mother.

Looking at the map again, Fletcher Brown said, "Jim and Titus know if the weather gets bad, they can get to the Miakka area through the Manatee. However, they were advised to get into the shallow waters of Sarasota Bay, buy a horse and wagon, unload their special cargo, and meet us in Miakka near the Carlton Ranch. Remember, by then we



will have a herd of our own, and those boys are as anxious as we are to start building homes, barns, and maybe even a store or two. I am counting on their help for just about everything we have to do. The raft was just a chance for them to be on their own and grow a bit before they get saddled again with helping us."

"Everything will depend on how we are received when we get to Sarasota/Miakka." He turned looking at the entire group and smiled. "Let's get some hot food in us now."

Looking at them all, he added, "Then bed down early to get a start at first light."

The Norberg sisters had been making a huge pot of stew since sun up. The men had gotten enough squirrels along the way to give them a strong hearty broth to which had been added carrots, greens they found on the roadside, some rice they carried in the wagon, and of course onions, a well balanced meal was provided.

No matter where you walked for a mile around, the smell of that stew cooking filled the air.

Tillie, the Norberg trio comic, began banging on an empty pot. "Come and get it."

Minnie was looking for enough tin plates to feed the children first. Logically she figured to get them fed so they wouldn't be interrupting their folks all through the meal.

Lillie, all a bustle, was taking biscuits out of the sheet metal oven that Carl had found for her.

"That oven was a real find, Carl. It makes everything I make more tasty." As she plumped the last biscuit on a plate, she said, "Well, that will give everyone somethin' to sop up gravy with. We are out of fruit, though, so nothing special tonight. Just stew."

Coming up alongside Lillie, James said, "If you give us a good chance to get away after we eat, I think I saw some blueberries, Lillie. Maybe you should look at them first. But it would be a nice breakfast fruit. Is that something we could do to help out?"

"You young people sit and eat now and I'll go with you later."

Running his hand through Lillie's hair like a big brother, Carl said, "Lillie, stew and biscuits made with your hands is a meal fit for a King in this wilderness. I'll always remember tonight and that wonderful smell that domesticated even these jungles."

With each family seated around the wagon, Fletcher said grace.

"Almighty and blessed Lord, your protection is needed for the trip ahead. We thank you for your devotion in getting us this far. Amen"

About 15 minutes into the meal, Amos tapped Fletcher, and then put a finger to his lips as he pointed to a clump of palmettos. "Somethin's movin' thar." He sort of stretched his neck a bit more and deliberately dropped his fork. He bent to pick it up and started crawling. First to the Lent wagon and then to Bloodgood's, alerting them to the movement on the far side of the clearing.

With guns on the ready, the men circled the brush.

All eyes on them, women raced up into wagon seats with guns ready. Children safely tucked into the back of each wagon, waited hushed and tense for the first shot to be fired.

Instead of gunfire there was only laughter, lots of laughter. They laughed with relief as a cow and its calf came crashing into the clearing, dodging the fire and trying to circle the wagon.

Lent, the only man handy with a rope so far, lassoed the cow.

Yelling, he successfully got her tied down. "Well, our first cattle didn't even cost a cent and we have our first calf, too; yep, our first to start our Miakka herd. What a treasure. Amen and Amen, Lord. What a beginning. I wonder how many more wild ones we can find out here."

With the cow and calf tied to the Lent's wagon, everyone finished their meal.

As the women cleaned up, the men gathered to look over the two animals. The consensus was that they were scrawny and underfed and would need good grassland and plenty of water if they were to get any milk from that cow. The one they had brought with them was dry for now. The thought of cream in their coffee each morning had them thinking of the Boston breakfasts they left behind. They would dream that night of the better times coming soon.

Wagons and animals were double checked as Johnson took the first watch on guard duty. The night went off peacefully. For five hours, the only activity consisted of Johnson throwing more wood on the fire, when suddenly the entire camp awoke as one person by a screeching they had never heard before.

Johnson's warning shots prompted the men to get torches lit first from the fire. Then, as they had drilled and trained to do in the dark, one man went forward, two went to the rear outside the circle, one to the center, and two checked each wagon to see who was on guard. They each checked the undercarriage of each wagon.

The screeching continued. It was intolerable in the dark, not a human sound at all.

Fletcher, realizing they were close to Fort White near Lake City, wondered if what they heard were Indians trying to scare them off. Or perhaps coming to reclaim the cow and calf.

The shrill sharpness of the screech was an unknown sound to them all.

Johnson and Fletcher's two sons reported they had seen nothing. The screeching continued.

Lillie Norberg came forward. "Fletcher, if no one comes close to us or we aren't threatened in any way, could I suggest screeching Macaw parrots live in this type jungle. They could be some sailor's pets. They can easily be brought in from Mexico or Central America.

"I knew you were a bird lover, Lillie," said Johnson, "and that you were going to be our wild life specialist on this trip, but Macaws as pets?"

Before any other decision could be made about the would-be Macaw, Amos came from his wagon and silently pointed to the underbrush surrounding the last wagon.

Fletcher, with gun aimed at the spot to which he had pointed, shouted, "All right, come out or I will shoot." Nothing happened. He shot, firing one shot clearly over the head of anyone in the brush.

From the other side of the clearing a Macaw flew into Fletcher's range. He swirled, fired and missed.

"Don't shoot the bird, sir," called Amos. "It's noisy but it's relatively harmless."

"Oh, now we have another expert on birds. Listen, if someone doesn't take that bird out of my range of fire, it's going to be tomorrow's supper."

Without adding any more to that conversation, Fletcher beckoned his oldest son to his side and whispered some new directions. Without a word, he untied the cow and calf and led them to the opposite side of the circled wagons, closer to where the screeching had come from.

The screeching grew louder. Then absolute quiet. Stillness. Another God awful screech.

In disbelief they watched as a sunburned, bearded man of perhaps five foot eight came out from a thicket near the heaviest part of the jungle. Barefoot, pants rolled up, a parrot on his shoulder, and thinking no one was watching, he reached over to grab the cow's rope.

"Just a minute, hold on there." It was Lent who was trying to stop him but keep him interested. "We need your help. Sorry if this is your animal." In a rushed flurry, for fear the man would leave as quickly as he came, Lent got his questions out as fast as he could.

"Can you tell us how to cross a couple rivers ahead of us? And where to get cattle like yours. Did you buy it, or rope wild ones. And say, how far away is the Myakka River?" It was Lent at his best.

Right beside him came Bloodgood. "Do you speak English?" We really would appreciate any help you can give us. We are actually two parties, one going by Gulf and one by Wagon Train." Telling the stranger more than he needed to in his nervous attempt to get questions answered, Carl knew the easiest leg of the journey was ahead if they had a guide through the open grasslands.

"We must meet up in Miakka. Can you help us? We would be glad to make it worth your while. Could you plot the path we need to take on our map?"

Bloodgood brought the map into the light from the torch.

Moving very slowly, the stranger looked up at Lent, then down at the map, and shot a glance over at Bloodgood, who was now running his finger to the Suwannee River and the Miakka.

The man pointed to his mouth indicating by a shake of his head that he could not talk. As the sun began to peek at them from between the trees and vines, the man pointed out a few things.

First to cross the Suwannee, he indicated the depth of the water with his hands.

On the other side of that river he drew a line going east. He scratched with his nail where to cross the Little Manatee. As he traced the line of the Manatee River, he drew in a lake beyond the end of the Manatee and connected it to a very narrow stream in the wider river. He straightened up, smiled and hit the map with his hand, indicating that was the crossing point that would lead to Miakka. He also pointed to Fort Meade, a seemingly alternative route.

Everyone breathed a sigh of relief as Fletcher asked, "What can we do for you in return?" Your help is invaluable to us." The stranger made the motion of wanting to eat and drink.

The women immediately put the coffee on the fire, fried their last egg and some potatoes, and heated up a little leftover stew with a small onion. They added plenty of salt and pepper, and even gave him a pinch of sugar in his coffee.

He fed the parrot potato; its hooked beak fascinated the girls. It screeched in thanks, I guess.

Young Amos Bloodgood brought a pad and pencil to the man. "Would you write your name for us so we can say prayers for you? You have helped us a lot. We aren't so afraid of being lost anymore because you know the way." He startled the whole company as he asked, "Why don't you come with us?"

As he went up to the stranger with the pad of paper, Amos stumbled. The stranger steadied him on his feet. For a moment Amos looked dazed. His mother immediately asked if he was feeling better or "still had a headache." The child pulled away from her, wanting to see what the stranger would write in reply to his question.

The man wrote, "I am Charles De Grotto. My boat crashed on Hog Island in a storm many years ago. I was the only one saved. My mouth was cut. I cannot talk. My parents and grandparents died after we landed. The bird, Grace, was my mother's pet Macaw. The cow is not mine, but I would like to have it."

When Fletcher read the paper to everyone, they cheered and welcomed Charles.

Mabel was the first to come forward with a gift, a hard piece of peppermint.

He continued to write, "When I smelled the stew, I came to steal some while you were asleep. But Grace gave me away. If you would let me get some of my things and you all agree, I would go with you. I could navigate! Oh, yes, I am 26 now; I taught mathematics in Mobile."

The men hadn't expected Charles to take Amos' suggestion seriously. Now that he had, they were uncertain.

Fletcher wondered! He knew nothing about him ... he was hesitant to take a stranger in with the families, especially when he considered how many single females he was responsible for.

On the other hand, if he knew the waterways, he could save them time and effort. And it was, after all, another set of hands to work with; maybe he couldn't speak, but he looked strong.

Lent decided that anyone who had been here for a few years would be familiar with Indians, the vegetation and animals, and could be very useful getting them through the grassland/wetlands.

Johnson wanted someone who knew more about weather conditions than they did. How they could protect themselves in wind and from the terrible lightning everyone told them about.

In a quick assessment, a count of "feelings toward Charles", he got the nod from the men and from the Norberg women. An extra set of hands at the Norberg wagon on the river would be needed, everyone was aware of that. The girls handled the reins well, but were not strong enough on rough terrain.

Hugo and Amos, Jacquelyn and Hildegard, although no one asked for their opinion also thought a "sailor would be a good addition to the company because sailors could read the stars."

It was Bloodgood who came up with a solution. "Charles, we can use another man, that's for sure, so why don't you come along with us for the next three days, help us ford the Suwannee, and then we'll make up our minds. You'll have good vittles and company, and we'll pay you a fair wage if we don't take you with us as part of the Company. In three days we won't have traveled so far from here that you wouldn't be able to return easily. How's that sound?"

He wrote three words, "Fair, if cow."

The company laughed and all welcomed him. He left to get his pack and they began to get ready to move out when he returned. In the meantime, some of the women put the children back to bed and took a quick snooze themselves before breakfast. But two pots of coffee were brewing.

Eventually the sun was up, as was everyone in camp. A new day. A new personality. A new challenge, how to communicate with him and get his opinion. That was easily and quickly shown to them all when he returned with a blanket roll and other belongings.

CALL ME CHUCK, he wrote in large letters, tapping each person on the shoulder and pointing to his sign. CALL ME CHUCK. And Chuck it was from then on

Going to Fletcher, he wrote, "Boss, I can shorten the trip."

So eager to have anyone help, Fletcher immediately responded to the word "shorten" by bringing the map back to Chuck.

On the pad of paper, Chuck duplicated the lines and names of towns and rivers.

He drew a new line marked:

Old Army Trails.

Then gave the startling news: FT. WHITE CLOSED

Go southeast first. Stay away from Suwannee. Head for Ft. Meade.

CHAPTER FIVE  
GRIEF AND GUILT COMBINE



As Carl Bloodgood returned to his wagon, his wife was asking Amos if his headache was any better. She placed a cool wet cloth on the boy's forehead. He was not his usual self.

"Anything wrong?" asked Carl.

"It's the second day he's had a headache and now he's running a temperature. He's listless, just suddenly drained of energy. I'm worried. You know what we were told about this area. Yellow Fever has been prevalent in the past."

"I'll stay with him and keep the cloth wet. You rest for now. This is coming on too fast Greta. I don't like it. Don't say anything to the others, but we just learned Fort White was closed down. There may be folks around it and even living in the buildings, but there are no soldiers to protect that region now. We are sending Scouts out to fathom our direction."

After breakfast, the wagon train pulled out onto an old army trail that had few snags, just lots of little streams to cross. Every family ate a brief lunch while traveling along. By nightfall they could see the lights from a settlement.

When they were within several miles of the big gates of the closed Fort, six riflemen left the Fort to greet them. They were just Frontiersmen keeping a watchful eye on the region.

"Good evening, Sir, Retired Lt. Earl Harrison at your service. Can you tell me how many are in your party and if you have any special needs? Any illness? And how many animals?

"Fletcher P. Brown, Lieutenant, Wagon Master. This party's out of Alabama. We are a party of 49, 11 adult women and 11 men, 10 young women and nine young men, five boys and one male slave. I haven't counted for awhile, but I believe we still have 18 horses, three or four cows, one calf, three bulls and a mule.

"One of the younger boys may have symptoms of the fever ... headache and temperature. He was also dizzy. He has not shown any yellowing yet. We have come through mosquitoes by the thousands at night. Do you have a doctor who could look at him?"

"Let me send the Medical Officer out to see him. He will make the decision as to whether you should mix with others. I am sorry that you will be detained. Do you need

water? Since the Fort closed, we're in the habit of staying close to it for safety. No sense letting it go to waste."

Bo came forward with several empty canteens on his shoulder.

"Lieutenant, could Bo take them up to the gate and have someone fill them and bring them back to us. Cool water would be a blessing for us right now. Your camp must have seen a lot of action in the war with the Seminoles. Is it quiet now?"

Without answering his questions, the soldier left and beckoned Bo to follow. Fletcher waved the wagons forward until they were within a few hundred feet of the gate. At that point one officer came out carrying a bag and lantern.

"Captain James Wills, medical officer. Will you take me to the patient?"

He followed Greta and Carl to their wagon where Hildegard was with Amos.

Hanging the lantern up high on the wagon's arched roof struts, the doctor said, "How are you, young man? I'm Dr. Wills. How long have you felt badly?"

"About three days. Sometimes my head hurts; sometimes I get hot, and once real dizzy like I was going to fall."

"Do you ache anywhere?"

"Yes, sir. Sometimes all the time. Sometimes it goes away."

"Let me take your temperature." With the thermometer ready to be placed in his butt, Amos looked scared. He knew the fever could kill you. He wanted to get to Miakka. He was so eager to make the trip. He never thought of getting sick. He was plain tired. Wave after wave of heat flushed over his aching body. First he felt like he was going to melt into the blanket, melt and float away somewhere. His head was pounding, kaboom, kaboom, like someone digging up the street back home. Kaboom, kaboom, it hurt his ears. His head was ringing like a huge bell in the steeple, gong, swoosh, gong. It got so loud he was sure his head would blow off his shoulders. Blow off and fall apart and no one would put it back together again. Swoosh gong! Then, as the doctor was examining him, he fell asleep, blessedly, before he heard the adults say anything else.

Dr. Willis looked very concerned. "M'am, your boy's covered with bites, arms and neck. He has the classic symptoms of Yellow Fever. This may be all that occurs. The fever may drop, but then come back and rise steeply in a day or two. You will see

yellowness on his face and skin, his gums could bleed, and his stomach, too. Notify me if the yellowing begins."

"We have seen many soldiers recover from this stage of the disease, others, after delirium, went into fatal coma. Let me know how he progresses. For now, keep him isolated."

You and your family will have to stay outside the camp. We will post a guard near you who has already had the fever and cannot get it again. Incidentally, you may tell Mr. Brown to let the animals graze outside here as long as your wagon is alongside the Fort."

The doctor waved Carl outside the wagon. "You have a very sick boy, sir. I don't want to give you false hope. Patients who go into coma rarely recover. Keep the fever down by bathing him with cool water every hour.

He slapped Carl on the back. With lantern in hand, he walked up to Fletcher's wagon. "If you don't mind, since we don't know how the fever is transmitted from one human to another, we'll keep one wagon outside the walls with a guard. I will come out tomorrow to see if there is a change in the boy. You are doing all that we know how to do for the fever. And tell your party the symptoms. Watch the children and let me know immediately if any others come down with the symptoms."

As the doctor mounted his horse and entered the gate, the others in the Wagon Train were waved on through. People were resting on porches, smoking near the walls and, in general, lazing about until they saw the young women in the wagon seats.

Suddenly there was a rash of young men, former soldiers, tucking in their shirts, pulling up their pants, sucking in their bellies till they hit their backbones, straightening their hair, hats and ties, throwing away cigars, and eyeing these young ladies like a cat that hadn't had a dish of milk in a-week-o-Sundays. Nothing was more satisfying to a soldier boy than the dream of holding a beautiful girl in his arms, and dancing was the easiest way to accomplish that dream.

Even in that dim light, they knew blondes when they saw them. As the wagons passed near the central lanterns and the girls turned to get a gander at the men, it was the soldiers who were ready to swoon. They hadn't seen any women other than the 20 or so who resided with their families near the Camp for a month, most of them already married or promised.

"I've just died and gone to heaven," said one young Corporal.

From somewhere within the walls came the music the camp was known for, Stephen Foster's ballads. Some plunked away on banjos, others sang "I Dream of Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair."

A light-hearted mood swept over the camp as everyone came out to see who was coming in. In no time at all, the acting mayor and his wife came out to greet the travelers. All were invited in.

A cool mint drink was ready and served to all. What better way to show off all these ladies, twenty-one in all.

The men and women of the Camp settlement had huddled together and then spoke softly to the Mayor. "Wouldn't it be fun to have a Social, maybe tomorrow evenin', to welcome the newcomers to Florida in our best Southern tradition?" They were so eager, the Mayor laughed and said, "I'm sure my health will be better if I say 'YES'."

It made very little difference that most of these men were from Illinois and Pennsylvania. They got their wish. A Social with dancing would be held. Civilization once more would rear its beautiful head over the Frontiersmen's Camp. The settlement's women would serve punch and cookies. It would be a grand occasion.

"Since it was in the best interest of the Fort to have a celebration to stimulate the men and relieve the boredom," Dr. Wills gave the event his blessing when reporting to Mayor Bill Walker.

The Rudolphins, Schultzes, Ericsons and Johnsons bid the Mayor and his wife Sally goodnight and retired to their wagons. The horses had already been given fresh hay and water and were placed in stalls with the animals belonging to the settlers.

Jeremiah Lent, worried about Carl and Greta Bloodgood's son Amos, sought permission to leave long enough to speak to them, but the doctor vetoed his request. He again repeated, "since they had no idea how the disease was transmitted from one person to another, it was best to avoid further illness in their Company."

The Norberg women settled down immediately, with all kinds of plans for the next day. Trunks that had not been opened since they left home were rummaged through to find the prettiest dresses they owned.

"Lillie, once we are on a ranch we may never go to a cotillion in Florida again. So let's do our hair, too, and get out those ribbons we've had for years and never wear." It was Minnie giving the advice.

Each wagon had some woman going through the same ritual of opening a trunk to find the fanciest dress the ladies' owned. The first thing all the women wanted to do now that they were near a pump was wash their hair and take baths. Tomorrow would be a special day for them.

Meanwhile in the Bloodgood wagon, Carl and Greta, Hildegard and Moe were taking turns wetting cloths to keep Amos cool and comfortable. At about midnight his fever broke and everyone went to sleep.

At sun up, a young man came out with breakfast for the family, carrying a pot of coffee. As he handed the food to Carl, he explained, "I had Yellow Fever two years ago. I came through it, weak for awhile, but stronger now. So I will be the liaison between the Fort and your family, Sir. If you will allow me, I can come down and dance with your daughter out here. The dirt is hard packed. We can just dance as the music moves us. I won't know all the steps. But the men don't want her to be left out. Could I have your permission to do that, Sir?

Carl, looking up from the tray of food, said, "I can't see any reason why I should withhold my permission. Your thoughtfulness of a young girl's desires will always be remembered. Hildegard is only 16 and has not yet been to a formal dance. Her young man is in the Navy."

As the family ate a wonderful hearty breakfast of biscuits, porridge, pineapple, slapjacks, syrup, honey and coffee, Carl told Hildegard about the young soldier who would be there that evening to entertain her. Turning to Amos, he said, "He had Yellow Fever two years ago and came through it. He said he was weak, but he finally regained his strength." The news of the soldier's recovery gave the family some hope, for on that day Amos was without fever.

On the other side of the stockade fence, women had taken over the pump and the stove to heat the water. The corner near the kitchen smelled like a rose garden as the girls and women were all using scented shampoos and soaps.

Near by, banjos, guitars, jews harps, fiddles and a few other country instruments were playing ballads as the men wished to keep the women contented, to keep the women smiling and in a happy frame of mind. They knew, more than the women did, the sacrifice they had made to come to this wilderness where they risked fever, snake bite, malaria and hardships they could never imagine in the heat and rain of Florida's changing seasons, inland, coastal, and on its waterways.

All through the next day, a committee was decorating the hall with streamers saved from other occasions. Women baked, men mixed juice and other flavorings into a punch, chopped a bit of mint to add to it, and decorated a bandstand with flags and bunting to give the military the flavor it needed for the evening. The Mayor and his staff gave the room a last-look-at and left to dress for the party.

Amos had friends in the Johnson twins, Frank and Hugo, James Schultz and Junior Rudolph, all of whom sang in church choirs before leaving for Florida. As these boys got to know the life of the Fort and talk to some folks, they asked if they could go up on the ramparts along the stockade. Their goal was to get into the area just above the gate where they could be heard by Amos.

