COMINGS AND GOINGS
by S. L. Snyder

Timeline: November and December 1873

The entire Sully/Quinn/Cooper/Cook family was at the station. Colleen, Andrew, Amanda and Matthew were leaving for San Francisco. There happened to be a medical and an attorney’s conference in the city at the same time. They had all agreed it would be a wonderful opportunity for them to go on a trip together and pursue business at the same time. While Colleen could go to the conferences with Andrew, she decided to spend the time with Amanda, shopping and seeing the sights. They would be gone for a week. They would be staying at one of Bob Peterson’s hotels (Amanda’s unofficial godfather). He was putting them in the hotel he lived in so he could watch out for them.

Michaela was quite nervous. Her children had never traveled this far without her. Denver was close enough for her to get to quickly if they had problems, but San Francisco……

“Michaela,” Sully whispered in her ear, “they’re grown up….they’ll be fine……they have each other and medical help all at the same time.” She smiled up at him, mostly at the thought he knew what she was thinking….feeling. Sully turned to Matthew, “Wire when ya get to San Francisco to let your ma know you arrived safely. She’s gonna worry the whole time.”

“Ma, we’ll be fine,” Colleen told her as she hugged Michaela.

“And Uncle Bob will make sure we’ll okay,” Amanda said.

“I know…..I’m not that worried…..”

“Yeah….right…..come’on, ma,” said Matthew, “I remember how you were if Colleen didn’t wired whenever she went back to school in Denver. Don’t worry, Sully, we’ll let ya know…..if we don’t, you ain’t gonna have much rest!”

“Thanks. Appreciate that,” Sully replied, laughing at Michaela.

“Hey, little brother, we’ll bring ya back something. Anything ya want?”

“Maybe a model ship…..but only if you have room.”

“We’ll look for one. And how about you, Miss Katie,” Matthew said as he swung her into his arms. Katie giggled and hugged her big brother. “We’ll have to find ya something!”

As the train pulled out, Sully stood behind Michaela and put his arms around her. “They’re gonna have such a good time.”

“I know….I know…..”

That night was a restless one for Michaela, even with Sully soothing her. In fact, until they received the telegram from Matthew on Friday, Michaela slept very little. Sully had told Horace about it and as soon as it came in, he ran down to the clinic with it. That night, Michaela had a sound sleep in Sully’s arms.

When the train pulled into the station in San Francisco, Bob Peterson was waiting on the platform. He was anxious to see Amanda, and the rest of the family. As they came off the train, he could see she was just fine.

“Uncle Bob!” And she was in his arms.

“You look wonderful, my dear. And you too, Colleen. Why, what two handsome couples! I’m honored to be in your presence.” They laughed. “Come now….show John and Peter your luggage so they can take it to the coach. We’ll get you set up in your hotel rooms.”

“Bob, I gotta send a telegraph home right away so Dr. Mike will stop worrying.”

“There’s an office here in the station on our way out. I figure you kids are tired, so you can rest the rest of
today and have supper at the hotel. While Matthew and Andrew are at their conferences, Amanda you can
take Colleen to see the city. John and the buggy are at your disposal. Tomorrow night we will have dinner at
the Wharf and Sunday night we have tickets to a play. I believe your conferences are tomorrow, half of
Sunday and all day Monday and you’re leaving Wednesday. So I thought on Tuesday we can spend the day
sightseeing if you’d like.”

With the others nodding their heads, Amanda said, “That all sounds wonderful. Thank you Uncle Bob.”

It was a clear, brisk Saturday morning and McKay was on his way up to Palmer Creek to see Cloud Dancing.
They had become friends in the last month, since McKay’s move to Colorado Springs. In fact he had gained
a number of friends and he knew it was because of his friendship with Sully, Michaela and their family.
Apparently the town folk decided if Sully and Michaela could forget the past, sell him part of their land, be
friends with him, they could do no less. He had admired Michaela from the time they first met, for her
dedication to her family, her friends and her patients; for her unwavering belief in her husband and her
desire to help others. Because of the things that had happened at Palmer Creek and after, before he got to
know Sully, he thought her dedication to him was misplaced. After all she was a beautiful, vibrant woman,
cultured, a doctor, and at the time, in McKay’s eyes, Sully was a traitor and a murderer.