They wanted to serenade him. When they got permission, they called down to Carl Bloodgood. He raised Amos up so that he could see his friends who started out with "Camp Town Races" and then "Old Folks At Home". Then the boys asked what song he would like to hear.

He asked for his favorite hymn, "Beneath the Cross of Jesus."

In beautiful three part harmony, tenor, alto and baritone, the song rang out over the Fort as only the voices of boys that age can provide.

All work stopped as soldiers and civilians listened to the words the boys were singing to their friend, boys whose faith and faith of their families helped them make the journey.

"Beneath the cross of Jesus, I fain would take my stand  
The shadow of a mighty rock within a weary land;  
A home within the wilderness, A rest upon the way,  
From the burning of the noontide heat, and the burden of the day  
I take O cross thy shadow for my abiding place;  
I ask no other sunshine than the sunshine of thy face;  
Content to let the world go by, to know no gain or loss,  
My sinful self my only shame, My glory all the cross."

As the boys left the stockade and jumped down to the ground near the gate, many of the soldiers came over to shake their hands and said they would pray for their friend Amos that night.

Fletcher, talking to his own sons, said, "These boys are one day going to grow up into fine men. I'm glad their families took the risk to bring them into this raw, uncivilized wilderness. It will one day have churches, schools, governments, and they will head many institutions. I just know we are leading future industrial giants, government leaders and clergy into this unknown backwoods culture. And you, my sons, will be ahead of them, showing them the way because you can be trusted to make good decisions. I'm proud of each one of you."

Paul, getting into a shirt and tie for the Social, responded, "Well, Pa, I know your dream includes your own sons. We have had you as our example and can only come out on top if we copy you. I just hope we will find women like Ma to bring up our sons."

As his sons opened the door to leave their quarters, they were astounded. The beauty of the girls in front of them intent on entering the hall was like a sea of foam pastels swirling about the floor.

John looked at Mabel in a peach dress, trimmed with ribbons and lace, low at the neck, synched in at the waist. She was lovely. A young man's dream. He simply whistled low and took off to offer her his arm. Following suit, Walter accompanied Lillie all dressed in blue, and Paul asked Jacquelyn, an absolute vision in lilac, if he "might have the honor of escorting her to the hall."

The music was playing, people were laughing and introducing each other to newly made friends. It was the kind of evening the Company needed. They had been doing nothing but working and traveling for months. This was a needed social event as much for the men as the women.

Out at the Bloodgood wagon, Greta had cut Carl's hair. He was so handsome without the bushy locks around his shoulders. His young daughter told him how "handsome" he was, too. Then Greta put on a more festive blouse and was sitting at the front of the wagon when the young soldier came a-calling. He said to Hildegard, "I'm happy to be your escort for this evening. I am Samuel Owens Stafford, nicknamed S.O.S., Miss Hildegard."

While back at the hall everyone was having a good time.

Liza Jane, Bill Rudolph's sister-in-law, was being introduced to several young officers who were just surrounding her with attention, bringing her a drink of punch, offering her a fan, filling out her dance card, and just giving her so much attention she never stopped smiling. This was certainly a first for Liza Jane.

On the other side of the hall, young girls who lived at the Fort with their families were being introduced to Fletcher Brown's boys, who were being introduced to the custom of filling out a girl's dance card.

As the first dance began, the newlyweds were the first to step out in a waltz. In a pale green frothy dress that swept over the floor, Nellie in the arms of Jeremiah Lent was radiant. Bill and Johanna Schultz were next. Since Charlie Johnson was no dancer, he turned his wife over to Wagon Master Fletcher Brown who certainly was light on his feet.

The only one without a partner and who knew nothing about dancing was Chuck De Grotto. Some of the mothers took turns showing him how to step out. But he didn't have the nerve to ask any girl to dance yet. Since there were many more men than women, it made little difference to the overall flow of things, but he certainly wanted to do his part as a man to entertain the ladies. That meant he had to learn mighty fast.

His next biggest problem was how he could let a girl know he wanted to dance. Margaretta Erickson soon solved that dilemma by telling him, "Now Chuck, when you are ready to ask a girl to dance, show her this dance card and point to the spot you would like to dance with her. You'll know what number the dance is by looking at the front of the hall on the board by the bandstand."

As the festivities were under way for the cotillion, Alexandria and Charles Johnson walked out to the stockade. Charles went up and looked out at the Bloodgood wagon to watch Hildegard who was dancing with a young soldier; a second soldier was standing guard above the gate, while her parents clapped out the time to the music. Amos was propped up to watch.

As the festivities were in full swing, the Fort's gates were opened to allow a small wagon and a large family to enter. The soldiers on Guard duty obviously knew them well, as they greeted them by name. The two-wheeler wagon was packed. The family was walking. A young man astride an ox which was pulling the wagon was smoking a foul



smelling tobacco. His Pa walked beside him in front with two other boys behind. Bringing up the rear was a woman, also smoking, and two young girls, followed by a cow and a dog.

"Yu all havin' ah gayty? We'uns will ha look in." It was the Pa talking.

"Yes, Marty. A wagon train came in today. The one outside there may have a child with the fever. Don't go over to them. We have them in isolation. Understand?"

"Lost a yun'un wi feva...yep...a lad...," he turned away shaking his head, sharing another family's sadness. This was the first Cracker family the folks in the Company would meet.

"Who are those folks that just entered the Fort?" Carl asked the soldier dancing with his daughter. He had never seen such a rag tag bunch in his life.

"Crackers, backwoods folk who live off the land. A big settlement in the backwoods on the spine ridge of the state both southeast of Tallahassee and south of Dade City. It's hard to say if the Crackers settle where they are needed to help cow hunters herd wild cows, or if the cow hunters hunt where the Crackers live. They live in the Piney Woods and hunt and fish like the Indians."

"But where do they come from? They looked so thin and scrawny. Even their dog and cow were scrawny. How do people get that thin?"

"Listen, Crackers are poor. Half of them have no teeth. So what can you eat without something to chew with? Crackers, we think, but aren't sure, came in from the Carolinas. But you know if you ask them about their roots, they are liable to tell you 'they just growed out the soil.' Way down south, west of the Everglades in the Thousand Islands, there is a big settlement in Chokoloskee.

"My Captain said down there the Crackers and Indians intermarry. They are rough folk but very proud and independent. They are mean shots and handy with a whip. Women folk are great cooks. Always makin' somethin' out of nothin'. If they get half-a-peeve on, stay out of their way."

Amos heard what was said and asked, "What about the children? Do they go to school? Who teaches the children if they live in the woods? And what else do they work at besides herdin' cattle? Are they like Nomads, or do they farm? Sam, tell me about them, please."

"Well, little man, that is a fine question and I don't think I got an answer for you 'cause I don't know. From the little I've talked to Marty, I don't think they bother with education as we do. They learn to live with and off what God created for them. They are the only people I know who can kill and cook rattlers and eat 'em without killin' themselves. They farm, but don't stay put."

"It's too bad we are so isolated from everyone 'cause I sure would like to talk to them," complained Amos who seemed clear-headed and without fever at that time.

Greta suggested it was time to share some cookies and punch that the Mayor's wife had sent out to the wagon earlier. "Say, these are butter cookies with raisins and look at these, ginger cookies with lemon icing. What a treat. I can't wait to be back in civilization and not cooking and living and sleeping in this poor old wagon." She passed the cookies along to Sam and Hildegard with little napkins, just to add a special occasion touch to their rustic festivities.

Inside the Fort, the dancing was now in full swirl. The Mayor and his wife led the dancing, whichever step they started with, every other couple followed: they had done a waltz, a mazurka, a polka, a reel and a schottische. The musicians were changing places so that everyone got a turn at playing and dancing.

In that momentary suspension of festivities, in came the Cracker family, led by Marty with his woman and their children in tow, just as disheveled and unkempt as they had been in their wagon and still smoking their pipes. Hair as wild as scared rabbits, whiskers full of grit, beard full of tobacco, and children without shoes.

Staring at the new arrivals, the members of the Company grouped together to comment. Nellie Lent to her husband, "Land-a-Goshen, what have we here?"

"Just keep calm, everyone. I heard we had some white savages in Florida and maybe this is them." That comment from Jerry Erickson brought the following retort from Bill Rudolph, "Well, whatever and whoever they are, I can smell them from here. I'm going out for some air."

"Please don't do that now, Bill. I would be very uncomfortable if you left me alone. I never saw such scruffy, unwashed savages in my life." That was well spoken, well educated, very liberal Fredericka Rudolph commenting on the new addition to the company.

Twenty-four-year-old Tillie Norberg, shaking her head and absolutely disgusted, said, "I would be unmarried till the day I die if that was all there was available as a spouse. Can you imagine sitting across the table three times a day from someone like that?"

To which her 18-year-old sister replied, "No teeth, stained beard, rattlesnake hair, no body to speak of, just a caved in chest and a pot belly. And the clothing. God forgive me, but I don't think I want to stay in this hall any longer.

"If Carl were here, he would set us all straight by saying, 'Remember, these are all God's children, too. Behave!'"

It was Dr. Wills who saved the moment by going over to Marty and bringing the family to a table near a window. He immediately beckoned to his aides to bring punch and cookies to the family. As they were seated at a round table, the good doctor joined them and began asking how their trip up from Dade City had been.

Marty, in perfect Cracker style replied, "Them Brushhoppers ga me 20 silva pcs fer three da's in th' muddy. Me, lone, brout out 200 scrub cows with ma drag and two catchdogs. Shud've ast fo mo. Coud a got it!"

Knowing full well that the dancers were not going to allow Marty's family to join the groups festivities, Dr. Wills suggested to the Mayor that they get them to entertain, slip a little whiskey into Ma and Pa's punch after the performance, and hustle them back to their wagon to sleep it off. When all agreed, he asked if the family would dance for everyone the way they do at a shindig in the Piney Woods.

Addressing Marty, Wills said, "We have a wagon train from Boston, North Carolina and Illinois who have expressed a desire to see local people dance. The Mayor suggested we ask you and your Mrs. to show them the country-style dancing you are known for. Would you do that as part of the entertainment tonight?"

"Ha dog, yu all kno we'uns wil sho clog for yu'uns."

Wills then got the fiddler, guitar, banjo and base to play a clog type song which immediately brought Marty and wife to the center of the floor.

They swirled and stepped, swirled and stepped, and then began a combination Irish step dance and English clog, with a touch of Black folks foot tapping and a Spanish heel clicking which was extraordinary to watch. Everyone was clapping in rhythm as they

again swirled and stepped around the floor as though they had danced every day of their lives to entertain folks.

They were the dirtiest of critters anyone had ever seen, but on the dance floor they were in another time and space; light, not at all clumsy, clogging and stepping, never missing a beat, as though they were on a Broadway stage or in an English dance hall.

In a very graceful change of beat, this time as they swirled and stepped, they changed to swaying back and forth, and then stepping out softly, holding each other as they swayed, imitating a palm tree's swish and swoop to the ground in a storm. Bent by the wind like two ballerinas, then snapping up again like two soldiers coming to attention, and then going in another swirl and step around the floor, they came to a stop in the center, smiling and bowing. Fascinating!

The applause changed the mood. What had been a shock became an unexpected awesome performance, teaching everyone something they all needed to learn. Said the doctor to the Lents, "Native folk will always surprise you if you give them a chance. Don't sit in judgment when you can sit and applaud. The Crackers are odd but usually trustworthy."

Marty was outside on the porch taking a long hard pull from his jug. Many of the men came out to thank him for showing them how to jog and step. Without any help from the Mayor, Marty's family followed him single file out to the wagon and a good night's sleep.

By ten o'clock the party was over. Young people were saying goodbye; the girls had promised to write when they had an address, and the men promised if they were moved to look them up if they passed through Sarasota/Miakka.

Back in the wagons, the girls once again folded their gowns and put them back in boxes and tissue into the trunk for the next time. All over you could hear things like, "Wasn't that David Smith nice?" Or "Did you see how Sam Moss waltzed, almost like a Viennese waltz. Oh, I liked him a lot." And when saying goodnight to their Moms, each girl expressed the same thought, "I wonder if we will ever see them again."

Back in the former barracks, the younger men were being teased by the married men. "Watch, she's got her claws out for you." – "Never knew you were a hot shot with the ladies. Thought you were a bookworm." – "That little redhead had your head spinning, didn't she? Her mother wasn't letting her out of her sight." – "What about those three

sisters? Any of you guys want to be my brother-in-law?" The laughter ended with the same thought the girls had, "Wonder if we'll ever get to see them again." It was such an unexpected, pleasant event.

In a short time, everyone settled down for the night. It was a noisy one with owls hooting, birds screeching, scrub cows pawing the ground, and for the first time, the rooting sound of piney-woods rooters as they attacked their prey, nose in the ground tearing up the turf as they fought. A cool breeze began to blow half way toward morning. It was followed by a lightning storm so ferocious even the horses stomping in their stalls were competing with Thor, God of thunder.

Each family woke to make sure their tarps were pulled tight over the front and backs of the wagons. The thunder bolts scared those who had not been subjected to a Florida storm before. Parents were soothing little one's fears, and husbands held wives tightly as the women shivered with fear.

Just another aggravation to get used to, mused Fletcher Brown, as he heard the cries from the wagons as each lightning strike burst into the ground. His son John woke up and sat looking out the tarp opening.

"Look at that, Pa. That lightning forked; look, it's trying to find the easiest path to earth from the sky. Lord, look at it, Pa, must be six lines of light coming from that one bolt. I never saw anything like this."

Fletcher, who had been sitting through it all, said, "Watch how they all fade once one bolt hits the earth. And sometimes I swear the lightning looks as though it's coming from the earth to the sky." The storm blew east and the two men rolled back into their blankets till morning.

Out in the Bloodgood wagon everyone was up. The storm was eerie but they were catching rain water. With buckets and bowls to wet towels in, they placed them on Amos' head. Once again he was burning up with fever. His color was changing ever so slightly. He was yellowish now.

As the morning air cooled, Greta and Carl sat together. Greta was moaning, rocking back and forth, back and forth, sobbing silently. "Carl, if he dies out here in this wilderness, I won't be able to leave him. I just can't leave him out here in some shallow grave some animal ...."

"Shhhh," Carl wouldn't let her finish her sentence. "We can stay here if you wish. We can let the others go ahead. We can catch up to them in Dade City. Now stop ripping yourself apart. These thoughts will tie you in knots, woman. We knew the risk we were taking before we started out. I always worried it would be me that somethin' happened to, and you and the children would have no man to protect you. We can find out where the closest cemetery is, bury him, and when we are settled, come back.

"I am sure we can bring him to a grave in Miakka. Let's think about it when we are able to, not now." As he said the words to calm his wife, tears were streaming down his face, and his body was shaking as he tried to keep control. Behind him, Hildegarde, who had heard every word, patted her Pa's shoulder. He reached around and lifted her to a seat between Greta and himself. It was young Hildegarde who prayed when her parents could not.

"Our heavenly, loving Father, watch out for my Ma and Pa as they try to help Amos through this day. Keep us with you, calm us, show us your loving ways so that we may have strength to share with each other and tender thoughts for Amos in his last days. Take care of Jim and Titus out on the raft and bring us safely to Miakka and a new say of life. Amen"

In silence they sat holding on to each other, until the breakfast detail arrived. The soldier looking up at their tear stained faces asked, "Sir, is your son worse? The doctor wants to know about his fever. I brought you some good hot coffee. Can I pour it for you?"

There was no response. Sam repeated, "Sir, can I pour you a cup of good hot coffee now?"

Hildegarde came over to take the mug and said, "Sam, they know Amos isn't going to make it. Let me take the coffee to them. Maybe it would be helpful if Doc Wills came out here once more."

Sam went over and put his arm around Hildegarde's shoulder. "I'll fetch him. See if you can get them to eat something." With that, he ran off to find the doctor. As the others saw him running into the medical officer's cabin, they suspected the worse.

Not waiting for the doctor, Sam hurried back to the wagon outside the Fort and to the family he had become so fond of in the past three days.

He could hear Amos calling out in his delirium, shouting now, "God, you know I have too much to do to come to you now. You have no right to take me now. What's wrong with you?"

"I wouldn't do this to you if I was you. Why are you doin' this to me? Why?"

Dr. Wills gave Amos something to calm him down. He wasn't sure what would happen next. This case was moving faster than any he had seen since coming to Florida. It was more like the Cuban Yellow Fever he read about. As he reached for the wet cloth to rub him down, he realized at once that he hadn't spoken to others in the Wagon Train. He knew he had to check their symptoms today. Turning to Carl and Greta, he said, "If you remember, I told you he could go into a coma. That is usually followed by death. Are either of you showing any symptoms?"

"No, doctor. We were not bitten the way the boys were one night when they were playing cards alongside the wagon after supper. I bathed them with Witch Hazel then and did the same for all of us."

As she finished talking, Hildegard, with tears running down her cheeks, pulled at her father's sleeve, "Oh, Mama, this is dreadful. His gums are bleeding. The fever is so high. He can't even hear me now. Pa, what should I do? He's going to die. I just know he's going to die."

Dr. Wills gave Hildegard an aspirin, sat her down, and put a cool cloth on her forehead. "My dear child, yes, your brother is not going to get better. This will be a difficult time for you and your parents. I think we have to concentrate now on whether anyone else has symptoms of Yellow Fever before we allow the Company to continue southeast."

With that, he returned to the Fort, rang the bell for assembly, and waited for everyone to gather in the hall. He had told the Mayor it would mean curtailing work for the day until everyone in the Settlement was checked, as well as everyone in the wagon train and the Marty family, too.

"I need some women who can write, a few nurses from the Troop and any other persons with medical knowledge. We have about 200 people in need of medical examinations, and the same number to interview. Let's get started. Try to keep meal time

as it has always been, let's boil our drinking water as a matter of precaution, and set up some extra cots in the old Infirmary just in case they are needed."

Setting up the charts, he began like this, with others taking notes:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Symptoms</u>	<u>How Long</u>	<u>Temperature</u>	<u>Placement</u>
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The first hour went fast and there were no symptoms listed among the Frontiersmen and Settlers. The Marty family was also clear. Two of the boys in the Company had headaches for the last three days, but that's all. No fever, no aches or pains. The doctor finished the interviews. He started physical examinations for those who had headaches, ten all together.

Outside the Fort, the Bloodgood family was in its worst turmoil. Greta wouldn't leave Amos' side, Hildegard couldn't stop crying, and Carl was just stoic, wouldn't talk or show any expression. Amos was in a deep coma.

Sam Stafford was with them, trying to keep water and food in them with little success. At four o'clock he went in to see if Dr. Wills was finished with his examinations. He was!

"Doc, you have to do something for the Bloodgoods. They haven't eaten and hardly had anything to drink all day. They are gonna make themselves sick."

"All right, Sam. Let's take them away from the wagon one at a time, talk to them, get them thinking ahead, and get some water in them if nothing else."

As they walked together to the gate, Sam said, "Let's start with Hildegard. She was doing very well and was helping her parents a lot until Amos' gums started bleeding. She can shake them out of their misery if anyone can."

"All right. If anyone knows the family, you do. I'll take the girl for a walk. You stay with her parents. Before I forget to tell you, you have been a real hero in this case."

"Mrs. Bloodgood, can you hear me? It's Doc Wills. I'd like to see your daughter. I'm checking your entire Company to see if anyone else has fever symptoms. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, sir. She'll be out in a second." Greta could be heard arguing with her daughter who was afraid if she left her brother he would die. "I want to be with my brother. When he goes to heaven, I have to see him leave."

"I'll call you, I promise, if that time comes while you are with the doctor."



Hildegarde, looking as wretched and forlorn as a child her age could, was absolutely distraught and wanted no part of talking to the doctor. He came toward her, took her hand and led her over to the gate where a table was set up with a pitcher of cool water. Pouring her a glass, he said, "If you don't start drinking more water, you will pass out from heat exhaustion. You don't want that, do you?" Without any fuss she drank it down.

"Your folks are going to need your help. Amos hasn't much time left now. We have to be ready when the time comes. Your brother can be buried right here at the Fort's cemetery. You will have to get your parents to agree to that so we can make plans. The rest of the Company is going on ahead and will meet you at the boarding house in Dade City."

Hildegarde looked as though she was going to faint. He slapped her hands and face.

"Listen to me," he said sharply. "Do you think you can get them talking now about my suggestions and then one of you let Sam know what your decision will be?"

Hildegarde nodded her head, slowly turned and went back to the wagon. After several minutes when the family could be heard talking and Greta began sobbing hysterically, Dr. Wills went up to the wagon and took Greta's hand. "Come out here with me. You and I need to talk."

He helped her to the ground, and with an arm around her shoulder said, "Ms. Greta, this is the hardest thing God will ever ask you to do. You have to be ready to make some tough decisions. Your husband is incapable right now. Do you understand what I am saying to you?"

"Carl can't ..." she didn't finish the sentence. She started again, "Carl can't think" 'twas all she could say for a few minutes. The Doc just waited until she could express herself.

"We want the Company to move out. I don't want to bury my boy in some wilderness side road. He can be buried here at the Fort."

He handed her a drink of water which she took, asked for another, returned the empty glass to him, and went back to her family as the doctor said, "Try to get Carl to come see me out here."

It was about 15 minutes later that Carl came out of the wagon. He had aged 20 years overnight. His face was wrinkled, lines and shadows under his eyes, his chin sagged, and

he could just about put one foot in front of the other. In a dazed condition, with the sun burning his eye sockets, Carl made his stumbling way to Dr. Wills.

Shocked at Carl's condition, Dr. Wills first held a glass to his lips. Taking a handkerchief from his pocket, he poured some water over it and put it on Carl's head. "Look up here, Carl. Let me see your face. How long have you had these symptoms? You have a headache? And maybe a fever that you've had for two days without saying anything. Your face is turning yellow, Carl. You have the fever, too. Tell me how long you've had the headache."

Carl's glassy-eyed stare indicated he wasn't comprehending anything the doctor had said. Sam looked at Carl and just shook his head. "What do we do now?" he asked.

"Let's just lay him out on a blanket here in the grass. It's cooler than in the wagon. Take his shirt off. Just find some loose thin cover, but first let's get more water into him." Sitting Carl up, he held the glass to his lips and said, "Sam, ask the guard to tell the Mayor I need another man out here, someone who has had the fever 'cause Carl has it now, too."

Within ten minutes a big burly Georgia boy was beside him, taking over Carl's care. He brought a bucket of cool water and a new bottle of Witch Hazel with him. He sprayed the Witch Hazel over Carl's sizzling body and then wrapped his head in cool water-soaked rags.

By eight o'clock the next morning, young Amos had died with his family around him praying and singing, thanking God for taking him so that he would no longer suffer.

The tune they chose, Draw Me Nearer Blessed Lord, was being sung by the entire Company.

"I am thine O Lord, I have heard thy voice  
And it told thy love to me  
But I long to rise in the arms of faith  
and be closer drawn to thee.  
Draw me nearer, nearer, nearer, blessed Lord,  
To the cross where thou has died  
Draw me nearer, nearer, nearer, blessed Lord  
To thy precious bleeding side."

With a group of friends carrying his casket, Amos was placed in a plot for visitors to the Fort. His father led the service. The entire Troop, in military formation and with an honor color guard, accompanied the family.

Carl's reading was from Psalm 139.

"O lord thou has searched me and known me!  
Thou knowest when I sit down and when I rise up:  
Thou discernest my thoughts from afar.  
Thou searchest out my path and my lying down  
and art acquainted with all my ways.  
Even before a word is on my tongue,  
lo, O lord, thou knowest it altogether.  
Thou dost beset me behind and before  
and layest thy hand upon me.  
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me  
it is high, I cannot attain it.  
Wither shall I go from thy Spirit?  
Or wither shall I flee from thy presence?  
If I ascend to heaven, thou art there!  
If I make my bed in sheol, thou art there  
Search me Lord and know my heart  
Try me and know my thoughts  
And see if there be any wicked way in me.  
And lead me in your way everlasting."

After coffee and sweet buns were served in the hall, each member of the Company said a proper "thank you" and "goodbye" to all, and made ready to depart. No one knew how Carl was able to conduct the service, but he would not hear of anyone else doing it. John Fletcher helped him back to his wagon and was assigned by his father to take the reins for the trip to Dade City.

Chuck was riding up ahead as Scout, Bo was assigned to take the reins of the Norberg girl's wagon. This was to be a cattle-drive trip, in other words, stopping only if necessary.

Chuck was riding up ahead as Scout, Bo was assigned to take the reins of the Norberg girl's wagon. This was to be a cattle-drive trip, in other words, stopping only if necessary. It was whip cracking, fast moving, ya-hoo sounding Wagon Train stopping for nothing. Food would be eaten in wagons, no camp fires on this ride! They were traveling the old army trails, leaving the Piney Woods behind. Shortly open plains would be ahead of them for miles.

The Bloodgood family was sound asleep.

The Lents were softly singing many of the old hymns from home.

The Erickson's children were playing cards, and the Rudolph's checkers, though it was hard to keep them on the board when the road got rough.

All around them were egrets, wild turkeys and deer. Rabbits and squirrels ran through the palmettos, and small snakes wiggled through the grass. Only once did they pass a rider coming toward them. They passed the time of day and learned the road was clear of all obstacles straight through to Dade. At lunch time, hardtack, grapes and hard-boiled eggs, a gift from the Mayor's wife Sally, with plenty of cool water from their canteens seemed sufficient for all.

The Norberg girls asked permission to ride their horses in the late afternoon. Permission was granted. They were surprised by the beauty of the land they rode through, much of which was hidden from their view when they rode inside the wagons.

Riding a well lathered horse, Chuck came flying back along the trail to Fletcher's wagon after scouting up ahead. Excitedly, he wrote a one word warning: BEAR. With a high whistle, Fletcher alerted all gun carrying folks to have guns on the ready.

He sent his son Walter back to warn each wagon they were in bear country and one was sighted. Fletcher put Chuck in the Lead wagon and they again set out. Everyone had a single thought, "Kill it before nightfall."

Chuck stood up, a pistol ready; Fletcher had a rifle and Paul a double barrel shotgun. Fletcher was more worried about the animals tied to the back of the last wagon. But he decided the animals could be used to lure the bear. He slowed the wagons. Calling out to the men, "Johnson, Rudolph, Schultz, with rifles, into that last wagon on the double. Keep your thinking right. We don't know how fast this bear is! But we don't want to face him in the dark. If you spot him, kill him."

About forty minutes into the woods, the rifles fired one after the other, as all three men spotted the bear coming up on two of the cows tied to the Erickson wagon. It was just as they figured. It was an easy kill using the cattle as bait.

The wagon train came to a halt. "We got it," shouted Rudolph.

"It's a bloody mess," said Schultz.

"Where are we going to dress it and skin it and all that stuff?" asked young Robert.

Turning to Fletcher, Lent quietly suggested, "How about putting it on the Chuck wagon. Are we after the flesh, the hide, or do we just want safe passage and we'll give it to the first Cracker we meet?"

Fletcher saw no advantage to camping out in the woods when they could spend the night more safely in a settlement Chuck discovered on the Santa Fe River. The incident with the bear, when they were in such an isolated venue, upset him. "Let's see if we can trade it for a meal."

With the bear aboard the chuck wagon, they entered the compound where the Strangefellows, who had about 13 shoeless little ones running in and out of the river after a duck, had an Inn of sorts. Mrs. Strangefellow had fresh water salmon, corn, pineapple, cornbread, coffee and some gaiter tails fried up with greens. She had a brine barrel on the porch with hog and mullet, but they went for the fresh fish.

The men figured they had about 350 pounds of bear to offer the Strangefellows who were pleased that the animal was finally dead. Seems it had been tormenting the whole river settlement for a month, tearing up vegetable gardens, scaring the children, and killing off the wild life so that they had little meat to eat. The Strangefellows were mighty glad to have some company. But the Company was too tired to socialize and fell asleep, exhausted. Leaving the safety of the Fort took courage.

## CHAPTER SIX

### NO MORE RIVERS TO CROSS

Carl Bloodgood, always the strongest of men, was obviously having only a slight case of Yellow Fever, for which he thanked the Lord. But he was not himself; weak yet and

drained. His grief was understandable. But his inability to think clearly, his lost desire to finish what he started, was worrying Greta.

His youngest son had been the apple-of-his-eye. But now he had other problems, cramps in his legs and arms, spasms that were very painful. And then he became faint in the middle of the day, dizzy, pale and sweaty. He needed help with everything. Before anyone else was in for the night, Carl was asleep in the back of his wagon, spent from a short journey. Greta finally realized these symptoms had nothing to do with Yellow Fever but might be related to Heat Exhaustion.

With Fletcher's help before they left, they got Carl into the river to cool his whole body down. And then he started drinking water with a pinch of salt every hour. He had perspired so much when running the fever he'd lost the salt in his body. The longer trip to Dade was ahead of them now. He was to spend it resting and wrapped in cool sheets.

Fletcher thanked their hosts and helped them get the bear into their smokehouse where it could be dressed and skinned. The skin would bring a good penny. The only thing the family needed was coffee and onions, which they also swapped for the meal.

With a good road ahead, Fletcher planned to leave after a breakfast of coffee, hardtack and more pineapple. He was beginning to be more accurate on reading the clouds. He feared they were heading into an early spring rain storm from the look of the thunderheads southeast of the settlement. Mud made travel with these wagons treacherous.

After a peaceful night, they awakened to a magnificent morning. Full sun, not a cloud in the sky; they had all moved on overnight. Washing in basins at each wagon, fresh linen for all, and a shave for some of the men, they were off again, thanking the family for their hospitality and leaving some peppermint behind for the little ones.

They traveled for two days without incident. At every brook they soaked sheets to keep Carl cool. Every hour a different person brought him a cup of water with salt.

Trying to keep him amused and interested in the trip was a job. He responded infrequently. The Wagon Train was just slogging along, people eating when needed, sleeping when it got too hot to travel. Finally on a huge plateau, a wide grass plain with few trees and hundreds of birds, they sure knew they were now in the tropics. The air was heavy, muggy, making it difficult to work. Their breathing was labored. They would have to take a slower pace with the animals now.

When the wind blew in from the Gulf, the sea air smelled delicious and reminded the Boston folks of home. A breath of breeze would tease its way through and between the wagons, and then be gone. Once again the humidity was intolerable.

The visit to Dade City's boarding house two days later gained a day of good food, baths and running water. They slept in their wagons. No one had room for 49 people, so they just used the facilities as they needed them and could pay for them. The City, of course, was not like any city they had seen up North, but it had a theater and stores, two churches and a doctor's office. Greta had the doctor visit Carl. He said, "Just keep going as you are, plenty of liquids, rest, and keep him cool. He'll come around. You caught it in time. By the way, did you come through Gainesville and get a look at the new university? I understand students are enrolled now in all classes including agriculture and education."

"No, we didn't travel that way; we were on some old army trail. We mustn't have known we were near a college campus," said Greta. "We had so many things that kept us preoccupied, I'm surprised we even got this far. I'm glad to know the state has advanced to that stage of higher education."

"We aren't as backward as Northerners think we are, M'am. We have two more colleges and an additional university in the planning stages. We'll be a better and stronger culture one day."

As he left, Greta looked at the map. They must have missed Gainesville. Too bad!

Lakeland and Fort Meade were the next stops. They had been advised to ask for an escort across the Manatee because of raiding robbers. Bandits along the trail took everything one family had. Troops finding them on their way back to Fort Meade saved their lives. This outraged the settlers. But there were no lawmen, no sheriff, only the soldiers. It would be some years before organized law enforcement would come to Florida.

Letters were written to the President, the Governor and Congressmen requesting protection. The Forts were all any government body could recommend and fund. So it was imperative that a good sense of justice prevail. The men did not want vigilante law. But they were well aware of the kind of social climate they were taking their families into now. However, no one was prepared for the change in attitude that occurred in some people's minds in the days ahead.



"What do we know about Fort Meade, Pa?" It was Paul asking the question. He wasn't too happy about heading into a military encampment with a Civil War going on without knowing if the Fort was manned by Union or Confederate forces.

"Well, as I remember, the New York Times reported that in the 1850's it was established in the hopes that the Army could keep the Indians and the Frontiersmen apart. It's in Hillsboro County now and has a population of maybe 400. Br. Major John Scott was the first officer in charge, part of the Fourth Artillery. Right now Lt. John Durrand with a Confederate contingent is in charge. I have no idea how many soldiers man the Fort or if many civilians live within its walls these days as they did in the past during the second Indian War."

"So why are we going there?"

"Because we are on a journey to improve conditions and the men are bound to help all of us trying to settle here. Just forget the War for a minute, will you."

"Pa, we're Northerners. How can I forget the War?"

"No, we are Floridians now, son. What's in the past is in the past. We still have the same convictions, just operating in a new location."

"I hope we don't get captured."

"We aren't raiding Fort Sumter! We are cattlemen. This Fort will more than likely become the base for a new town, with a school, churches, a saw mill, someone grinding cane, maybe flour. One day it will be the center of civilization in this part of Florida."

"But what kind of people will come to a Confederate-held Fort?"

"More than likely the same kind we have found throughout our journey, Paul; homeless families, former soldiers, wanderers. One person will come to help at a sawmill, one will build cabins, the ladies will do laundry, bake pies, open Inns. People will do whatever is needed with whatever talents they have. Now stop frettin', boy. I won't lead us into anything we haven't already investigated. Our lead Scouts will find out what we need to know."

The beauty of the Lakeland countryside had suddenly captured the Johnsons' imagination.

Alexandria was the first of the women to rebel. She wanted to stay put. She had had enough of wagon life. She pleaded with Charles to stay. The twins were on her side and

put even more pressure on their father. There was a church, a school, and nice friendly people. And along the lake front it did seem cooler. There were large clumps of trees for shade, and people rode around the lake in surreys. It was more like home. The family was fighting Charles.

Twenty-year-old Bo, the family friend who had come the distance with them, had a solution. "Charles, you have a problem. Why not give in? Stay awhile. Even build a house. If you decide later you want to go on to Miakka, I'll buy your house and we can visit back and forth. I'm sure I'll find a wife here. I love the lakes and I could start an Inn and do a lot of fresh water fishing."

This was more than Charles could handle. "You are the last person I would expect to leave the Company. You have been in favor of everything we did. From the first you were gung ho."

"True, true, but I too am not going to lie. I have had enough of wagon life. I'm ready to build a house, make some furniture, and settle down."

Alexandria knew when to be quiet. She could see the wheels spinning in Charles' mind. When he left without saying anything, she watched him. He went up to talk to Fletcher.

Fletcher's easy acceptance of a couple leaving at this point surprised Charles. "Every Company has someone who leaves before the destination is reached. I don't hold it against them. Just be satisfied they stuck it out this long. Besides, that will give us someone to visit from time to time. Keep us from being bored. And who knows, we may be able to go into business together serving people in two areas, so think twice before you say it's unacceptable."

"All right, but I have to talk it over with Greta and Carl."

Alexandria started walking over to the Bloodgood wagon, too. She looked at Charles and took his hand to finish the walk. Greta saw them coming. Carl was so much better, she asked him if he was up to having visitors. He nodded.

The two couples sat on benches under the shade of a huge oak tree. Greta had water ready for them, as Charles prepared to tell them the solution they had reached.

"Problem: Alexandria and Bo like Lakeland and want to stop here instead of going on. They are exhausted by wagon living. They want to put down roots. I'm having a hard time

accepting all this. What do you think of us breaking our promise to go on to Miakka? Will you think less of us as friends for breaking our word?"

"Well now, Charles, we did not sign a contract; we only agreed to help each other reach Florida and obtain some land for cattle raising. If you find it before we do, you are in luck. Can't say, at this point, that I blame you. I'm sore of traveling in a wagon myself."

The men shook hands. The women exchanged hugs and went to tell their children. The two families had been neighbors for years. "Carl, you are one in a million. Thank you for understanding. I knew you would. When Alexandria digs her heels in, there isn't much I can do to change her mind. But I want you to know I have never met a man like you and hope you'll always remain my friend. And, oh yes, come to marry my twins when the time comes."

Laughing, they slapped each other on the back and embraced, as men do.

After supper, Fletcher made the announcement and thanked the family for its help. To everyone else, he said, "These things happen. Now you'll all have someone to visit."

Bo began playing his jews harp, and the children began dancing. Fletcher had a jug that the men passed around, and an hour or so later, with John Brown keeping guard, sleep came easy.

Carl and Greta talked way into the early morning hours about what they should do. Sometimes they felt like staying in Lakeland, too; other times they wanted to go on.

"Greta, if I didn't want to raise a herd, I'd stop now. But I know we can get cattle up ahead and bring it with us to Miakka. People are waiting for us; I made a commitment to a church. I have to continue. Do you understand? I know this is the most beautiful country we could possibly choose, but Miakka is my destination."

"Carl, I know you made plans. Do what you need to do. I will follow you anywhere on earth. I told you that when we married. Let's get some rest now." They said their prayers and went to sleep in each others arms with a cool breeze blowing off the lake.

Hildegard could not help but overhear her parents' conversation. Her anxiety was finally over. She heard them both say they had a planned destination and they were going on. Long ago, she had made a promise to her brother that neither parent knew anything about.

The boys, Jim and Titus, were eager to become ranchers. Miakka was their dream. She didn't know why, but it had become hers, too. The teenagers had pledged to help each other with building homes, herds and buying land. Lakeland was beautiful, but they were cattle people. They needed to be with others who were cattle people. Her dream was connected with Titus' and Jim's dream. They had talked about it for over a year. She even wrote and told Otto that Miakka was her destination and, if he wanted to join them when he was out of the Navy, she would wait for him. She had been faithful and hoped his dream would be her dream.

As young as she was, Hildegard had already learned that she needed to be in the same proximity with people she loved, with people who shared her dreams, faith and goals. She was healthy and strong because she believed that being with people you agreed with reduced stress, and without stress you were a healthier person. She found traveling very stressful. After her brother Amos died of the fever, she determined never to move again. It may not have been logical, but that was her teenage resolve. Once they reached Miakka, she would be there for life.

But even she knew the older folks were getting testy; they just wanted to find a homestead site and settle in with other folks around them. It was taking too much effort now to be polite to each other. Actually, they were much too civilized to enjoy the wilderness, the wagon life, and the endless search for food. The heat in the cramped wagons made everyone miserable. Prickly heat and rashes in tender spots were wearing. Witch Hazel was running low and it was the only source of relief they had when they were not near a river.

No one put it in words, but they had "sacrificed" a child to their desire to have a new life. They were all grieving, but worse was their guilt for having endangered a child. They watched their children more carefully now; everyone was more protective, more spontaneous in helping children, and more caring or loving in their attitudes. Frequently now, when a decision had to be made, someone would say, "What would be best for the children? Let's ask them for their opinions first."

Chuck was busy conversing on paper with the men about the desire of some to separate from the Wagon Train and the request of another group to join the Company.

Carl came forward, "We may historically be accused of being too adventuresome, but it's time to be more cautious." He called out to Fletcher, "I've been thinking, Fletch, that perhaps we need to double the forward guard, have Scouts on the rivers as well as on land. We could make a small raft, scout downstream on the Little Manatee, before bringing in the entire Company."

"Good idea, Carl," put in Johnson. "We need to find those cattlemen who are supposed to be willing to sell to us. It would be a good excuse if we came across any suspicious characters."

"Say, we could do that," added Carl. "There are plenty of trees in Lakeland. We could test the raft on the lake."

"Let's keep it small enough to take on a wagon," added Schultz. "Remember, we are still splitting the group. We have already lost one driver with helping hands and a good mind."

"Say, I almost forgot to tell you some important news," said Lent, who had come back from the stores that afternoon. "While we were getting supplies, salt and sugar, we met a family. They want to join us for the Miakka leg of the trip. I didn't say we were willing to take on new folks, only that I would put it to the Company. Perhaps after church tomorrow we could meet the family and see how we feel about them. What do you say to that idea?"

"What do you know about them? We don't want to take on any troublemakers now when we are so close to our destination," said Johnson. "Can they pull their own weight?"

"Have they got little ones? How many animals? Will we have more animals to look after and feed? How old are they?" asked Greta.

"Can they look after themselves? What about money? Did they seem to have enough to get them through and to keep them going until we are all settled?" asked Fletcher. "Do they want to raise cows? What's their ambition and abilities?"

"Say, hold on a minute," said Lent. "I only had an inquiry at the store. The man looked clean. That's all I can tell you, 'cept he was wearing a handsome pair of boots, had a good looking Arab bred mare and a well tooled saddle. Yes, and he wore a Western style gun belt for his side arms. My first impression was he knew where he was going. He's no Dude."

"What do you want to know about him and his family besides the questions you have already asked?" snapped Tillie. "Besides the questions you asked, I want to know if someone can vouch for his character, if they are church going people, will the wife or someone from their family help with the cooking? What kind of wagon do they have? Will it slow us down? Do they have extra wheels? Will they help us if we get in trouble? And what's their reason for going to Miakka, and how did they get this far, and where are they from?"

"Those are mighty good questions, Tillie," said Carl. "I want to know if he's experienced with those guns. Will he use them if we get into trouble with outlaws?"

Chuck pulled his writing pad out of his pocket and wrote, "Is he married? How many single females are with him? Is anyone sick? Do they recognize dangerous critters?"

"Well, said Fletcher, "the poor man will be exhausted if we remember all these questions."

That brought a good laugh from all those gathered, and the tension eased.

"More important," laughed Carl, "what do we do if he doesn't show up for church, or if he isn't a religious man, or worse, if he is Catholic? What are all you practicing Protestants going to do with a Roman Catholic in your midst? Could you behave yourselves and show less of your usual Boston bias against Irish Catholics?"

No one thought his last remarks were the least bit funny. But then, being a reverend, he was expected to think that way, wasn't he?

"Rather than questioning him right off, why don't we just ask him to tell us his life story and why he'd want to travel with us. That would be a more friendly way of getting to know him. Then we'll find out how open he is, and can then base our questions on what he tells us or omits. We may really want this fellow. Let's abide by the Good Book and not scare him off by being rude. After all, we are all in this wilderness together and, while it is unbelievable at times that God could have made it with all these miseries, even God had to practice somewhere."

That was the perfect note on which to end that discussion, so Fletcher jumped right in.

"Thank you all for your ideas. I vote to follow Rev. Carl's advice tomorrow. We'll find this man in church or out and we will be civil and get to know what he is willing to tell." With that, he headed for his wagon and his sons. They had plenty to talk over.

"Walter, I want you and John to scout out some good trees tomorrow for that raft we're goin' to make. No choppin' on the Sabbath, but look around so first thing Monday mornin' you can get started. I want you two to be our river Scouts, and perhaps Chuck should go with you, too. He will see and know things you may not understand, even people. Does that suit you?"