He laughed to himself….how things had changed….or how he had changed. Even in the Army, he had never
had the kind of friends that Sully, Michaela and Cloud Dancing had become. He enjoyed being with them,
talking with them, learning from them. A few years ago if any one had told him there was a life outside the
Army, he would have been appalled. He’d saved just about all his Army wages, using only enough to get by
on, and had enough to buy the land, to live on for quite awhile and to build his house. He’d set up a tent on
the land and everyday worked on his new house. He built a corral first, for the two horses he’d bought from
Robert E.

He had also developed a friendship with Matthew and that surprised him the most. Matthew held no hard
feelings over his resignation from his job as sheriff. And then there was Brian…..stopping by on his way to
town all the time, asking questions about the places McKay had been, always interested in everything. In
fact, Brian had published an article in the Gazette about McKay moving here. When he had time, Brian
would help with building the house.

Cloud Dancing was going to show him how to use a bow and arrow. He never carried his Army sidearm
anymore and had buried it near his tent. He didn’t want anyone to find it and had no place to keep it until
he finished the house and made a place for it. He carried his rifle with him just in case.

“Mornin’, Cloud Dancing.”

“A-ho, McKay. It is a fine morning, is it not?”

“Yeah…..but sure can tell winter is coming on,” he replied as he dismounted and tied his horse.

They spent a pleasant morning while McKay learned the fine points of using the bow and arrow. “You have
learned well,” Cloud Dancing told him. “I made the bow and arrows for you….you should practice when you
can.”

McKay was pleasantly surprised at Cloud Dancing’s gift. “Thanks. I promise to practice and in a week or so,
show ya what I’ve learned. Maybe when you think I’m good enough, you and Sully would take me hunting?”

“I would be pleased to and I know Sully would enjoy it also.”

McKay rode slowly toward home, smiling and whistling. It had been a good day. Then he heard a horse
neigh, probably in response to his whistling. He followed the sound and in the trees saw a horse. He rode
over to it and was startled to realize it was Taffy, Brian’s horse. “Brian?” he called, but there was no
response. He looked closer at Taffy and saw faint signs of blood. He tied up the horses and started looking
for Brian. He followed the hoof prints that Taffy must have made. He walked maybe a quarter of a mile
when he came to a small bluff overlooking a stream. He looked down and saw Brian, on his back, in the
middle of the stream, apparently unconscious. He rushed down the slope and knelt by Brian.

He put his hand on Brian’s throat and felt a pulse. “Brian?” he said, gently shaking his shoulder. But there
was no response. There was blood on Brian’s head and right shoulder. Looking closer, McKay realized Brian
had been shot. He knew he had to get help and Cloud Dancing was closer than town. He gathered Brian up,
got to the horses, and propped Brian on Taffy as he mounted his horse. Then he took Brian in his arms, tying Taffy's reins to his saddlehorn, he set out for Palmer Creek.

Cloud Dancing looked up to see McKay returning, with another horse and carrying someone. As McKay got closer, he realized it was Brian. McKay handed Brian to him and quickly told him where and how he'd found Brian. They knelt down as Cloud Dancing quickly checked Brian over.

"The bullet is still in the shoulder. He is not awake because of the one that touched his head. Please go for Dr. Mike."

Without a word, McKay undid Taffy's reins from his horse, jumped on his horse and headed for town at breakneck speed. Sully was standing outside the clinic, holding Katie and talking with Jake and Hank, when McKay tore into town. "Sully!" he yelled. "Brian's been shot, he's up with Cloud Dancing, who sent me for Dr. Mike."

Jake took Katie as Sully turned and rushed into the clinic, calling for Michaela. Hank took off for the livery to get their wagon, returning just as Sully was heading for the livery. "Thanks, Hank." Sully got on the as Michaela came out of the clinic with her bag. Hank helped her up.

"I'll give Katie to Dorothy," Jake said.

"Thanks." Sully replied.

"McKay," said Hank, "who shot him?"

"Don't know," he responded as Sully and Michaela headed for Palmer Creek. "I was on my way home from visiting Cloud Dancing when I found his horse and then him. I reckon he'd been there awhile."

"Daniel ain't here right now, so can ya take me to where ya found him?" asked 'deputy' Hank.

"Sure. Come on."

Sully and Michaela arrived at Cloud Dancing's teepee. They rushed inside to find Brian laying on the blankets. Cloud Dancing had torn back his shirt to expose the shoulder wound and he was putting pressure on. "Dr. Mike, it did not go through. There was not much blood. His head is also hurt."