"Pa, we had hoped you would do just what you did. I think you are a mind reader. We like Chuck and are beginning to know how to communicate with him. Amos gave us a real gift when he suggested he join the Company." Walter turned to his brother, "Isn't that so?"

"Yep, Pa, Chuck's a good 'un. Like him a lot. He's already taught us a lot about tracking. And knots. He really can tie rope, twine and reeds together, and he keeps his knife sharp with a stone. Yeh, we'll be a good team making and operating the raft."

Mabel had been brooding for the past few days and was determined to see the Preacher for a private talk Sunday. She thought she wouldn't be needed to help interview the family. Sunday morning she could be seen bustling 'round the fire, making sure an early morning breakfast was had by all so the cleanup committee, of which she was a member, could get to service on time.

The Preacher's message was a good one, dealing with conversion. Mabel was never sure how the Africans could be condemned for not believing if no one had ever brought the message to them. She was a great believer in sending Missionaries overseas.

The last hymn was sung and she positioned herself so that she would be among the last to leave the little chapel. Smiling and shaking hands, she asked, "Rev. Berkus, do you have time to discuss a heavy theological question with me now, this morning?"

"What is that thou hast brought me, Sister, that weighs so mightily on your mind?"

"You must know that our Company lost a child to the fever a short time ago. Well, ever since then I've been wondering about what it's like to be dead. I wonder how the Spirit of the Dead goes through returning to heaven. Does the Spirit have many life forms? Do those Spirits ever return to earth? It seems to me a great deal of effort goes into developing a Spirit in each of us. If our bodies return and our souls return, what happens to the Spirit?"

"Well now, Sister, those are heavy theological problems you have on your mind. I may not be able to answer in one day's time. But let me say, you sound as if you have gotten hold of some Hindu belief."

"How could that have happened? I do not know any Hindus."

"Well, when our minds wander, we actually think up some different philosophies. Hindus do believe that after death a human can take on the life of an animal or even a person of the opposite sex. African headhunters, for instance, believe that if they collect heads of their enemies, their own powers would magically increase. The Druids taught that 'souls do not disappear but wander from one body to the other.'"

"My heavens," Mabel could not believe all she had just heard. "I guess my thinking is tame compared to what others have already thought up. Thank you, Mr. Berkus."

"You have a good mind, my child. Why not use it while you are traveling by starting a discussion group for the children and women?" He waited for an answer. "Don't tell me now you can't. You can do anything the Lord gives you the talent and industry to attempt. Let me know what your first discussion will encompass. We'll use the same topic here! Our mail system isn't the best, but we could try to get letters back and forth once a month to see how each group differs in thinking on the topics presented. I would enjoy stretching my mind to take in such a group if you would be interested in leading the Company's discussion."

Mabel was speechless. The Preacher's response was more than she had anticipated and certainly never even imagined. Could she lead a Discussion Group? Those things were usually done by men of the Church. Her first reply was, "Sir, you honor me. I will have to think this over with help from Misses Tillie, Lillie and Minnie."

The members of the Company were waiting to meet with the new family after service. The women were eyeing the clothing, the wagon, how children were behaving. The men took in every detail of the wagon, the method of storing water and how the barrel hung off the back on leather straps, how the horses were tethered, and what kind of boots he wore. Finally, it was the Wagon Master Fletcher Brown who went to speak to the man.

"Good morning, I've been told by one of our Company that you and your folks are interested in joining us on the last leg of our trip which will bring us into Miakka. Do you have a reason for going with a group rather than alone? I'm Fletch Brown, Wagon Master."



Do you have time to talk for a spell? We could all ride out to our camp and have a bite to eat while we get to know each other. How's that sound?"

Extending his hand in greeting, the man said, "Billy Bob Frazer here, sounds mighty neighborly, and that's what we are, neighborly folks out of Kansas. We have a reason, snakes, alligators, and only three good shots in the group consisting of six children under ten years, my two elderly parents, my wife and her widowed sister. We've 86 head of cattle, two milk goats, a clutch of chickens, and cage or Rock Doves, good for sending messages back home."

"This is my wife, Jane Kay, my mother Sue Ann, and my sister-in-law Susan Lort. They have made a stew and biscuits and would like to invite you to eat with us right yonder. Easier than going back to your camp, don't you agree?"

Fletch looked at the smiling faces of the Company and quickly said, "Right smart move on your part. Good cooking has sealed many a contract. And it will certainly win over the women." With the last remark the families intermingled, introducing themselves to each other.

"Let me tell the children to come to the table so they can all meet each other. Ruth, Grace and Billy are my nieces and nephew, Estelle and John Lee are my children. This rag tag child, name of Melinda Sue, was found on the trail after her parents were burned out by Indians in Georgia. She doesn't speak, but she understands. She isn't sick, but she isn't right. However, she is handy with catching anything that swims with bare hands. She is ten and she does write a bit. She can write her name and the alphabet and simple words."

Fletch called Chuck over with a thought that these two people could help each other. "Do you think sometimes it's unfair you cannot speak, Chuck? Well we have a young'un, part of this family, who cannot either. Would that make things more difficult for us?"

Chuck shook his head, indicating she was accepted by him.

With logs pushed together for sitting, and tin plates borrowed from the church passed to each person, the ladies ladled out the stew which was mopped up with biscuits. Coffee was brewing, and it was real coffee. To everyone's surprise, sugar cookies were passed out by Ruth and Grace who, they were told, made them yesterday. "You can each have two," they announced with great pride for having so much ready ahead of time.

Ruth came through with tin cups and a pot of lemonade for the children. Before they could wonder how they would all get along, the two groups had merged quickly into interesting groups, the men talking cattle, the women talking sewing and cooking, and the children talking about school and what it would be like in a one room school house.

Carl called the group to order and said, "We need to give the Frazers a chance to tell us who they are so we can vote on bringing them into the Company. Let's give them our attention now. Kansas people had a big fight over slavery and became a state a few years ago, so they are as new as Florida."

Billy Bob picked up from there, "We're Jayhawkers, cattlemen who fought against slavery. We were Free Staters who fought with John Brown; traveled trails with cattle into Dodge at a time when a man's pistol wasn't enough to protect him from drunken gun slingers. We had to travel together, six in a group, so every side could be watched while riding. We're here 'cause our women wanted to live in a more peaceful world, start anew to bring peace somewhere so we could grow the children and educate them. But we are cattlemen, first, last and always."

One of the children added, "We believe in God! We hope you do, too. Do you?"

Since no one attempted to silence the child, Fletcher thought one of the children in the Company ought to answer the question. Before he could put the question to one of his Company's children, Junior Rudolph, another ten year old, spoke up.

"We worship every Sunday, say prayers at table, follow the Commandments, and try to love our neighbors. We were wondering if you were Protestants, Quakers, Catholics or Anabaptists. We wouldn't hold your religion against you. We need to know if you can handle a gun and would use it if you had to. We sometimes get in dangerous situations."

There was applause from all sides. Fletcher remarked, "Guess that tells you we are educating our children to speak up as yours do. Glad to see we are in agreement on that issue. Religion is important only in that if you be Quakers and would not kill, then our lives could be endangered if we had to protect you and yours. I hope you understand what we are referring to here. We are not prejudiced folks. All are welcome in our homes. But we need every bit of help we can get to travel through this wilderness. Animals, snakes, warring outlaws, all need to be prevented from hurting us, and that sometimes means killing."

Miss Frazer said, "I am Roman Catholic, my husband is Presbyterian, and his parents are Methodist. We have no idea what an Anabaptist is, don't think we ever met one. We women folk can handle a rifle as good as any man, or so I've been told, not bragging, just reassuring. We've had to kill bear and panther so far."

Carl came forward, "Well, you are one up on us. We have not yet had a run in with a panther, thank heaven. Did you save it or trade it?"

"We met a Cracker family right after who wanted the whole animal. They took it and we asked no questions, lucky to be alive. It was in mid-air jumping for me when my Ma brought it down. We have each carried a weapon since we started the trip. Pa got a Rattler one evening as it was crawling into the wagon. Shot a hole in the water barrel on that one, but we corked it up."

"Seems to me," said Tillie, "that you've told us most of what we wanted to hear. How are you fixed for money? Will you buy more cattle or are you just looking for land?"

"Just good land. My herd will be doubled in two years. But I know we can buy cattle near Fort Meade if that is important to you. I could help with a cattle drive from there to Miakka."

"What do you know about us?" Fletcher asked.

"Do you hold classes for the young'uns? My woman and Ma are both teaching ours. Would you want your young'uns included? It would make it a heap more interestin' for them all."

"I am sure we can work that out to benefit all. Right now, though, I am more than interested in your statement about cattle bein' available near Fort Meade. From here in Lakeland, we would have to go southwest to Miakka. So we would have to change direction to reach the Fort. Let's sit down with the map and decide how we can travel back and forth."

CHAPTER SEVEN  
AMBASSADORS AND MANATEES

Titus, always ready to seek out new information but never ready to give up the truth as he knows it, addressed Captain Cardillo again. "Sir, I don't mean to be disrespectful, but I

find it hard to believe a whale would come into these waters. This time of year the Gulf temperature is in the 70s. Whales are common in cold New England waters, not in Florida."

"You are not alone in your thinking, young man. Half my crew said as you, not a whale but a manatee. Believe me, there is no species of manatee that is black with white markings! They are a pearly gray, as big as a whale perhaps. But this was not a manatee."

"How do you do, young men, I am Ambassador Richard P. Whiting, recently come in from the Islands. Our Captain is correct. So let's get down to business. We owe you something for taking care of my wife and grandchildren. If you will come aboard ship, as stressful condition as it is in, I have some gifts for you, and a map you will find helpful."

"One of us will have to stay with the raft, sir." As he said this, Jim turned to get Titus' full attention and indicated by facial wrinkles, squinting eyes and half-closed lids, that he was not about to "trust" these strangers who saw Orca whales in Gulf Coast waters.

"Yes, my cousin is right; one of us must stay with the raft. Why don't you bring your map to us? We are not looking for a reward. After all, you rescued them from us, if you remember."

"No, No, come to the ship. Let us thank you properly," said the elderly woman.

For some reason they could not explain, the boys dug their heels in and decided to stay put. The story of how and why these folks were on this coast didn't seem right. This was not the missing supply ship that did not make port in Tampa. And the "rescue" of the woman and children was not logical. Titus came up behind Jim and whispered, "Make your way back to the raft and I will, too. I don't trust these people."

As he observed their movements, the Captain second guessed their thinking. Before they made it to the raft, he pulled a pistol and said, "That's far enough." With a slight movement of his head, he directed the children, man and woman to the raft. "Take those two boxes marked 'POWDER' ashore. Bring them to the ship immediately. We may have company by nightfall. We'll need all the ammunition we can find. We haven't enough to blow a hole in a rock."

When his orders were carried out, he turned to Jim and Titus. "Get aboard your raft and head south. Make no attempt to return for your black powder. I will not think twice. I will just kill you. Do you understand? I will kill you."

"Oh, yes, we understand," said Titus.

"Yep, we do, oh yes, we do," said Jim. They raced for their raft bobbing up and down off shore. Wading into the knee deep water, they got aboard. Titus put up the sail; Jim hauled up the anchor. Jim, with tiller in hand, directed Titus "to give a push on that sandy bottom with an oar so we can head South. Hold your breath and don't say a word. Just get into that breeze and sail. We'll have the last laugh yet."

Without one backward glance, they did all they could to sail west and then due south. "I want to be so far out their shots will miss us. They will be furious when they open those cases and find they have my Ma's homemade tomato sauce and her best yellow cling peaches."

Titus, with mouth agape, just said, "No! How?"

"When Pa and I were loading up," said Jim, "we ran out of packing crates. Since he needed to take rifles and powder with the wagon train as well as leave some with us, he gave me the empty boxes marked 'powder' for some of the glass jars Ma cooked her sauce and peaches in. We rearranged the excelsior around the jars and left a good three inches on top to protect them. We were the only ones that knew not all our 'powder' was powder."

Laughing, Titus said, "Well, if we are lucky, they won't open them right away. But listen, Jim, what were they all about? – pirating, robbing outlaws pretending to be an Ambassador with grandchildren and wife! That's about as bazaar a tale as I ever heard. Like I been saying, our parents are going to have a hard time believing some of this stuff that's happening to us. I'm for getting out of these Gulf waters."

"Didn't my Pa map out a course that took us into the Manatee River and then over land to Miakka? Didn't he say to 'use it no matter what' to take us away from the Gulf, to get inland quickly 'in case of bad weather or other circumstances'? Well, isn't this a case of 'other circumstances'?"

"Yep, you called it, 'other circumstances' it is. Why don't you just pull out that map and let's see if we can find a clear passage into the Manatee. I never looked too hard at what he was showing us, but as I remember, it was a wide mouth river basin, east and inside an island chain."

"As I remember the shoreline, we may be only a day's sail from that area. Why don't we take a rest, you spell me, then me you, have somethin' to eat, and sail through the night

while it's cool? Then tomorrow, if the sun's as hot as today, we could pull ashore, hide the raft and sleep."

"I don't know what those folks were – outlaws for sure. We were told there were, I think my Pa said 'loose cannons', people who roam around not caring where they land and causing trouble when they do. But how long could they keep a ship in that condition and use it for a base without someone reporting them?"

"Who would they report to? There's no law down here, just a man's conscience."

Titus was looking for the map to determine how they could find the Manatee River without making a mistake. "Well, here's the coordinates for Sarasota Bay: 82.37 by 27.24. Let's see if we can find the mouth of a river north and a little west of those coordinates."

"This appears to be what we want, but it doesn't give sufficient information about how far east the river goes. Those are the important coordinates we need. Jim, are you any better at deducing these figures than me? Take a look at this map and see if you can make better sense of it! Remember, we were told there were two rivers. This is the larger of the two."

"That's got to be the mouth of the Manatee right here," he said, pointing to the map. "From Pa's figures that's roughly 27.31 North, 82.38 West. If the river is 20 to 25 miles long, that would put it at about 27.29 North, 82.21 West, according to my compass and ruler. But I've no idea where we pick up the Myakka River. It just seems to wind down to the Gulf forever and ever from the center of the state." With a deep sigh, he added, "I need to see my folks. I've a feeling things aren't goin' good for them."

"We'll more than likely see them in a few weeks, and that large mouth of the Manatee River tomorrow. Why don't we go ashore tonight so we don't sail past it in the dark?"

"Should we drop a line or eat what we have, the last of the coconut, some berries and the hardtack? It's not much, but it could hold us over till morning."

"If it satisfies you, it will me. We need to get ashore now. Look at those clouds coming in. They sure have late day storms around here." The sky turned gray in a matter of minutes. The wind came howling in from the south, kicking up water and making it difficult to pull shoreward. They got there, with no shelter in sight, just mangroves, as a torrential rain fell, stinging their faces and biting their backs. They were soaked as they pulled the raft in and tied it to the stilts. With the inadequate, spotty shelter provided by

the intertwined leaves and with rain drizzling down on them, they dozed off, just sitting there in the grove for over an hour till the rain stopped. When the sun came out again, broiling hot, they dried off quickly.

They ate their meager meal sitting in the grove watching the fish playing. A dolphin kept them amused leaping in and out of the Gulf waters. Titus threw out a line and, after an hour or so, had a small grouper, two mullet and something he never saw before. The boys were scraping and gutting the fish, got a fire going, and had just started frying them as the sun went down.

"Titus, was that thunder? Hear it?"

"Hear it? Man, I hear it. Jim, that's not thunder, that's an explosion."

It didn't happen again, but it came from the north and up the coast. Looking out from their grove position, Jim watched as a faint glow grew in the sky. "Well, I guess we won't have to worry about being followed."

"They couldn't have blown themselves up with Ma's peaches and tomato sauce; someone gave them help in leaving this world." Titus seemed to relax. "Of course it could have been anything else, not just the frigate. But I'm wishing and hoping it's the end of them."

"Listen, Titus, I know we say silent prayers, but I think it's time to let the Lord know we have appreciated his watchin' over us. What do you say to a prayer of thanksgiving about now?"

"Go ahead, Jim. You're the Preacher's son, you know how it's done better than me."

Kneeling among the crooked stilts of the mangroves, Jim asked,

"Lord, if you have some important work for us to do, we're ready to serve. We thank you for getting us away from harm these last few weeks, for the nice folks we met, and please help the people on the lost supply boat find their way to a safe harbor. In the week ahead may we be kept safe that we can meet up with our folks in Miakka. Keep them safe too, please. We are thankful for your tender, loving, merciful care. Amen."

"Jim, that was a good prayer. Say, what do you say if we sleep on the raft while it's tied to the stilts. It would be better than trying to sleep on these roots and stilts, don't you agree?"



Back they went to the raft. With blankets curled beneath them, they fell asleep looking at the stars in a cloudless sky. Both were ready for the new adventure of going into a fresh water river after a month on the Gulf of Mexico, and hopefully looked forward to their first encounter with a manatee.

Jim was dreaming about Amos that night, and about his Mom. It was an unusual dream, all about losing things and replacing what's lost.

Titus and Jim were slow the next morning. Really slow! Neither of them was interested in food, but what was worse, they had no desire to untie the raft to set sail again.

"Maybe we need to do something like walk, as in take a walk on dry land, Jim. How about it?"

"We need some exercise, you're right. Let's wade downshore beyond these mangroves, pull the raft ashore and cover it up. I don't imagine there are people around here; I just don't want to come back from walking and find everything missing."

"Let's go," it was Titus calling out as he loosened the ropes and began pulling the raft with Jim's help. Within 100 feet of where they spent the night on a curve in the shoreline there was a small cove just wide enough for the raft. They cut enough branches to just cover up their possessions.

Before long they were picking up oranges from the ground and a few from a tree. Deciding to sit awhile and peel the luscious fruit, which they had seen only once or twice before at Christmas time, they peeled and sectioned the fruit, eating it from their knives. The smell of the fruit, its texture and its juice were a great delicious discovery for them. Better than water.

Taking in the land, they realized the coastline was changing and the water was more brackish; they had turned, without knowing it, into the banks of the Manatee River. From their lookout point they could now see the Gulf and the wide expanse of river flowing into the Gulf waters. Within a few yards of the shore grew palmettos, palms, and dense underbrush making it difficult to see ahead.

They walked along the shore and hadn't gone far when Titus put up his hand, a signal to stop. He whispered, "Jim, do you hear voices? One seems lower than the other, listen."

"Titus, you are always hearing things," but before he could say another word, he pointed in the direction of a tall pine tree. "Oh, oh, you were right. Look over there, two

people under that tree. I can only see their shoes; must be women folk from the looks of the heels."

"Should we get closer?" Jim didn't wait for an answer, instead he crawled on his belly in the direction of the tree. "I know this is what Ma calls 'eavesdropping', but we should know something about them, don't you think?"

Titus put his finger to his lips, asking for silence. Protected from detection by the palmettos, what he heard was unusual and completely unexpected.

"Jane Marie," they heard, "we have to change our names or we'll be traced back to our owners. I have no need to be a slaving scullery maid for that old man. We came here as teachers."

"Evie Jean, you are so brave. I wouldn't think of changing our names. What to? Beachman is a good name. It's respectable. Besides, he can't reach us now. We're over 50 miles away from Braden Town. Besides, indentured servants are not slaves."

The girls were eating oranges, too. They didn't speak again for some time as they enjoyed the luscious fruit. Both lay back on the grass, the sun shining full on their bodies where they had rolled up their sleeves, opened the necks of their shirts, took off their socks and pulled their dresses up over their knees. "Let's just rest and then wade in the water to clean our feet and cool off."

Jim beckoned Titus to follow him back to the orange tree.

"Sounds to me as if they are in a pile of trouble. If they were slaves, black, that is, they could be hung. What's an indentured servant?" asked Jim.

"I think it means you pay off the cost of your passage by working for the person who paid your fare. And you are bound to that person and can't get free of them until you work off the cost. It's like a contract."

"Well, they are in trouble all right, but how can we offer to help them without admitting we listened in on their private conversation?"

"Shucks, Titus, they will be glad someone else realizes the seriousness of their situation."

"Guess you are right, Jim, but how do we do this? Come out of the palmettos and say, 'Hello there, we couldn't help but hear about your problem.'"

"No. Just watch me." Walking toward the girls, he began to whistle. As he got just behind them, he stopped. "Well, Hallelujah. What are you two ladies doin' out here by yourselves, miles from nowhere? Why, I don't see a house or a boat around for miles. Of course my cousin and I have our raft nearby. How'd you all get here without an escort?"

Startled at first, but amused by Jim's approach, Jane Marie decided to talk about the raft rather than answer his question.

"Land o'Goshen. A raft. Just what we prayed for, a way to get out of these mangroves. Where you all goin'? If it is South, may we accompany you? You cousins? So are we. If you gentlemen have drinking water, we would appreciate being offered a nice refreshing drink about now. Please don't think us too forward, but for the oranges we are nearly starved."

Titus decided this could lead to an amusing if not interesting circumstance.

"How are you, M'am. I am Titus. He's Jim, and we are heading south. I don't know if the raft could carry any more weight. Whatcha weigh?"

Jim, in defense of the ladies and entering into the humor of it all, said, "You have to excuse my cousin Titus' rudeness, Ma'm; he does know better, honest he does."

"Yes, but when it comes to our raft, I have to be more scientific. That part of me takes over and I forget ladies are more particular about giving out such private information as their weight. May I offer you the cool water you requested and apologize for my ungentlemanly attitude?"

Evie Jean was laughing now and could see right through their shenanigans. "I suppose he needs to know what his cargo weighs since that's a shallow draft craft, that raft. Let's solve the problem and allow us to protect our modesty by asking you men how much more weight you could carry. Wouldn't that be gentlemanly and allow us, oh you know, to be modest?"

Titus was not going to get caught. He saw the trap and turned to Jim, who immediately sized up the two women, saying, "Barely 200 pounds."

Jane Marie quickly assured Jim he could take them aboard.

He, in turn, asked if they had any food to contribute to the small store of food on board.

"Not really. Just these oranges and one half a coconut. But we cook, so while you maneuver the raft we can fix meals. We are strong and, if need be, can catch fish by hand.

We can both shoot anything unfriendly, man or beast. Would that qualify us as traveling companions? We wouldn't be any trouble. We could also keep watch while you all sleep. I realize the delicacy of the position we have put you in, but honestly we would be helpful. We are, after all, true pioneer women."

That convinced both men they could make room for Evie Jean and Jane Marie.

"You get the oranges and we will rearrange the cargo to keep the raft on an even keel." Jim was adamant about some things and added, "Titus, you rest. I'll take the next shift."

With a dozen oranges stacked in their straw bonnets, Jim helped them aboard, placing one forward and one aft on packing crates. While Titus stretched out to catch some rest, Jim manned the tiller. About a half hour out on the calm waters of the Gulf, the ladies began singing old Spanish melodies, Evie Jean alto and Jane Marie bass, a rare but pleasing combination of voices.

Jim, struck by the beauty of Evie Jean's blonde hair as it flew around her face in the breeze, wondered how old she was, what she taught in school, and how she became indentured to someone who obviously had mistreated her. As much as he wanted to ask questions, he decided not to.

It seemed best at that moment to talk about things two educated females might find interesting.

"You should know our primary aim in Florida is to set up a ranch so that our various family members can enjoy ranching. We are not dairymen, but cattlemen. We raise cattle for beef. What we are attempting to do is raise a thousand head herd, with cattle weighing between 600 and 1,000 pounds each. Aberdeen-Angus from the Highlands of Scotland, a few Brahman from India with well developed sweat glands, humps over their shoulders, good for cross breeding. If we are successful in cross breeding, we'll develop a breed with greater resistance to high temperatures."

Evie Jean asked, "Didn't the Spanish bring cattle with them? And weren't the Longhorns from Europe brought in by Columbus? Seems to me someone told me they were the ancestors of the famous Texas Longhorns."

"Well, you are really well informed. I mean, how did you learn all this about Florida's cattle? Have you been here very long working on a ranch?"

"You won't believe this, but the cattle egrets that romp around on a cow's back just fascinated me when I first arrived." Evie Jean was dead serious with this information and what she felt. "One of my owner's black slaves educated me on the types of cattle roaming free and those that were branded and had been brought in by cattlemen from the North. So I asked questions in order to teach the children more about the number one industry of Texas, realizing that one day Florida would be a great cattle producing state. We were on a small ranch that belonged to a religious group. They had two fenced-in pens, one for cattle and one for deer." As she spoke, she remembered her first day in Florida and how impressed she was with its butterflies. "Have you noticed the butterflies on shore? They move singularly and then some as one when hundreds in a field lift and fly off together. They are so graceful I never stop watching their flight."

Wanting their conversation to continue, Jim added what he knew. "Did you know that the Monarch butterfly lives close to the Gulf of Mexico? And the Painted Lady flies from California to Hawaii, North Africa to Iceland, New Zealand to Australia." Jim had completed his knowledge of butterflies and hoped she would pick up the conversation again.

Evie Jean chimed back in, "You know, don't you, that butterflies have natural enemies here? – flies and wasps. They lay their eggs on the caterpillar, and dragonflies eat the butterfly lava."

"Say, your students are really going to be smart if you tell them these kinds of things in class. My Mom always told us to learn from nature, to watch how animals survive, to see where they get the food they need, where and how they build a home or nest. The one thing I have already learned since coming to Florida is not to build close to the Gulf. Its sudden storms in many different seasons are threatening to your life. I love being near the water, but I will always live inland."

Titus disagreed, "Gosh, Jim, I know you want a cattle ranch, but I wouldn't sacrifice my love of the sea to live inland near the business. Maybe in the beginning we'll have to do things like that, but I know my grandfather always kept a place near the shore even though he was a lumberman and the business was in Northern Vermont. I want to sail the Gulf to the Keys and get to know the coves and ports of Mexico. That's part of the adventure of coming South to the Gulf."

Jane Marie had been listening intently to all that was said. "You are all well ahead of me in thinking. I'm just trying to eke out a living and, in living day to day, do it the best I can. I'll be happy wherever I am, on the sea, near the shore, or inland, as long as I have good friends for company. And, oh yes, a dog. I need a dog. I miss Roger, our Lab. I should have persuaded my Mom to let me take him, but she said 'it was unthinkable'."

Titus found he really liked Jane Marie for her ability to express herself openly and honestly. He didn't know many women, at least any like these two single ladies who were unafraid to come so far from home and then, when abused, escape from a bad situation.

Jim, as he navigated, was sure they were now in the long awaited Manatee River, going east, inland and hopefully toward Miakka. He could see the southern shore of the river and the wide mouth of it that empties into the Gulf of Mexico. Bird life abounded, huge turtles, porpoise and what they now knew to be manatee were as curious about the raft as its occupants were of all the wild life. It was a beautiful sight, palm trees, a golden sun shining down on the water, birds swooping over their shoulders. The four young people were awestruck.

As Titus and Jim changed places, Jim fell asleep wondering how his mother and father would react when he came to the shores of the Myakka with two unmarried females in tow. The only saving grace was that they were both teachers and could establish a school wherever the wagon train settled, that is, if Evie Jean and Jane Marie wished to remain a part of the group.

Titus, always wanting to have a conversation going, said, "Since you are teachers, you may be interested in knowing that Old Miakka and the Myakka River have two different spellings:

M-I-A-K-K-A, we believe, refers to the Indian legend of turtles that abound in the area.

M-Y-A-K-K-A, as the legend goes, refers to a land of sleeping turtles. Or vice versa."

The two women laughed at his insistence in teaching them everything he had learned on the trip so far. Evie Jean asked, "Have you ever thought about going into teaching, Titus?" You have a way of presenting information that makes it easy to remember. I would never have thought that the two Myakkas had anything to do with turtles. I would have thought it would be more directly related with waterways, you know, small and narrow vs. long and wide."

Titus suddenly realized that in a very short time span he admired these two women for their thinking. They were so different from other women they knew who seemed to emote through life.

His biggest problem at the moment was how to find out their age. He and Jim would both turn 18 in a few months. He guessed both women had to be at least twenty years old.

"Well, tell me how you decided on teaching, having a career instead of marrying right away. You must have spent some time in preparing for teaching. And what subjects and age groups do you teach? And why be Frontiersmen? Wouldn't it have been easier to stay in a more civilized setting than frontier Florida?"

"Our parents died years ago, leaving us with grandparents to educate us. Since they were both religious people and missionaries, we never lived a normal life in a settled community. We spent our teen years in Canada. We were to be given our inheritance when we reached the age of 21. But our grandparents died before that and we inherited from them. With that money and from more obtained from selling their property, we opened a school in Hartford for girls. Since we planned to send our female students south as indentured servants, we took six months off to see what it was like to live as indentured servants ourselves." Evie Jean stopped talking and turned to Jane Marie.

"We knew we were as smart as any of the boys or men we had met both abroad and in the States," she said in a very strong voice, but carefully watching for a reaction from both Titus and Jim, who were now sitting up, Titus leaning on his elbow, listening intently to the story. "We were never afraid to travel, and because of Grandpa Beachman's age, we frequently made all the arrangements, acting as his secretaries."

"You are unusual."

"That you are," added Jim. "There is nothing usual about your upbringing."

"As to why we haven't married, we haven't met the kind of men we are looking for yet."

"Really," said Jim. "And what kind of men would that be?"

Titus wasn't sure this would be a fruitful conversation, but he too wondered just what type of man these girls might take to. They were sure different from their Moms.

"They must be fearless, unafraid of change, and ready to move on a moment's notice. I want a very kind and thoughtful man, too, and he must love children. I want a big family," explained Jane Marie. "And above all else, he must be religious, a believer."

"Yep," put in Evie Jean. "A believer in Jesus as our Savior, God as our creator, and the Bible as a way of life. A man who is faithful is of primary importance to me. And one who doesn't drink every week. Someone who will love me; a man that I can trust."

Both men knew they qualified. Both were speechless at first. After a few minutes, Titus attempted to pick up the conversation.

"So what you are saying is that you would marry if you found a man with the qualifications necessary to make you happy, but that you would not like to give up your careers. Is that an accurate interpretation of your feelings?"

"Well, you left something out Titus," said Jim. "Although they hadn't said so, they want educated, or perhaps men as intelligent as they, and who are adventuresome. I might say my Pa is a Preacher and would be impressed with both of you."

Titus, jumping right into the spirit of the conversation, said, "Well, let me tell you, I am impressed with both of you. I hope after hearing your story that you'll come up the Manatee with us 'til we catch up with our folks. You would be a great help in getting a school started in a new settlement. And we certainly know because Pa is going to preach there that it is a religious community where you may find men you want to marry some day." As he said it, he thought "if you haven't already found them in us."

With nothing else to do on this wide open river, they started to sing:

"Swing low, sweet chariot, Coming for to carry me home;  
Swing low, sweet chariot, Coming for to carry me home;"

Base, Alto Baritone and Tenor, in three part harmony they added:

"I looked over Jordan, and what did I see, Coming for to carry me home?  
A band of angels coming after me, Coming to carry me home.  
If you get there before I do, Coming for to carry me home  
Tell all my friends I'm coming too, Coming for to carry me home."

#### CHAPTER EIGHT

#### CHANGES AND LAMENTS

Pouring over maps was the morning chore.



Fletcher, Bloodgood and Frazer tried to figure out if they should bring their families to Miakka first and then go to Fort Meade for cattle. The slight change created some derision.

Fletcher laughed at the thought of going back and forth with a herd of cows. Bloodgood wondered what mischief the children would get into without the men around. The women folks didn't want to be left in a new place while the men went back for cattle. It now seemed odd that they had traveled hundreds of miles together without any of these traits showing up before.

Suddenly no sign of cooperation existed. Consensus went out the window.

Fletcher asked, "What's happening to us? Our combined opinion last night was that we should stay together and travel southeast to the Fort, get the cattle, and then travel southwest to Miakka."

"We were thinking correctly last night. It would be more logical to get everything we need or want and bring it in with us to the homestead sites. Just making one trip would allow us to concentrate on settling in, you know, on building homes, fencing a corral, and branding cows," said Greta. "I'm ready to make some kitchen curtains and plant a garden. What do you say?"

"We are all ready to settle down. Please admit that, will you. We have all had enough of wagon life. And maybe what's wrong with us is that the Johnsons are staying behind in Lakeland. They aren't with us any longer. Are we envious? Yes, we are. They have settled in. We have not. And we're tired." It was the usually very quiet Mrs. Rudolph speaking up and saying her piece.

"You sure have a head for planning what has to be done, woman," said Greta's brother-in-law, Lent. "The way you women folk are beginning to speak your mind, I think we're going to see a new kind of womanhood develop here. We'll be partners."

"Partners, hmmm," with a smile on her lips, Greta rolled the word off her tongue. She enjoyed the sound of the word "partners". She said it again, "partners".

"Tomorrow we break camp and get going on the last leg of our journey," said Fletcher. to which Bloodgood added a rousing "Amen".

As the Johnsons were making ready to find land in Lakeland, everyone was excited for them. Alexandria wanted the coolness of lake living. Charles wanted good grazing land. With the help of the local minister, they found both on 70 choice acres at 24 cents an acre.

Charles was proud of what they had purchased. "With narrow frontage for a house on the lake, and acreage stretching eastward away from the town, we're also not too far from the schoolhouse, which satisfies Frank, Hugo and Bo."

This accomplishment inspired the whole Company. One family had attained its goal!

The surveying team got its equipment together and went off to lay out the Johnson house so that Alexandria would have a kitchen facing north; it would be cooler that way. The children began dragging stones for the fireplace to the north side of the house.

All the boys got together and cut three foot posts and dug the corner post holes. In two days they had felled enough trees to lay the floor of a one room cabin about 14 by 20. With that done, and a carpenter found to help Charles and Bo cut the timber and build the side walls and roof, the Company took off.

The old Army trail was still intact, making travel easier, but there were other obstacles now: wild cows, a panther that seemed to follow them, wild dogs, and wild hogs known as rooters.

It became a common sound, frequent shotgun blasts as the men attempted to keep the wild life at bay. None of it good enough to eat, they were constantly looking for deer. Evening meals were always interrupted with shotgun blasts as the guards on duty fired at prowling animals brought to the camp site by the smell of food. This was truly wilderness living.

A new village, Bartow, was halfway between Lakeland and the Fort. They hoped to get there the second day. The first night they doubled the guard and kept two fires burning. The children were forbidden to leave the wagons unless an adult was with them.

Just before dawn, a huge black panther crawled under a wagon and got into the circle. It had attacked and killed a calf before anyone realized what was happening. In a fury the men fired, but all missed their target as it bounded back into the dark woods, dragging a leg with it.

The yowling, screeching and thumping of the animals' hooves had everyone wide awake and jittery. The bleeding calf, half its head gone, was too much for the women.

They pleaded with Fletcher to remove it. To the woods it went, a mistake! The scent of blood now brought other wild ones out. Two wild pigs were shot from the Rudolph wagon. To the amazement of all, it was ten-year-old Junior Rudolph who brought down both animals, a first for him.

The Company was up and dressed for another exciting day on the trail. The women had decided the day before to make slapjacks served with syrup, fresh pineapple and coffee for breakfast. And eat this crowd did. After the harrowing experience with the panther, they were eating ravenously. It was like a sporting event, the food was all part of what occurred.

"You Scouts get out there and tell us quick as you can what lies ahead. Will you do that now? There is a line here that says Pease Creek. Now it could be a river, so tell me how to avoid crossing it. It will be up to you boys to guide us to the town and then to the Fort. I want to stay west of that creek." Fletcher was adamant.

"While we're waiting it would be a good time to clean your rifles."

He added, "Then get your ammunition near your firing posts in each wagon. Everyone needs to check their supplies of kerosene and Witch Hazel. While we have good fires burning, could you women get some baking or roasting done so we have a good supply of food in each wagon. We are sure to hit rain soon, almost every day. I want us to be prepared for the trip to the Fort without stopping."

"How about water? Are we in good supply? Everyone assured him they were.

By the time Fletcher had given them the morning "talk at" everyone was checking for safety, comfort and enough provisions. The women fried mullet, rabbit and squirrel, baked biscuits and stirred up enough pineapple to make preserves. Got some hardtack done and felt satisfied they would be able to feed their families in any emergency.

At eight o'clock the Scouts saw a clear roadway out to the Fort. The wagons broke their circle and traveled together. The jews harp, harmonicas and guitars were being played softly as they moved out. It was exciting to know they were finally on the last leg of the journey. For miles they were in open grasslands, huge pine trees were outlined against the western sky, and birds of every sort filled the air.

The Rudolphys started talking again about it "not being too late to take everyone into Miakka, settle down, and then let the men go for the cattle."

As Bloodgood returned to his wagon, the last thing he expected was the "lip" his wife was giving him from the minute he set foot on the backboard.

"You men folk take us a million miles from home, keep us working night and day just to keep food on the board, expect us to be cheerful and loving no matter how hot, filthy and bedraggled you get, then you tell us you are going to dump us all off in some Godforsaken wood lot while you go off to play cowboys and find us some more cows.

"When did cows become more important than your women folk? Why do cows have more of your time than your women? How much longer do you think I can go without a home? I need a roof over my head, some common courtesies spent on me, not on those alfalfa eating, water thrashing cows. I am sick of competing with cows. I need your attention, too."

"Well, Honey Pie, I sure as shootin' didn't mean to be neglectful. But you've got to understand those cows are our bread and butter." Bloodgood watched carefully as his wife's face had turned crimson while she was talking. His wonderful calm, serene, thoughtful, intelligent, logical woman really had a bee-in-her-bonnet this time. He'd never seen her, but once, this distraught.

Looking carefully at Greta, he sidled up to her, slipped an arm around her shoulder and pulled her close. He asked, "Are you in a family way?"

"Yes, I am," she thundered. "A million miles from nowhere, no doctor, not even a midwife, and I have to get pregnant at my age."

"No house, no crib no stove, nothing. And as I remember it the last time you were not much use. You may be a great hand at delivering cows, but when it comes to your own babies you just turn green."

"Oh Lord, how will I handle a new baby, help build a house, plant a garden, do laundry and the canning? Oh, how will I do it all?"

"Sh, sh, sh now ... you have a grown daughter to help you, other women folk with no responsibilities to help you, and I promise you'll get an even amount of my time with the cows."

Looking up at her husband, Greta laughed softly. And her man had the good sense, the wisdom of an experienced man, to just hold her close in his arms until she calmed down. It was a tender moment, something they had not had enough time for since their son's

death. With the daily routine, the demands of the wagon train, the dangers they faced, and perhaps losing the Johnsons, their best friends, they were stressed beyond normal limits. It's surprising there hadn't been an outburst before this.

"Partners, that's what we were. But I will be limited now, and I won't like it one bit. I won't be able to do all that I had expected to do to help you, and I looked forward to helping with the house, too."

I guess you could call that "Greta's Lament", she wanted to help build her house.

"You could draw a house plan and be the supervisor on the site. But really, Greta, there's no reason why you can't help some. We'll be building that house you want so much by the beginning of next month. We have to get started quickly before the rainy season starts. Winter brings rain here in Florida and God forbid snow. It's rare but it's been known to happen.

"Just tell me how and where the kitchen is to be and I'll tell you which side the fireplace will go on. Smoke and wind have to be dealt with simultaneously. And the house must be built 16 inches off the ground." Greta had a good man and she knew it as he looked down at her tenderly, raised her chin in his hand, and planted a kiss on her eager, waiting lips.

Getting more interested in these construction principles and losing her emotional, stressed-out demeanor, Greta asked, "Why so high off the ground? I understand the smoke and wind theory in order to keep the chimney from smokin' out the family. But what benefit, other than to protect against flooding, is there to building 16 inches off the ground?"

"We need to provide for complete circulation of air. First to keep cool with breezes below the floor in addition to circulating through windows, and after the rainy season to dry out faster. It will also provide shelter for the dog and a place for chickens to roost until we get a hen house built. For safety from the Lord's critters that crawl and creep out here, it's also better to be off the ground. Hogs won't be likely to climb up steps as they are to walk in off ground level. And then there are all kinds of insects and bugs."

"All right, you've proven your point. I guess there is a lot more to building a house than I thought of. Will we fell our own trees? Where can we buy windows with glass panes? How can we build a hearth? Will you have to split rocks?"

"I ordered five double-hung windows before we left Tampa. One for each end on the second floor, one for the kitchen, and the other two on the walls away from the fireplace. That supply ship we heard was lost may have had our building supplies on board. In a month or two they said we'd have them. I have to write the company if the supplies aren't at the Sarasota dock waiting for pickup."

Greta had calmed down and could see many ways she would still be involved in planning. Her desire for a home was so strong she attributed it to her "nesting instincts" that were at a higher level now that she was expecting a baby. She really wanted the child even though it was coming at an inconvenient time in their lives. It gave her so much to think about.

She knew she had some fine white cotton lawn in her trunk that she had brought to make curtains, but now some of it could be used to make cool wrappers for the new baby. She hoped that they could build a house with two stories so that they could have several upstairs bedrooms. A big sitting room downstairs and a kitchen off the house with a porch between the kitchen and the sitting room would keep the house cool. She realized though that some of the houses were built with separate buildings for kitchens. A fire safety precaution. She didn't want that style Southern home. She wanted air circulating between the downstairs and the kitchen. She expected it would be more expensive to build, but she wanted to try to build what she envisioned.

The scouts and the Browns were up front watching for the unexpected; they were in grass so high they came upon two calves before they saw them, almost running them over. They roped and tied them till they could place them among the other cows at the rear of the wagon train.

Walter asked, "Do we want to acquire so many young stock, Pa? I know they eat grasses here, but if we get a cold spell and grasses aren't good enough for feed, what will we do to keep them alive?"

"I was more or less thinking they would be for the table. We haven't been finding much deer. The next best wild meat are these young calves. They'll be a lot more tender than some old cow."

Up ahead they saw the remains of a Fort with walls, a few houses and people milling about. They pulled up and asked if they could camp and refill their water jugs. Secondly, they asked where they could find cattle dealers reported to be here at the Fort.

The women and children were the first out of the wagons talking to the folks who lived at the Fort. Folks were so glad to see new faces and learn about the trips each other had made that in no time they were sitting around a table having coffee and pie.

Brown asked, "Have you been safe since the Indian wars ended? Or do you still have a few marauders causing trouble?"

Keith Smith, who had greeted them as the unofficial "Mayor" replied that they had no Indian troubles. "What we have now are folks, strays we call them, who lost what they had from bein' burned out, and have never really settled again. Young'uns without parents, men without family ties. It's sad to see the women who wander from camp site to camp site, looking for the man who never came back from the wars. It's pitiful."

Meg Smith, his wife asked, "What can we do to help you move on to Miakka? My sister would like to join your Company if you have room. She's engaged to one of the Carlton boys and wants to visit the ranch. She could help you find the safest way into the area, she's traveled it many times."

Cliff Mayhew introduced himself. "I heard you were looking to buy cattle. I haven't a lot to sell right now, but you can look over what I've got if you are interested in native stock."