Michaela quickly assessed Brian's injuries. "I need to take the bullet out before take him to the clinic. I need hot water and light."

"I have heated water," said Cloud Dancing. "It is out on the fire."

"Will the outside light be enough?" Sully asked. "We can move him near the opening."

"Yes, that should do it."

Michaela quickly got her instruments out of the bag. And with Cloud Dancing holding the chloroform over Brian's nose and mouth, and Sully assisting her as she asked for things, she probed for and removed the bullet from Brian's shoulder. It came out smoothly, with very little blood. "He's lucky. It didn't hit anything major and was lodged in soft tissue. The head wound is more of a concern, although the bullet did not penetrate," she told them as she stitched up Brian's shoulder. She cleaned up the head wound and had to apply a few stitches where the bullet had left a furrow on his forehead.

"Brian said this morning he was coming up here. Did he ever make it?" Sully asked Cloud Dancing.

"No. I did not see him. Only McKay was here and he left before noon."

"Brian left home as we were leaving for the clinic. That means he had to have been out there about three hours." Sully glanced at Michaela to see tears pouring down her face. "Michaela?! Is he gonna be okay?"

"What?... Oh.....I think so. I just.....the thought of him laying out there, injured....."

"I know....I know." Sully put his arms around her and held on for a few minutes. "Now, honey, let's get him
inta town….to the clinic….okay?”

“Yes.”

“May I come also?”

“Of course, Cloud Dancing,” Michaela said, “Family is always welcome.”

When they arrived at the clinic, Sarah was sitting on the bench. She had heard about Brian and was very scared. She ran to the wagon when Sully stopped. She glanced at him, then looked up at Michaela, crying. “He’s alive, Sarah. I took a bullet out of his shoulder. But he is unconscious because of the head wound.” She said as Sully picked him up and carried him into the clinic, up to a recovery room. Cloud Dancing went to tell Dorothy while Michaela got down and put an arm around Sarah. “Come with me. You can sit with him.”

“Thank you, Dr. Mike. Mr. Slicker told me a little while ago when I was at the store. He said Mr. Lawson and Mr. McKay were riding up to where it happened. Mr. Lawson wants to find out who did it.” Sarah said as they walked into the clinic and headed up to Brian.

Outside the recovery room, Michaela stopped Sarah. “Let me make sure everything’s okay before you go in.” Sarah nodded. Michaela opened the door and went in. Sully was removing Brian’s clothes….his boots were on the floor. Michaela covered him with a sheet and blankets, checked his pulse and heart beat. “Sully, have Sarah come in.”

Sarah came over to the bed and took his hand, tears still running down her cheeks. Sully brought her a chair. She sat down. ”Thank you, Mr. Sully. She looked up at Michaela. ”Will he be okay?”

“I hope so. I’ve done all I can. Now we must wait, which is always the hardest part. You can help, Sarah, by being with him, talking to him. I believe when someone is in a coma, they can still hear the people they care about. Just talk about things you have done together, about school, things like that. We’ll be downstairs if you need us….if he wakes up….just call….I’ll be up in a little while.”

Sully and Michaela went downstairs. The minute she was in her office, she turned into his arms and started shaking. “We could have lost him….could still lose him.”

“Shhhh…..he’s strong……’member when he was little and ya had to operate? That was worse and he came through fine. We gotta believe he’ll be okay.” He hugged her tight and rubbed her back to comfort her.

Through the window, Sully saw Hank and McKay riding into town. ”Michaela, I wanna talk with Hank and McKay…they’re back...” he said, pointing toward the window. ”I’ll go with you.”

They stepped out as Hank and McKay rode up to the clinic.

"How is Brian?” McKay asked.

"He's still unconscious,” Michaela responded. “He did not lose a lot of blood. I think he'll be okay. But I won't know until he wakes up.”

"Can I talk with him then?” asked Hank.

"Certainly. But don't be surprised if he doesn't remember much. A head injury can make you forget things, usually the recent ones. "

"Did ya find anything out there?” Sully asked.

"Nope. But I ain't the best tracker. I think he was shot somewhere else and made it to the stream on Taffy. I was hopin' you'd go back with me and take a look.”

"Michaela?”