"If you intend to crossbreed, I will surely be interested in what you produce. And you already have a good beginning with the stock you got trailing the wagon train. I can buy from you, too, when you got the stock. I am always short of good bulls for breeding purposes. This native stock is what's left from the Spanish conquest. They went off and left them to fend for themselves. They are a scrawny looking breed now, but given enough good grassland to pasture and good water, they'll come up real good, just wait'n see."

"Well, thank you, Cliff, for that advice," said Bloodgood. "We are cattlemen. That's all we know. I hope we'll have enough milk cows for our use, but we intend to raise beef cattle for export. Is anyone else doin' that in this area? We've brought along three of the finest bulls we owned, two Aberdeen Angus and one Hereford, and three milk cows. We now have three calves. We expect to obtain the best bred you've got for our stock. With

the 18 horses we have, ten for pulling wagons and eight for riding, we should be able to operate a ranch quickly enough. The big thing now is finding the land. Is anyone ranching for export?"

"No one with any experience. Those who have been around cattle most of their lives are rounding up the wild herds, fattening them up and selling them to folks like you, people who need them to survive. We have a few large herds below Sarasota and one or two in Miakka where a few families have ranches."

While the women folk talked around the table and the children played catch, the men went off to deal in cattle. Four hours later they came back happy to report they had selected 18 cows for the startup herd. They suggested everyone get a good night's sleep before they headed to Miakka in the morning.

## CHAPTER NINE

### GIRLS, LADIES OR WOMEN



Floating east on the Manatee River from the Gulf, the boys had no idea they were in historic territory. It was in this area that Ponce de Leon was believed to have come into Florida looking for the Fountain of Youth. The breadth of the mouth of the river was so unexpectedly wide, they could not help but compare it to Tampa Harbor.

"Look at the width of that inlet and watch the strength of the current. This is some piece of water, Jim. It's going to take both of us to get and keep the raft up against the north shoreline. Remember, we've got to row against the tide; we are going east against the tide."

"Titus, if I knew it was going to be such a struggle, I would have said, 'Sail south and pull in as planned at Sarasota.' But we've got this far, so let's see if we can make it."

"The tide in Tampa Harbor wasn't this strong, was it?" asked Jim. "Remember the Lawson family we met there? They sure were the nicest surprise we had on this journey."

"Why was that?" asked Jane Marie Beachman from her perch on the blankets aft.

Looking over at Jim, Titus hesitated. Watching him squirm under Jane Marie's scrutiny, Jim finally said, "They owned a store that handled all kinds of supplies so we were outfitted by one of the finest suppliers in the area. Then his wife and family had us over for dinner, drinks and our first cigars, which we will never forget."

Jim thought he had handled that well, but as he smiled remembering the twins, Rebecca and Rachel, he realized he now knew five women of marriageable age. Of course these two were women, Jane Marie and Evie Jean, were older but not enough to keep them from marrying if they fell in love. He found himself thinking differently as he tended the tiller moving east. Usually he was intent on navigation; for the moment he was sizing up the five women in his life, wondering how his mother would react when she found him with two women in tow.

It was Titus who spilled the beans when he said, "The Lawsons had three very beautiful daughters, twins Rachel and Rebecca, sixteen, and Ruth, a year older. They had that fair skin Swedes are known for and were great cooks. They sure went out of their way to make us a good meal. They even invited us back with our folks someday."

That information brought dead silence to the raft. Titus didn't have the *savoir-faire* Jim had. Being a preacher's son, Jim had the social adroitness that came with handling the public from childhood on.

As they crossed the lake, they saw several homes, a few stores, and a boat basin with long docks coming out into the river. He was tempted to pull in to find out how much further they would have to travel when a skiff headed toward them. He called out to the skipper:

"Can you tell me how much longer I have to travel to get inland close to Miakka?"

"With a stiff wind you'll be there before nightfall. If the wind dies down, row."

The skipper waved them off, laughing as he tacked windward to trim the sails.

Jim and Titus now needed help. Calling the girls up to the tiller, they gave them instructions to keep the raft steady in the main stream. Quickly, while free of navigation responsibilities, the two boys worked fast as they moved the cargo fore and aft to get a better use of their one thin sail. They were suddenly sailing in a strong west wind. But nothing took their joy away as they stood watching the dolphins and an occasional manatee playing in the clear waters of the Manatee River.

They could hardly wait to see their family and friends again. (Of course Jim had no idea that his brother had died. It would come as a horrible shock to him. They had been so close it was one reason he hadn't given serious consideration to coming south by raft.) It was his father who urged him to "do the manly thing and travel by water as the wagon train goes inland." Titus had different concerns; he hoped by now that his Dad and new stepmother were happy and used to married life.

It was soon time to eat. Oranges and water quenched their thirst; they only had some hardtack left to munch on. It was Evie Jean who saved the day by catching a large fish, bare handed. Over the open fire in the big copper kettle on the iron plate, she tossed in diced onions and peppers and had a meal fit for this adventurous day. Finally, with their bellies full, they took turns dozing off in the hot Florida sunshine.

After several hours sailing at a good clip, the river began to narrow down, widened again as though they were in a lake and then ran into a grassland marsh. The raft was not going to be much use here. They poured over their maps again. Titus was all for going back to the Gulf and down to Sarasota. Jim had another idea, "Let's sail back into that lake, cross it to the south, and see if we can find any settlers on that shore. That's the Miakka side of the river. We should be able to find settlers there. What do you say, Titus?"

"I say that's a good idea. Let's turn this raft around and pray we don't get caught in this bog before we get out into the main stream again."

With that the boys used the oars to push away from the shore and into the main stream of the Manatee without any trouble. They were surprised at the number of fish and how easily Evie Jean and Jane Marie could catch them bare handed, like Indian women. They cleaned them, cooked them, and stowed them in flat plans with covers all ready for tomorrow's meals.

A stiff breeze came up but they crossed the small lake by sundown. The sky was shot with purple and orange clouds; the sun was a ball of fire. None of them had ever seen anything like this fiery sunset. They gazed enthralled by the color the clouds in the sunset.

Off in the distance to the southeast a thin dark trail of black smoke led them to a shack about 300 feet in from the river. It was half hidden by palmettos and low hanging pines.

Jim called out, "Hello the house."

There was no response. He motioned everyone to disembark.

"Evie Jean, don't go any further toward that shack until we find out if som'un's home thar, you hear. Just stay where you are, and you too, Jane Marie. Titus and I will circle around the back. Now, in case a person shows himself, call out to him. Something like, 'we need cool water, friend, can you help us?' However, if they have a gun, just hide in the bushes. If they're a threat to you, or us, scream as loud as you can. And if you have to run away, get back to the raft. Now don't forget what I said," all this said by Jim in his most authoritative quiet manner.

The dusk of late evening laid a misty haze over the ground and spread over the house. Titus and Jim hunched low to the ground as they walked toward the back gareden. A young man sitting on the back porch railing cleaned a rifle.

"Gads, Jim, I've never seen a Reb uniform but I think that's what he's wearing. This may be a Confederate camp site, right on the river and inland from the Gulf. If Johnny Reb is here, sure as shootin', there's a Union camp somewhere, too. We don't want to get in between two camps here, so keep your eyes open," whispered Titus.

Nodding his head in agreement with Titus, Jim beckoned him away from the house.

"You know, I wondered when this war would show its face in Florida. Well, here it is. Hope we can find our folks before someone tells us we've got to fight on one side or the other."

As they were about to return to the girls, a soldier called out, "Halt. Who goes thar? Turn and face me immediately. Identify yourselves."

"Be you Yanks?" That question came from someone else behind them near some trees.

Titus, whispering to Jim, advised him to "Keep your cool. We are surrounded. Remember we're only settlers looking for a wagon train."

Jim called back, "No sir, we're settlers, cattlemen. We got separated from a wagon train and we are supposed to meet around here to go into Miakka. Have you seen or heard of a wagon train coming through this past week?"

A soldier with Captain's bars came toward them. "The only wagon train in the area came through Lakeland several weeks ago. Their party divided and picked up another family coming this way. We lost track of them. Once we got our camp settled, we had other worries. The Indian Wars are over so we aren't protecting you folks down here any more.

"Our primary goal is keeping the Yanks out of this area. The settlers are divided in their sympathy between North and South. We have a Civil War going on now. We need cattle and horses to send back to the troops. We want no skirmishes with settlers or Yankee troops, but if forced to, we'll fight if attacked."

Jim, stepping up to the Captain, extended his hand, "Jim Bloodgood, sir; this is my cousin Titus Lent." The Captain shook hands with both boys and at the same time asked, "You like to have coffee with us? We see you have women folk with you, extend our invitation to them, too. We haven't seen any women folks in months. It would be a pleasure to be with you for a bit."

"You realize, sir, we have to protect the women. Can your troops be trusted to act in a gentlemanly fashion around them?" Jim asked politely.

At first offended by the question, he then relaxed and said, "You can count on gentlemanly behavior, my good man. We are the North Carolina fifth regiment. Our sisters, wives and mothers are important in our culture, as yours are to you. Do invite them to our campfire."

Jim went around the side of the house just as Evie Jean let out a howling scream. He ran the rest of the way with pistol drawn, only to find her standing on a downed log, with a hog pushing the log with its snout. This caused the log to rock. She was about to lose her footing. She screamed again as she valiantly tried to keep from losing her balance.

Looking at the scene with some amusement, he decided not to fire his gun. He picked up a long fallen branch and thrust it between Evie Jean and the hog, distracting the hog.

"Jump, Jeanie, jump. Get behind me here, this is one ugly animal. I may have to shoot." As she jumped, which lightened the log considerably, the grunting, rootin hog kept up his pushing efforts and rolled it down the embankment toward the river.

Evie Jean shook with fright.

Putting his arm around her shoulders, he pulled her to him as he stroked her hair and whispered, "You're safe! It's gone. Just calm down now."

Enjoying his role as her Knight in Shining Armor and coming to her rescue, he wondered if he dare kiss her. Not having enough nerve to kiss her lips, he kissed the top of her head, patted her shoulder and said, "Come around the back of the house, the Captain has invited you to have coffee with him at the camp fire."

She immediately straightened up.

"The Captain? We have an officer inviting us for coffee. My. Wait a minute! They are Rebels. How do we know they won't take us captives?"

Before she could finish her thoughts, Jim assured her, "They are North Carolina boys and gentlemen. Don't worry now. Just smile and thank them for the coffee. You may want to sing for them, too. They are lonesome for the soft voices of their women folk."

As they walked arm-in-arm toward the house, Jane Marie and Titus approached from the other side, also arm-in-arm. Both boys felt this would give them a look of "ownership". It worked; the soldiers assumed they were two couples who had lost their way on the river.

The Captain introduced himself and offered the women tin cups of hot coffee from the regiment's urn. It smelled wonderful and was the first indication they were returning to civilization after months of isolation on the trail.

The coffee stimulated and helped everyone become more sociable. As one of the solders began to play a harmonica, another played a guitar. Evie Jean began to hum along

with them and asked if they knew "Greensleeves". The soldiers got into the right key and the men and women hummed along in harmony.

The Captain asked, "Could you sing, if you know the words, one of my Mama's favorites? Love Divine, All Loves Excelling. They sang it at Services just before I left to join my regiment. It always reminds me of home."

"Yes, sir, I agree with you," put in his Corporal. "It was Grandpa's favorite, too. Sure was."

Together they sang the chorus of the old Wesley hymn:

"Finish then Thy new creation, Pure and spotless let us be;  
Let us see Thy great salvation Perfectly restored in Thee.  
Changed from glory into glory, 'Til in heaven we take our place.  
'Til we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder, love and praise."

"That was appropriate singing about a 'new creation'. I keep wondering what it will be like here 50 years from now. My family, the Staffords, plan to leave Asheville, North Carolina, when the war is over, to settle in Tallahassee. They expect to build a hotel, the way they do things in Europe for people who need to stay for months at a time to get away from cold weather. It will be a large place where folks come to take the waters, too.

"We men pledged to support, build and operate the Stafford House. We'll be married by then, I expect, but our women folks will need to have good business heads, too." His last remark was made as he smiled at Evie Jean while filling her cup with fresh hot coffee.

Jim, looking around at the soldiers who gave their undivided attention to their Captain's family plans, said, "Well, from the looks of the devotion these men give you, sir, you will have no shortage of people to work for you at the Stafford House!"

Just as they were getting ready to disassemble the raft and hire horses, another Corporal came riding in and went to the Captain's tent to make his report. The Corporal came out and beckoned Jim and Titus to the tent, leaving the girls to fold blankets.

"Good news, gentlemen. Your folks have gotten to Myakka Head. They will be in Miakka, a good strong settlement, in two days. You should be able to be there at the same time. I'm sending one of our Scouts to their location to tell them you are safe here with us and will meet them in two days. Of course if that meets with your approval."

Jim and Titus, speaking at the same time, said, "Great, just great, thank you."

Jane Marie asked, "Wouldn't it be easier for all of us if we could rent a wagon and two horses to continue this part of the trip. Or maybe they would just take us. What do you say? We won't need a wagon after we get there since everyone there already has one."

"Clear thinking, Jane Marie," said Jim as he headed over to the Captain's tent.

Once inside, he sat facing the Captain and asked, "Are you allowed to help us if we pay our way? Could you rent us a driver, wagon and two horses for the ride to Miakka?"

Rubbing his chin, Captain Stafford went to the tent flap, looked out at the horses and men available and said, "Only if you could be ready in the next hour. I can send my Scout through Miakka. His next stop is toward Arcadia and the Peace River. He needs the wagon to bring back canoes. The best ones are made by an Indian tribe that comes into Arcadia to sell."

"We'll be ready. Incidentally, we could leave you the raft equipped with tiller and stove."

"Excellent suggestion. Excellent," said the Captain. "And I'll take the raft as payment for getting you to Miakka. That will look good in my weekly report."

When Jim told Evie Jean, Jane Marie and Titus how their plan had worked out, they were jubilant. Each of them began taking possessions from the raft, piling them on the bank, waiting to load the wagon. Jane Marie discovered an old newspaper from 1861, covering the first raid on Fort Sumter, South Carolina. As she read the paper, she said, "My word, who'd a thought it."

"Look at this," she said, walking over to Evie Jean. "Of all the stories I could have found, this one is about my Mom's second cousin from New Orleans. He's the famous general who attached Ft. Sumter, General Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard, 'the romantic Creole'. She talked about him all the time. It's not every family who produces a man like him."

"No, it isn't," said Titus, who had returned to help them. "After his raid on Ft. Sumter and that's what really started the war between the States, he won the first Battle of Bull Run and then the Battle of Shiloh a year later."

The Captain could not help but overhear the conversation. "Do you mean to tell me we have the honor of escorting a relative of one of the Confederacy's greatest men, General Beauregard, to Miakka? He is now fighting at Petersburg, Virginia."

"No, I wasn't aware of that, sir. Thank you for bringing us up to date. We have not heard much about the war while traveling through Florida, except for news now and again from settlers."

As the Captain left to make plans for their driver, Titus spoke up, "Say, what about leaving some of your Mom's peaches with these guys? If anyone could appreciate homemade preserves, these soldiers would." Eager to be with the Captain for even a few more minutes, Evie Jean and Jane Marie got the jars of fruit and walked over to the Captain's tent.

"Titus and Jim want to thank you for helping us. They hope the men will enjoy these peaches," said Evie Jean as she placed the jars on his camp table.

"This is most kind. While you're here, will you ladies please register in our visitor's book, and also note where you started from and where you are heading."

As Evie Jean was about to object, Jane Marie spoke up, "Of course you mean our hometowns, don't you? Jim and Titus tentatively agreed to hire us for the new school that will be established in their community, so I guess that would be our destination."

"You ladies will be most valuable to the settlers because you will bring 'thinking and calculating' into their children's lives. Educating our young ones is most important in this mixed culture. This new society is a mix of rag tag indigents, shopkeepers, ranchers and Crackers with a big population of former soldiers who came to fight in the Indian Wars. Unless the settlers vote to bring in paid lawmen, this will become another example of the 'wild west'."

"Thank you for the compliment and for your opinion. Our first experience with Florida was not a good one. You are absolutely correct. Lawmen are needed and now is none too soon."

The Captain, surprised at Evie Jean's ability to express herself so well and especially to speak up about her own beliefs, looked at her again. He saw the beauty beneath the sun-browned face, and the lovely figure beneath the worn out clothes.

"Do you really expect to stay this far South?" he asked.

"That depends on how we are treated, the salary we are paid for the education we bring, and our housing accommodations. We also expect that parents will help with the school's



supplies and that we will not have to buy them out of our salaries. We are trained and educated and expect to be compensated accordingly."

"You speak as though your careers are important. Don't you consider marriage in your future? Or is that too personal a question to ask? If it is, excuse me."

Evie Jean's face went crimson red. It was time for Jane Marie to get into this conversation.

"Well, sir, in the backwoods of Florida, I'm not sure we'll find the gentlemen we require for husbands. But we do hope to have children of our own one day, if that's what your probing questions were trying to find out. We make notes of the characteristics we find interesting when we meet men folk or talk to their wives. In this logical framework, we'll eventually know exactly what kind of man we don't want, probably before we know the total makeup of the man we do want."

"And where does wealth and family position come into this? Do you tackle all your problems so logically? Does love come into your equation?" asked Captain Stafford, frowning.

"You may have gone beyond our thinking, Captain. We come from a family with more than enough money; if we need help, we'll get it. However, the good Lord has always supplied our needs. I don't expect that to change just because we get married. Love hasn't happened yet. So I would not know how to answer that question. I say, logic and sane thinking seems to go out the window when people fall in love, and I'm not sure it is something I want to experience," Jane Marie stated emphatically.

Turning to Evie Jean, he asked, "And what, pray tell, is your opinion of this? Do you agree with your companion's opinions and her answers to my questions?"

Smiling at the Captain, Evie Jean said in a calculating tone, "Well, let's suppose you proposed to one of us. We know, from what you have said, your family is comfortable financially. However, we want proof of what you say. You seem to be fairly well educated, speak with a good vocabulary, but what is that if you are dishonest, a cheat, a womanizer, an atheist?"

"Suppose you're lazy and can't earn a living? Suppose you don't want children or wouldn't pay for their education? What if your interests take you far from home, and the family isn't allowed to accompany you? What would happen if our families were

competitors and you didn't get along with them? Suppose you had no sense of humor and did not like to entertain your guests, or didn't enjoy music and plays? What would you expect of me?"

"Say, you do have a mind of your own! I never thought of half these questions in relation to finding the right woman," he was looking very puzzled as he spoke.

Jane Marie asked, "Are you telling us you would not have to wait for the right woman, someone you fell in love with? What kind of man are you?"

"To answer such a direct question, I am sober, hard working, honest, and fun to be with. I don't gamble, I enjoy music and a good time. I want a neat house, a sober wife, children who obey, and someone who takes care of herself. If something happens to me, she needs to be a combination nurse and business partner. I would hope that we were friends first, that we liked each other. And perhaps love would come. But like you, it has not happened to me yet."

"What an interesting conversation this has been! I doubt we will ever have such a conversation again. I have a lot of notes to add to my book tonight. I think the three of us should stay in touch.

"What do you say to that, Captain Stafford?" asked Jane Marie.

"I say you're right, Miss. You know where I am. I'll need to know where you are. Before the war is over, I'll visit you in Miakka. That is, if it would be appropriate. Maybe I should wait until the war is over. What do you say to that?"

"We'll look forward to that," said Evie Jean. "And should any of us fall in love, young Jim's Dad is one of the preachers for that settlement. Goodbye now and excuse us as we load the wagon." She was trying very hard to behave herself, for this man intrigued her.

"My men are helping Titus and Jim with that. Let's have one more cup of coffee and before you leave, a prayer. Holding hands with them, he said,

"We ask for a safe journey for these young folks, Lord,  
Your guidance for these two ladies as they take on  
awesome responsibilities with a new settlement.  
Keep them in your care; well, safe and comfortable. Amen"

The girls were beaming as they headed over to the wagon. Even if saying an evening prayer was the only way they got to hold hands, it seemed ingenious as well as thoughtful.

Jim, looking up quickly, saw the shine in Evie Jean's eyes and wondered what was afoot. Maybe the captain's men were gentlemen, he thought, but what's the Captain been up to?

With their maps, a guide who doubled as a driver, two good horses and a stout wagon, the four travelers took off overland for the first time since they had met. With all their possessions safely stored, cushions and blankets for seats, the girls soon fell asleep.

Later, leaving a settlement and traveling on a dirt road, they soon realized the river became a stream. Riding through palmetto groves, they followed a very rough trail, sometimes cutting their way through. From time to time they passed a small cabin, asked for water, and were treated to lemonade. Folks were very friendly.

In three hours they came to an open road. The driver informed them it was the connecting road between Lakewood and Arcadia to the east, Miakka to the southeast, and Sarasota to the west.

"Your Wagon Train Master, Fletcher Brown, I think his name was, asked me last week if there was any sign of you two on the Manatee. We knew you were on the Gulf, but weren't sure you were the men they were all praying for. Seems like a nice colony of folks where you're going and they sure will be happy to see you." He added, "There are a few things you should know. The Yanks have a Fort opposite ours on the northern banks of the Manatee River. We try to stay out of each other's territory.

"Now because you are teachers you should know about the two ways to spell Miakka/Myakka. The River is spelled with a 'y' as is Myakka Head. The settlement is spelled with an 'i'. Now I don't know which is which, and which Indian language they're speaking about, but long ago someone told me one word meant 'land of turtles' and the other meant 'land of the sleeping turtles'."

"Well, we will tell the ladies for it seems we have two sleeping in our wagon just now." They laughed as they turned on to another road, this one winding through a valley. After an hour or so they crossed the river, which luckily was shallow at the crossing point.

"This road leads to a settlement known as Sandy, and from there we go to Miakka," said the driver, Al. "I've traveled it frequently for supplies we buy from the settlers."

Turning and curving as the river did, the road was interesting and just being settled for the first time in its history. The Myakka River! For years it would never be touched. It would be a wild river for generations.

Now it was growing wider and deeper. The sun was so hot, the water so inviting, they longed for a swim. Sharing the last of the water from the canteens and vowing to take a swim the next time they were in a deeper part of the river, they wiped the sweat off their faces.

Their clothing stuck to their bodies.

Hideous little bugs, in pairs, flew at them, sticking to their hair, making their lives miserable.

No one was happy. Everyone wanted to swim, to cool off.

They came to a sandy stretch. Without a moment's hesitation, Al pulled the wagon over and got into the river as fast as he could untie his shoes.

"You women go over there by those trees and we promise to stay over here," said Jim.

The women left their shoes and stockings, skirts and hair ribbons in a neat pile on the bank near a sandy knoll. They kept their blouses on until they were up to their waists in water and then threw them back to shore.

The men were skinny dipping on their side of the river, laughing and enjoying splashing each other. They had finally cooled down; however, they were no sooner naked than they spotted movement in the trees going in the direction where the girls were bathing.

Not able to see the girls, nor to identify the person or animal in the bushes, for safety sake, they realized they would have to break a promise to remain where they were, cool and wet.

"Jim, can you reach your gun, and get your trousers and mine without being seen?"

"If I crawl on my belly! I can get the guns, not so sure about our pants."

Al the driver said, "Let me go first. If it's a Yanky, I want to get credit for capturing him. If it's a hog, I get the first shot; you can have it to bring to your new settlement."

In seconds, each of the men had a gun.

Al went directly to the sound in the bushes.

Jim took the right flank, and Titus the left, looking carefully behind to be sure no one surprised them from the rear.

Crawling along on hands and knees, they came close to the river's edge where the girls were bathing. As they got beyond the bend in the river, they could clearly see them, with the sun shining on their hair and their arms all suds and bubbles, splashing and cavorting around unaware of the danger.

Quietly and deliberately taut, the three men crept closer to them, guns drawn, ready to shoot.

Everything happened at once.

There was a crashing sound coming from the trees as something or someone made its way toward the river and the unsuspecting girls.

The men stood up ready to aim.

The girls screamed.

Out of the trees about three feet off the water, a wild turkey took off over the river.

The three men shooting at once, brought it down, smash, right in front of the girls, its wings flapping as it took its last breath, its blood mixing with their soap bubbles ran into the river water.

The girls screamed in fright, first from the sound of the bird and its flight just above their heads, then from the size and weight of its body as the bird flew directly at them, then from the shots with the sound echoing off the trees that thundered in their ear drums, and finally at being discovered by three naked men. With hands across their bare chests, they ducked under the water, pleading with the men to "Go away, Go away."

"We meant no harm, we weren't sure what was creeping up on you from the bushes. We didn't look, honest. We were trying to protect you." It was Al doing his best to try to explain.

"Just go away, go away anywhere," screamed Evie Jean.

As he walked backwards and up the bank, going away from the scene as the women directed, he called out, "Honest, Ma'm, we didn't see nothin'."

Jim and Titus, out of sheer relief, took to a fit of laughing.

Al's attempt to put salve on troubled waters only made matters worse.

The women, upset at having "Al", a stranger, try to assure them their privacy and modesty was intact, were well aware that he said this while walking backward unable to take his eyes off the girls. They, on the other hand, hid their eyes from viewing him and his half naked body. Half submerged in the crystal clear water of the Myakka River, they did not believe a word he said. His grin was infectious and they were feeling both indignantly silly and very exposed.

Jim and Titus, laughing at the situation, didn't help.

Sitting on the bank, Titus said, "Now if I was a grown man, this would be an excellent time for a cigar or a shot of bourbon like Mr. Lawson gave us in Tampa. How I wish I had gotten to know that family better than we did."

Jim, still shaking with laughter, was barely able to respond. "You never will forget those twins, will you? Nor their Dad, trying to treat us like men, he nearly choked us first with cigar smoke and then strong drink. Lord, remember how we chucked up our dinner. I don't think I'll ever drink hard liquor again."

From behind them, they heard a sound they weren't used to. Once again, on guard with guns drawn, Jim spun left, Titus right, as Al crouched low in the grass.

As the sound came closer, it apparently was the squeaking wheels of a wagon, but who would be out in this wilderness with a horse and wagon? They watched, a two-wheel wagon was being backed up into the river. It was drawn by a sorry old horse, come to the river's edge to drink, while its driver was filling buckets with water.

The driver was about six foot three, shoulders like a bull. He turned, caught sight of Titus, then Jim and Al. From beside the two-wheel wagon came a booming voice which echoed through the trees.

"Well, it's about time you two showed up! And with two girls? And all of you stark naked. And who's this other lad? Wait till your Ma hears this. But it will be my Pa who deals with you."

It was Paul Brown, the wagon master's son, joining in the laughter now.

It was such a ridiculous situation even the girls were laughing now.

"No one will know if you don't open your big mouth," chided Titus. "These ladies are not 'girls,' they are the future teachers for Miakka. Do you want to ruin their reputations? They need to be introduced to the Company! We all wanted to clean up before seeing our

folks. Do you find anything wrong with that, you old Billy Goat? You were always like an old lady, ready to spread gossip. When are you going to grow up?"

The girls, once more primly dressed, came from their side of the bend in the river to see who this new man was. Paul's build, shock of bleached hair and blue eyes made him very attractive.

Drawing himself up to his full height, Jim Bloodgood said in his best manner as he addressed them, "Paul, may I present Evie Jean and Jane Marie Beachman, cousins of General Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard, of the Confederate Army of the Confederate States of America, now fighting in the battle of Petersburg, Virginia, who led the Battle of Fort Sumter, Bull Run and Shiloh. Ladies, may I present our wagon master's son, Paul Brown. Paul has been kind enough to offer to escort you ladies into Miakka, haven't you, Paul?"

Jumping down from the wagon and obviously awed by the beauty of these two "ladies", Paul just about bowed to the ground.

"If I had a cape, I would place it at your feet; if I had a hat, I would flourish it with feathers before you; if I had a sword, I would fight all who dared to harm you; but alas, I have only the strength of a heart which beats faster in your presence."

To which Evie Jean responded, "And I do hear the thump of every beat, sir. If I had a glove I would throw it at your feet to challenge you to a duel, armed only with my quickly beating heart, and with the beauty which you have so wondrously perceived. A mind to taunt you, eyes to drink you in as with each movement, you do tease me, sir." Extending her arm and her hand to within his reach, she added, "My good man, will you now escort me to your carriage?"

Laughing until they could no longer see, and applauding till their palms were sore, Titus, Al, Jim and Jane Marie applauded, again and again as the tears streamed down their flushed cheeks.

"Well, won't the family be delighted with your lightheartedness, Mistress Beachman!"

It was Paul, amateur Shakespearian scholar, "graduate" of his grandfather's library and with one year at NYU, who offered her his hand, kissing it first as he handed her up into the two-wheel wagon as though it was a peach satin-lined gilded carriage on the streets of London.

She was absolutely charmed at his playfulness.

"My, what will the backwoods of Florida produce next?" asked Jane Marie, "to cast me first into the shadows of its forests, then in a spellbound state lift me to the esoteric heights of its sun-saturated clouds. If this be Miakka, let all who hear me know that it stuns me; stuns me and leaves me senseless, breathless as I bathe in its warm river waters, walk in its cool dreamland forests, into the fantasy of its meadows."

It was now Jane Marie expounding in the Elizabethan style as they all laughingly headed to the make-believe carriage.

The ladies were seated, and the men continued to ride in the wagon driven by Al.

The day was getting cooler. The skies had clouded over. They hastily got on their way. The road widened. There were now fences around gardens, a few small cottages, and cows and chickens in every front yard.

Evie Jean called out to Paul, "We are really cold now. Could you stop for a few minutes and allow the wagon to catch up to us? We need to get two small blankets to use as shawls."

Doing as she asked, Paul reined in the horse to allow the wagon to come closer.

He asked Jim for the smaller blankets that the ladies could use as shawls. Looking at the two ladies huddled together, Jim suddenly realized how self-conscious they might be since they had no change of clothes. He dug into the bottom of the chest where he knew there were several fairly new small afghans and, handing them over to Paul, said, "These should serve the purpose."

The one afghan in blue and pink, obviously made for a new baby, and the other in yellow and green, certainly gave the ladies a lift, protecting them from the east wind.

Within a half hour they arrived at one of the homes built in Miakka several years before. Of board and batten construction, it had a long porch across the front, a chimney on the south side and a lean-to shed at its back. Chickens ran around the yard, as did two half-clothed children in long pants and long-sleeved cotton shirts.

The woman of the house, Mary Karr, came out smoking a corn cob pipe. Smiling and welcoming them to Miakka, she said, "The Captain's messenger reached us yesterday to say two teachers would be arriving in a few days. You'll be staying here. You men folk



need to go down this road until you find a house being built. That will be your place." She waved the men on, and invited the women to have tea.

"We have no luggage," explained Evie Jean, "because we left our last residence under stressful circumstances. We escaped from very cruel treatment."

"Don't you worry none. I happen to have clothing left behind by family members. When others could not tolerate the heat, they just went back North, leaving summer things here. I have a suitcase my sister left to me. She died just as I was leaving for this trip three years ago. I haven't opened the valise since. So let's see, after tea, what we can find for you two girls."

Showing them the house, she said, "That back room has two cots. You can share the shelves for clothes and hang things up from the nails on the two by fours. That table can be used for your water pitcher and basin, too. And also as a desk. Just tell me if you need something and I'll do my best to get it for you."

They walked back to the table between the kitchen and the fireplace.

"What exquisite China, Miss Karr. Was this your mother's?"

"No, a wedding present when Yank and I got wed. My Uncle Frank sent it to my home in New York City from his in Chicago." She refilled the tea cups and passed some fresh bread and pineapple preserves to them. "Yank and our sons Bruce and Calvin went out with the herd this morning. There's a cattle sale next week so we want to mark the animals we've decided to sell to make it easy to get them separated. All the men play Cowboys for a few days to get the cattle sold before winter sets in. Then we don't have to worry none 'bout feed."

"Come on, let's see what we can find for you, perhaps a few shirtwaists. You need cool cotton now." She unlocked the suitcase and threw open the cover.

"What beautiful lingerie," said Evie Jean. "This is nice enough for a trousseau."

"Well, she bought her things in Fifth Avenue shops and some through a French Magazine Salon de la Mode. She was always dressed in the most fashionable clothes, so of course she couldn't stand Miakka. Women here wear men's clothing most of the time when herding cows. Or we have the same old gingham skirts. Nothing fancy in this heat, you'd wilt before noon."

"Here is a nice sheer cotton blouse. See if one of you could wear it," said Miss Karr.

Evie Jean tried it and looked good in it. It was gathered so it wasn't the kind of sheer you could see through.

Then Jane Marie found a navy blue skirt that fit her well.

Little by little as they opened the other luggage, there were all kinds of things they could use, from shoes to hair ribbons. As the evening wore on and the women talked, they got to like each other and really understand why they were there. The Beachmans to teach school, and Miss Karr to teach piano. And all three to teach Sunday School for older students in their teen years.

"I'm so glad you got here on a Friday evening. Now you can get settled in. I'll take you to the schoolhouse. It's not much now. We have the money, though, to build a new one by next September. If you want to wash, the soap is kept by the pump. Or you can bring in water, heat it on the stove, and wash in your room."

"What time do you rise in the morning?" asked Evie Jean.

"About six. Need to get the fire started to have a good breakfast and coffee. Now you can have tea at any time of day, but coffee in the morning. It's costly so I make just one pot a day."

"I have to check on Mrs. Bloodgood. She lost her baby last night. That will take me about an hour and then we can talk again. In the meantime, do as you wish and make yourselves at home."

Taking their new clothes back to their room, the girls got settled in and washed. Looking out the window, Evie Jean saw two young men ride up and tie their horses to a fence post out back.

Meanwhile, Al and Paul were talking with Jim and Titus about the number of cows the Company had acquired, the new family that had joined them, and the Johnsons' settling in Lakewood.

"Jim, before we go in to see your folks, I need to talk to you alone first." Paul was trying to do this as easy as possible.

Looking at the seriousness of Paul's face, Jim said, "Let Titus in on it, too."

The three of them sat down near an old pine tree. Paul hesitated and then said, "This is the hardest thing I have ever done, Jim. We had a bad time at one point on the trip. Yellow Fever hit the region we were in hard, especially some of the younger folks."

Before he could say another word, Jim said, "Did Amos get it? Are you going to tell me Amos died out there on the trail? God, where is he buried? Who else got it? Anyone left weak now and unable to work? What about Hildegard and my Ma?"

"Slow down. Yes, your Dad had it, too. Took a long time to recuperate. Your Ma nursed him back to health. Yes, we lost Amos. He's buried at the Fort in a special section of the Cemetery. It was hard on everyone. His friends sang to him before he went on, and then at his service. There is one more thing, Jim. Your Ma isn't up to doin' a lot. She lost a baby. So we all help her."

Jim sat motionless. Not a word came from his lips.

The young men sat, their heads hanging down, unfolding hands over and over again. A tear came down the side of Jim's cheek. He was biting his lips trying not to cry when suddenly he just burst, long wrenching sobs, deep breaths, then the wrenching sobs over and over again. It was about twenty minutes before anyone tried to speak again.

Paul, speaking softly and placing an arm around Jim's shoulder, said, "I told your folks I would take you to the grave site when you wanted to since your Ma can't take a long trip now. I'm sorry, Jim. I know how much Amos meant to you."

The young men sat in absolute silence. There was nothing they could say now. No way to bring Amos back to his adoring big brother. It was obvious Jim was not going to get to see his family tonight. He needed time to collect his thoughts and gain some composure.

They walked over to Miss Karr's and asked, "M'am, could we leave our wagon here tonight and sleep on your porch? We have all we need. Jim's in no shape to see his folks tonight."

"You young men also need some food, so get yourselves around the back of the house to wash and I'll set out some chicken and potatoes for you. Guess you could use some coffee about now, too."

As she busied herself in the kitchen, the two teachers came out to help set the table. Evie Jean asked, "Do you have a lot of other duties to help the settlement move more easily, Miss Karr?"

"I get called on to deliver babies. I'm not a nurse, just experienced in it. I can lance boils and bandage up a wound and set a bone if it's a simple fracture. And recently I learned to Divine for water with a forked apple tree branch."

"Now how did you learn to do something as scientific as that?"

"Jane Marie, I never thought of it as a science. It's something we need to do out here. I watched a few men from Scotland in Sarasota one day. When they stopped for beer, I picked up their twig and walked around with it. Would you believe it almost jumped out of my hands right over where they found water, too?"

"Is this something you get paid for or is it considered a sacred thing," asked a very serious Evie Jean. "I can't believe your talent."

"Well, good drinking water is scarce. I get paid off in a good water supply, not money, which is worth a lot more, don't you agree?"

"I would say you need money, too, Miss Karr. How are you able to buy your supplies: molasses, sugar, salt, kerosene, Witch Hazel and stuff?" Evie Jean was adamant. "It's time for us to get paid. We should not have to do things for free."

Changing the subject, Miss Karr asked, "Have either of you ever delivered a baby? I could teach you if you aren't too squeamish. It would be good to have several of us able to do deliveries. Do you agree with me?" She was looking at the women hoping she would get a positive response, but neither of them replied right away.

After a few minutes, the teachers went out on the porch to talk and there instead met the men again. They could tell something was wrong and walked back into the kitchen.

"Those young lads seem pretty gloomy. Is something wrong that we don't know about?"

"Paul just told Jim his little brother died of Yellow Fever on the trail. He adored the boy and is taking it very hard. He doesn't want to see his family till the morning so they will camp out on the porch tonight. Why don't you tell them their supper's ready?"

Once the men were at the table, the three women sat on the porch. It was Jane Marie who opened the subject of Health again. "I took a few courses on Health. We need some more tools in these backwoods to help us. But we could learn from you whatever you have already done. There's a Frenchman named Louis Pasteur who's studying how diseases are carried from one person to another. I want to know more about his work. It wouldn't hurt

us to have a few books either. A Library of sorts. We could do a lot more if we knew how."

Miss Karr excused herself, asking the teachers to clean up the few dishes the men had used, as she headed out for the Bloodgood home. She went out on the porch and beckoned to Jim.

As he came to her, she said, "Jim, I know your pain over your brother's death is hard on you. But I think you could help yourself and your Mother both tonight if you accompanied me to her bedside. She is grieving again for a child she lost. She needs to see you now."

"Yes'um. I'm glad you spoke up. I've been thinking the same. Do you need a lantern? Or should we take the wagon?"

"I wouldn't mind a ride, Mr. Jim." Together they got into the wagon and went down the road and around the bend to the new house being built at a fork in the road.

"Jim, pull in over by that tree. The horses can get some fresh grass there," said Miss Karr.

Rev. Jim Bloodgood came out with a lantern. "I prayed you would get in tonight, son. Your Mom sure needs to look at you and know you are healthy and back in the family fold once more. She worried the whole time we let you take that raft down the Gulf."

The men shook hands and father slapped son on the shoulders. No one noticed the tears streaming down their cheeks, but the two of them. In the silence of the porch and by lantern light, Rev. Carl bowed his head and said,

"Thank you Lord for bringing our son safely to the family again.  
We ask you now to let him be the tonic his Mother needs to restore  
her body and her mind. Let his Spirit lift hers, we pray. Amen"

Opening the door for young Jim, Rev. Carl led him to the bedroom where his mother lay weeping; quietly going to his wife's side, laying a hand on her shoulder, he said, "Mother, you have a son here who needs to see you tonight as much as you need to see him."

Greta turned over. Looking up at Jim, she reached her arms out to him. Quickly he got to his knees and wrapped his arms around her. In that position they wept, silently, for Amos and each other. Slightly shaking now in his other's arms, he said, "No one can ever take his place in my heart, Ma. No one. He was such a joy. He wanted so much to do

everything with me. I can't believe he's in the cold ground not running after me to show me some new discovery, a bug, a bird, something he made. Life was so beautiful through his eyes. I pray I will one day have a son like him for you to love and for me to love again. A boy to teach, and to watch him grow to enjoy life as Amos did. Through his eyes we learned so much. He was my brother, son, and friend. I liked being his big brother."

Greta just sat listening. Her son's thoughts soothed her, calmed her heart. As her son's thoughts were shared with her, she felt whole again. He left her a boy, himself, and returned a grown, thoughtful, loving young man. So much like his Pa, she thought. She laid herself back against the pillows and fell asleep holding fast to his hand. Jim, with his head against the side of her body, fell asleep on the floor beside her. Their tears had ceased. The healing had begun.

Jim was holding tightly to his mother's hand as though he would never again leave her side. He never admitted to Titus how much he missed his family. Although his Pastor had predicted that he and Lent would be men, no longer boys, when they finished the trip by raft to Florida, Jim realized something else now. This experience taught him more about being a family man, responsibilities and protecting the women folk.

He and Lent both wanted to be cattlemen with their own ranches and their own herds like their fathers. But something new had been added to Jim's goals: he wanted a wife, a family of his own, and a house he could settle down in.

As he dozed off at his mother's side, he wondered if all this was happening because of what he went through: the women he'd met who certainly could all become good wives some day for somebody, or was it because of the Lawson family and their three daughters that he met in Tampa Bay?

The house was very quiet when Rev. Carl came in from the porch. Looking into the bedroom an hour or so later, he found his wife and son as they slept. Silently he knelt to pray:

"Heavenly Father, Lord of us all, we give thanks now for bringing this son home to his grieving Mother's side; bringing him when she needed him most as she is torn by the loss of Amos. Thou has brought us to this spacious land perhaps to help others. I feel your spirit working in me again, Lord. Am I not to be the preacher you once called? Am I now called to some other duty? A man follows, a man is called, a man will do your will.

I remember so well how you stood with us. We escaped all the demons but one Lord, thank you for your guidance. Like the Samaritan of years ago we remember to give thanks for being spared. Amos is with you now. We know you can answer all his questions. We thank you again for the time we had with him. Amen"

In the days ahead, Jim and Lent had new duties as they expected. In the days ahead Jim and Lent were building settlers' homes, while the men of the Company were working together fencing in corrals for their breeding stock. The ranch homes were few and far between. Perhaps as many as 15 families were now settled between Pine Level, the county seat, and Miakka.

In the meantime, Sara Sota, as it was then called, was beginning to grow into a fishing village known for its mullet. The Indians had caught a variety of small critters in the Town which settlers soon learned how to dress and cook: possum, squirrel, wildcats, rabbits, and snakes. There was a plentiful supply of foods the Spaniards had planted, and orange trees brought into the area in 1846 by H.V. Snell from Cuba. President Chester Arthur deeded 100 acres of land on Siesta Key to Thomas Gordon Edmonson. Land near the Gulf had jumped to \$1.25 an acre. Fresh vegetables and wild asparagus began to attract tourists. But in Miakka, Heart of Palm was the favorite dish.

While schools and churches were being organized locally, the Reconstruction period which followed the Civil War had begun: it was an attempt to restore relations between the Confederate States and the Union.

Times were tumultuous!

In January 1865 Congress proposed the 13th Amendment to the Constitution which would free the slaves.

In March 1865, the Freedmen's Bureau was formed to protect the interests of Southern blacks

The American Civil War officially ended on April 9, 1865.

President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated a week later.

The North grieved its hero president.

The South faced enormous problems which led to many Southerners taking off for Florida. The first government problem was how to reinstate the 11 states that had seceded

from the Union. And then there was the question of what rights should be granted the four million slaves who had been freed.

By 1870, all 11 states had rejoined the Union; at the same time, Congress gave slaves the right to vote. This condition or attitude did not last. The North lost interest in Reconstruction which set in motion the gradual takeover of the Southern states by people who had been sympathetic to the Confederacy. The Black population was denied its newly gained right to vote; sometimes by the threat of death.

Violence was rampant throughout the land, North and South. In 1865/66, whites murdered 5,000 Southern blacks; during race riots white mobs killed 46 blacks in Memphis and 34 in New Orleans. In 1866, a secret assassination society known as the Ku Klux Klan was founded in Tennessee.

In the next ten years, Sara Sota was wild: land owners were killing each other over property and water rights. Shortly thereafter, the Sara Sota Assassination Society was organized by white land owners.

Several people had been killed in Sara Sota including Post Master Charles E. Abbe, one of the largest land owners, a man who was greatly respected for his democratic ways. Many of the cattlemen joined together to bring the vigilante association to an end.

The effort to catch the murderers was specifically set in Miakka's wetlands where the culprits were hiding out. Ranchers could see fires at night, watched as the murderers caught fish, and when they looked exhausted, went out to talk to them and asked them to surrender. Dent Murphy was given credit for bringing some of them in. Several outlaws were arrested and brought to trial. At this time, people were writing national leaders asking for law enforcement agencies and federal courts to be established in Southwest Florida towns. Smuggling and fires of unknown origin which burned hotels and other businesses may also have been part of the land grabbing mania that encompassed the entire state, but Sara Sota in particular.

The national publicity generated by Post Master Charles Abbe's murder was front page news in The New York Times. People who had invested in mortgage associations in Sarasota added their voices to the pressure put on Washington to establish law and order in what became the Southland's Wild West. Nothing was missing, Sara Sota men wore the boots and cowboy paraphernalia of the Wild West, including Stetson hats.



As Miakka grew, its women traveled into Sara Sota for shopping until the roads became unsafe. Again, the Sara Sota Council decided new roadbeds were needed if the town was to grow. It also developed a system of canals to drain the land after each storm for they spent half the Spring wading through knee deep water.

Miakka's growth was evident as it stopped worshipping in neighboring Sardis and built its first church, which was blown down in a hurricane. The second attempt, built on land donated by two of the founding fathers, and a parsonage, were built on Miakka Road facing east on the highest land in what was to become Sarasota County.

All the furniture was made by the settlers. When the high-backed pews were finished, it was reported that one or two of the men, including a preacher, took great pleasure in walking the narrow backs of the pews while singing hymns.

This was not an easy time for Methodist Episcopal clergy. Money was scarce. They had to work their own farms in order to feed their families. But they were also paid off with a leg of deer, a side of beef, or a few chickens or a dozen eggs, depending on what the parishioners were able to raise.

## CHAPTER TEN

### MIAKKA TEN YEARS LATER

#### THE YEAR 1875

"Can we be comfortable out here on the porch, Kathleen? Or would this best be done indoors? I can throw the dogs out of the house, and the kittens too, if you'd rather be inside today. I want to make sure we give you everything you need. It isn't every day I agree to sit for a portrait with Kathleen Seagrave, the best portrait artist in the South."

"Actually, Rev. Bloodgood, the light is better outdoors. And may I say, it isn't often I get the opportunity to paint the portrait of a 60-year-old cattle baron." Seems to me you need the warmth of the sun, the cool breezes, the smell of orange blossoms, and the sound of the cattle and horses in the background to help you relax."

"Yep, that always helps, you're right, but actually just sitting here, looking out over the land, seeing what we've accomplished in the last ten years, puts me in the best mood of all: contentment sneaks in and calms me right down."

"That's good to know because you have to be in the right frame of mind. I have to capture the Spirit of the ranch and its influence on your life. I hope you'll visualize those good memories as I sit and paint."

Getting her pallet fixed with the flesh tones and others needed for the portrait that day, Kathleen Seagrave looked at Carl for a long silent moment. She admired this man. He was not only her pastor and a great preacher, he was her family's friend.

"Obviously you have forgotten, I warned you that I would be interviewing you as I do this. Remember?"

"Yes, I do remember. You said something like 'it's a technique you have taught yourself, a way of capturing a life,' I think you said."

"Right! I need to bring your life and your belief 'that society has a tendency to improve itself' into your eyes. I want everyone who looks at the finished portrait to know what kind of man you are just by looking at those eyes."

"Do you see what I mean, or at least understand it, Rev. Bloodgood?"

"I do. I really do. I once saw a portrait of Christ that did something like that to me. I was holding it in my hands. It was in a filigree frame. It caught me completely off guard."

It was an original. The face was so sad, yet accepting of its fate, and forgiving, all in one expression. I have looked at it only twice. The second time, the disheveled hair, the droop of the eyelids, the strength of the chin, gave me more insight into the character of the man.

"A man who really wanted to stay here on earth. Yet he had to obey, he had to leave, leave what he had learned to love. How many folks have you known who have had to make that decision? Soldiers as they go to war, perhaps?

"Well any way, not many. We feel what you're talking about when a loved one dies, or when we've worked to accomplish something and have it burned to the ground. We saw it happen here in the Indian Wars and again, throughout the South, in the Civil War, over and over again. Hearts were broken, minds destroyed, energy wasted by the fury and anger of the flames."

The screen door opened from the house; it was Samantha, Hildegard's daughter.

"I've been listening to you, Grandpa. If I sit quietly here by the brine barrel, could I listen and watch while you talk and Miss Kathleen paints?"

"Well, how's my favorite eight-year-old granddaughter? Of course you can listen. If our artist here does all she hopes to do with me, you'll learn a lot about family history."

"Grandpa, I overheard you say 'hearts were broken and minds destroyed.' Tell us more about that."

"Those are the thoughts I want to hear too, Samantha. Keep talking, Rev. Bloodgood. It's time to start. I want to sketch you as you're sitting, talking to me. But I need to know how you talk to yourself.

"I believe what people say to themselves governs the way they feel and the way they act." Kathleen was adamant on this.

Carl looked up sharply at this young woman who had come into his life so unexpectedly because Greta wanted a 'portrait' of her man to hang in the dining room of their new home. "You are a strong believer, aren't you Kathleen? So am I. 'As a man thinketh in his heart, so he is. Proverbs 23:7,'" quoted Jim.

"Might have known you'd be quotin' the Bible at me'; well, this is how I see it, believe it and feel it: what I love most is Psalm 139:

"Search me O God and know my heart.  
Try me O God and know my thoughts  
And see if there be any wicked way in me  
The heart is the Center of our intellectual life  
Feelings follow thought."

She surprised Carl with that. "Good one, and many people agree it's their favorite, too. It's a plea. Well, perhaps I know now why you paint such interesting portraits. You go looking beyond the outer man to find the source of our inner glow."

"Rev. Bloodgood, I don't mean to interrupt your thoughts, but could you just turn a bit to the right. There, now, I have the light just right."

"Well, to add to what you have been saying, Sir, I just imagine what a finished portrait will look like before I start." She said that looking at his facial characteristics, his stiff clergy collar and the old gold cross and chain that hung from his neck.

"Imagination is a creature function, we become what we imagine ourselves to be. And I think you become, on my canvas, what I hear and imagine your life to have been."

"My fantasy helps me rescue you from your life. I help you to momentarily escape. That helps me create a masterpiece. If, however, I see in your face fear, negativity, hate, anxiety, cruelty, sadistic thoughts, those things that bring about self-condemnation, I must work all the harder in the interview."

"And what do you do exactly to counteract the negativity?" asked Rev. Bloodgood.

"First, I encourage you to speak of your strengths. Then, I draw you out, unlock your past, tear down the barriers that block your ability to change. I don't want a significant change, just an ability to tell your own story truthfully. So many people deceive themselves and then believe their fairy tales and tell them to others as though they are the Gospel truth. I don't need that."

"I want to know about your will power, and your imagination, both. Your will and my imagination could be in conflict. However, from my life experiences I've learned imagination never loses; it always wins."

"Well that's exactly how we got here, ten years ago, after three men in the family died."

"As the War Between the States got more heated and plantations were left to be burned by the Union Army, I imagined what it would be like to live peacefully. Peacefully, in some new place, where war had not divided people, nor destroyed land. Where a man's

effort was appreciated, where he was known as a workman, honest, trustworthy and kind to all. Known and valued for what he did, not who his family was and how much they owned."

"Grandpa, was the family known in North Carolina for what it owned?" It was Samantha looking puzzled as she asked the question.

"Yes, Sam. We had slaves, a tremendous holding of land, cattle and cotton fields. I didn't agree with slave holding. I wanted to stay with the cattle business and not grow any more cotton 'cause I couldn't do it without cheap labor, and I knew it."

"So, did you leave peacefully and separate from the family or did you have a feud?"

"No, Samantha, we are not that kind of folk. The Bloodgoods are not feuding people, my dear. But we had strong feelings that divided the family. So, we democratically called a family meeting and took a vote. Lent and I came to Florida as a result of that vote, bringing other friends with us, and joining with Wagon Master Fletcher Brown as we went. The family gave us a small share of breeding stock, supplied us with a Conestoga wagon and enough money to purchase land to get us started here.

"Our worst experience was fighting Yellow Fever and losing Amos to it before we got to Myakka. The second was Greta losing our child. That miscarriage was the worst for us as a couple: both of us suffered without ever turning to the other for help. Being able to lean on each other was a strength we developed as a couple, something that had made our marriage so strong and which strengthened us as individuals. For awhile we lost the hope we had for a better future."

"Do you know why that happened?" asked Kathleen.

"Because we saw ourselves as selfish, greedy people, sacrificing our children in order to gain a new way of life. But that new way kept eluding us. Yes, we tried to escape the other life, but at what cost? Greta had a breakdown. Threw herself into physical labor. Whatever she picked up in the morning, she did all day long.

"I, on the other hand, was no help. I withdrew. I had little use for anyone or anything. For the first time in my life, I was mad at God."

"Grandpa! What a thing to say. Did God scold you? Did he talk to you and help you? How did you get to be the way you are? How?"

"Long story. It's time for me to get into cooler clothes. And I'll find us some lemonade, too." The Rev. Carl Bloodgood was not enjoying this questioning, being forced to look back and being asked "why" was not easy. In fact, there would be questions, he knew, which he still had no answer for.

Greta came out carrying a tray of glasses with a tall blue-glazed pitcher of cool water, a smaller crystal pitcher of freshly squeezed lemon juice, and a yellow bowl of honey that always sat on the kitchen table. With a wooden spoon, she took some honey and placed it in a glass, then poured the lemon juice in, then the water, stirred it all and handed the first glass to Kathleen.

"My, that is refreshing. Thank you very much. Won't you sit and join us for awhile?" asked Kathleen. "It may help your husband relax even more."

"No, this is something you will have to do, get him to relax."

Samantha came out holding her dear grandfather's hand, saying, "Oh look, how good Granma has been to us, lemonade and honey to sweeten it. How good can that be?"

As they relaxed and talked about the land and cows, Kathleen turned and asked, "I don't know how all the children married so well, and to people they like. How did that happen in this wilderness?"

"Well, let's start with Samantha's Ma and Pa. When our son Amos was dying up at the Fort, soldiers who had already survived an attack of Yellow Fever were assigned to the family as we were locked outside the Fort. They brought us food and water, ran messages back and forth, and became like family to us.

"Such a one was Sam Stafford. He even danced with Hildegarde on the hard packed clay roadway outside the walls of the Fort the night they welcomed the wagon train with a social and dance. He didn't want her to feel left out. The music was soft and very beautiful. She was only sixteen and engaged to a boy named Otto, in the Union Navy. He was killed in action. After we arrived in Myakka, and when he could, Sam visited Hildegarde. When the war was over, they were married and stayed here with us to help run the ranch.

"Samantha was our first grandchild. The first of the new generation born in Florida."

"What were the biggest obstacles you faced in starting the ranch? Did you lose many cattle?" asked Kathleen as she started to paint what she had sketched of his face. She was

feeling better about the painting now as Jim sat in an open-necked shirt. She just didn't like the idea of painting him in his clergy collar; she never got past thinking of him as a cattleman, except on Sunday.

"In fact we did lose cattle. But by then we had bred at least 40 new heifers a year. It was a fever brought on by ticks. We learned how to dip the cows to kill them. It was a mammoth undertaking. Here in Myakka, the Carltons and other ranchers perfected the tick dip that saved the cattle industry in Florida."

He sat thinking for awhile and then said, "As I look back on it, the greatest obstacles had to do with getting goods out this far. No one had a regular run to Myakka. We had to do our own carting. It made us a very independent lot.

"Like getting those first five windows for the house. They were ordered before we left Tampa. The sloop never was found. We had to re-order from a mill on the East Coast. As Sarasota and Manatee ports got more boat traffic, we got goods shipped in but again had to pick it up.

"There was one fella who ran a boat with supplies, up the Myakka, to Venice Landing. After the rainy season he could occasionally come into Myakka landing, but that was only in the spring and summer months. It wasn't like the steamers that came up the St. John's River. We didn't have the trade, the current or the depth of water needed to do that. So almost everything we ordered came in somewhere else and we brought it overland to Myakka."

"What about health problems? Or is that too painful to talk about?" Kathleen thought to herself, I may have gone too far this time.

"Fortunately we had several good nurses with us most of the time, trained midwives, and one herbalist who knew Indian methods for healing. And of course the Scotch were good at this too once they arrived in Sarasota.

"Just this year in fact, on April 11, 1874, my 27-year-old son Jim and his wife Ruth Lawson, an herbalist and midwife from Tampa, had twins. What a celebration that was."

Samantha spoke up now, "You never heard such a ruckus in your life. The cousins were shooting off fireworks, the grandparents were shooting off guns out over the river, and the little ones were beating drums, playing horns and flutes. We had a parade up and down Myakka Road from breakfast time that morning until dinner time."

"Twins. We couldn't believe it, said Carl. "She didn't look too big, not like our old cows. We can always tell when they are carrying twins. But Ruth gave us no inkling. It was Greta who once said she 'felt too many feet' kicking."

"So did they move in with you?"

"Oh no. We had promised Jim and Titus their own land and homes if they helped us get the family down here. They came by raft after we left Tallahassee. They have a small ranch on the south side of the river on the big eastern bend. They have some cattle and a string of horses. They tried to breed llamas without much success.

"They built a two-story house in time for the twins' arrival and for their tenth anniversary.

"It's Hildegard's husband who's in business for himself. A land surveyor. They have a small ranch that's all part of the one big spread. Sam Stafford has been as much like a son to me as anyone could ask for."

"Tell her about Titus, Grandpa. Tell her about Titus and Jane Marie. Oh Miss Kathleen, they had the most romantic days, courting and singing to each other. They were so happy they made everyone else happy. You never saw a happier lady than Jane Marie. She was so in love. She even lit candles on the porch so they could sit out in the moonlight and not get bit by mosquitoes."

"Yes," added Jim, "They have been married six years. No children yet. She teaches school in Myakka, and he is studying Law. I think he wants to run for State Senate from the County. But they raise hay for all the ranches that sometimes need it in cold weather."

"What about the other Beachman girl? Aren't there two cousins who came to teach?"

"Yes, you're thinking of Evie Jean. She found her true love in our wagon master's son, Paul Fletcher Brown. And what a pair they are. They have enchanted everyone with their Elizabethan dramas. She has lost two babies and is now expecting again. She's in her eighth month and doing well. This time they made her take it easy and stay off her feet.

"While Paul has a small spread and raises horses and milk cows, his big push this year is to open a Play House in Sarasota. There are now many more people of means in the city. Europeans are used to theater and opera, more than we are. Easterners also expect some form of professional entertainment. So Paul stands a chance of doing what he loves best, staging plays.



"The Scots are golfers, so naturally a golf course is going to be a great attraction, however, not everyone wants to be out in the heat day and night. Paul has found a few Easterners who are willing to put up the money for the theater or an Opera House."

"Let's take a break and walk around a bit, Rev. Bloodgood. I am dying to ask you my next question, but I don't want to offend you by bringing up memories that may be very unpleasant."

"That means you want to know how the family survived after the Civil War was over when the girls fell in love with Confederate soldiers, when we were avowed Union Army supporters. Am I right?"

Kathleen was being careful here. She could already see the scowl on his face. She was well aware that the family was of two minds: they fought against slavery, and then, when the war was over, tried to forgive those who were on the other side. Being of two minds was not something everyone was willing to talk about. There was no dualism here; that would take another two generations.

"We were not as hurt by the differences in thinking as we were by the differences in caring for the wounded. Somewhere around 12,000 of the 30,000 Northern men died in Andersonville, the Confederate prison hospital set up in southwestern Georgia. The mothers and sisters who attempted to care for family men and had to watch them die of infections, without adequate medical care, were never the same. Some of those women were mentally destroyed by what they witnessed. Others became bitter and resentful. Never wanted a non-Southerner in their homes. Northern hospitals weren't much better.

"When Captain Stafford asked for Lillie Norberg's hand, the sisters were upset. They came and asked for my help. After many discussions between all concerned, it was agreed that if Capt. Stafford made his home here in Florida, instead of returning with his bride to his North Carolina home, the family would support the marriage.

"Captain Stafford spirited Lillie Norberg away from the Company shortly after their wedding. When his family opened a hotel in Tallahassee, she enjoyed playing hostess to the rich and famous as they came for the winter season from all over the world. She occasionally comes back to Myakka with their two children, William and Paul, another set of twins.

"But the Captain made one mistake. He brought his mother and grandmother from North Carolina to live with them." Jim Bloodgood looked across the grasslands for a second, with the saddest look in his eyes, that Kathleen felt like weeping for him, something few men would ever do in public.

"Two more bitter women I have never met. They have made life for Lillie sheer Hell, calling her 'a Union Whore, cousin of a baby killer'. They never let up on her. The Captain finally moved them down to Tampa and hired two black women to care for them.

"His attempt to help his own kin established a home for other Southern women who had means, but no kin folk to care for them. They have kept their Southern traditions, but reality is not one of their strong suits."

"What a sad and remarkable story. Is the Captain doing anything else?"

"Well, there is a National Health Commission attempting to set up health standards for all hospitals; he serves on that Board. Basically he is a writer. He hopes to own a Tampa paper that he is now editing. Money is all that's holding him back. But I'm sure he'll get a loan. His Army record, his ability to have kept the two sides from firing on each other, when they sat looking right down each other's throats across the Manatee River, was a miracle. It will help him get what he needs."

They were walking along a creek bed when an alligator splashed into it ahead of them. Kathleen asked, "What about these natural armies of terror: alligators, spiders, snakes and such. How much trouble were they?"

"Once everyone learned to shoot, carry a gun, and never gave a gator a chance, we had them under control a bit. Our dogs helped a lot there, warning us if we were in danger. The same with snakes. But the spiders killed a few, not in our family, but among our neighbors. Mosquitoes were our worst enemy, bringing fever every year.

"Walter and John Brown married Rebecca and Rachel Lawson, the twins. They had met when Lawson came to Myakka to talk to Carl about political plans for voting in statehood in Florida. They were the family who had been so helpful to Titus and Jim when they came down by raft on the Gulf.

"They made their homes in Sarasota. The two brothers opened a branch supply store of Lawson's. It's over twenty miles to Sarasota from Myakka but at least once a month the women get together for shopping and make the trip by horseback. From time to time they

take the wagon in, but after they got caught in a tornado, lost the wagon and the horse, they prefer to ride in. They are great horsemen, all of them.

"Jane Marie and Titus are a special couple, too. Not married as long as the others, but they certainly enjoy each other.

"Say, look whose coming down the road this morning. It's William and Paul."

The whole family went out to meet the carriage as they pulled into the drive.

Bouncing from the carriage they ran to their grandfather shouting, "We got permission Gramps, we got permission from Pa, if you give yours."

"Well now, I'm glad you got permission for something, but how about telling me what it's all about. What am I suppose to say YEAH to?"

"Why to a raft, Gramps. We want to build a raft like Uncle Titus and Uncle Jim did and go sailing down the Myakka to the Gulf and then to Cuba."

"Cuba, hey, now that would be an adventure, wouldn't it?" laughed Carl Bloodgood as he smiled at his grandsons. They walked up on to the porch, sat down in the big rockers, as Carl said, "Let's hear your plans for this adventure: who's going to cut the logs – who's going to teach you to fish and cook - who's going to supply the maps, and where will you get the money? Why Cuba? How about Key West first time out?"

"Pa said first we have to mark the trees we're going to cut for the raft. Since we have to grow some and the trees will too, by the time we are 15 we can start building the raft. Ma said she would let us cook on Saturdays, and we thought we could work for you in the summer when school is out. In our spare time we are learning to fish and clean it to eat it. We haven't asked, but I think Uncle Titus will help us with maps. How does that sound?" asked Paul.

"Well planned." Carl smiled at the boys' enthusiasm. Ruffling their curly heads, he said, "Adventures, adventures, always adventures. Each generation has its adventures!"