"Go, Sully. I'll be fine. I'll go sit with Sarah. I don't want her alone too long with Brian or she might start to get scared.”
Dorothy, Katie and Cloud Dancing had come up while they were talking. Katie reached out for her mother and Michaela picked her up.

"Michaela, I’d like to go sit with you." Dorothy said and Michaela nodded.

"Hank, I would like to go with you," said Cloud Dancing.

Hank looked at Cloud Dancing a moment....."Thanks....appreciate the help.”

Sully and Cloud Dancing borrowed horses from Robert E and along with McKay, rode out with Hank.

The father in Sully was seething. He wanted his hands around the throat of the person who shot his son. Cloud Dancing rode beside him, watching him. He knew his friend and how he would probably react if they found Brian’s attacker. Cloud Dancing wanted to be with Sully if that happened.....he knew he could stop Sully before anything bad happened.

They reached the stream where McKay had found Brian and he showed Sully where Taffy had been. Sully and Cloud Dancing found hoof prints coming to the edge of the bluff and stopping. They surmised the prints were Taffy’s and she had stopped at the edge, probably throwing Brian down the slope. Sully was thankful it wasn’t a long drop, only about ten feet. They started walking the track back, with Wolf at Sully’s side. After 15 minutes, they were close to the trail Brian would have been on and found where Taffy had broken into the brush. They came out on the trail some two miles away from where McKay was when he had heard Taffy neigh.

Sully stood on the spot where she broke from the trail. He slowly turned in all directions, scanning the area, more with his heart and head than with his eyes. On his third scan, he stopped, looking at a bluff maybe 500 hundred yards away. He focused on the bluff. “Cloud Dancing, McKay, stay here. Hank come with me,” he said as he started walking toward the bluff. They climbed the hill and on the other side found whiskey bottles and cartridges.

“Son-of-a-bitch!’ Hank exploded. “A drunk taking pot shots, I’ll bet!”

“Gotta hope that’s all it was. Hope it weren’t someone meaning to hurt Brian, or to get back at me.”

Hank picked up one of the bottles. “Damn. I think this is from my place! God, I’m sorry, Sully.”

“Ain’t your fault. You can’t control what someone does. But that it’s from your place may be good. Whoever bought it might show up again and be talking about shooting.”

“Sure hope so.” Hank said with a gleam in his eye as he collected the other bottles and cartridges and they headed back to the trail. They showed McKay and Cloud Dancing what they found and discussed their suspicions as they headed back to town.

Sully and Cloud Dancing came into Brian’s room. Michaela went to be held by her husband as Cloud Dancing walked over to Dorothy and took her hand. “Anything?” Sully asked.

“No. But his breathing is fine and his pulse is strong.”

“Good.”

“Did you find anything?”

“Yep. Found where it happened....some whiskey bottles Hank think’s are from his place. He’s feeling real bad about that.”

“But it’s not his fault.”

“I told him that....don’t think it helps much though.”

“Dr. Mike!” Sarah called.
Michaela hurried to Brian’s bed. His eyelids were flickering. She checked his breathing and pulse……they were fine. “Brian? Brian, can you open your eyes?……Brian?”

Slowly his eyes opened……it was evident he was confused……still dazed. “Ma?”

“Yes, dear…” Michaela took his hand, “Squeeze my hand please….” And he did. She reached down to touch his toes. “Brian, do you feel my fingers?”

“On my toes?”

“Yes, dear…..that’s fine.” She glanced up at Sully and smiled.

“Pa?”

“I’m right here.”

“What happened?”

Sully glanced at Michaela and she nodded her head. “You were shot, son. Do you remember heading up to see Cloud Dancing this morning?”

“Ah…..no…..”

“What’s the last thing you remember, Brian?” Michaela asked.

“Breakfast…..me talking to pa about going up to Palmer Creek……was that today?”

“Yes. You need to stay here and rest. You had a bullet in your shoulder, which I removed. And a bullet grazed your forehead. Terrance found you unconscious off the trail on the way to Palmer Creek.”

Brian jerked up, then moaned at the pain in his shoulder and head. “Taffy?!”

“She’s fine, son,” Sully said. “She’s the reason McKay found you. Robert E has her. We’ll tell ya about it when you’re better. For now, do as your ma says and rest. Sarah’s here with ya.”

Brian knew someone was holding his hand but hadn’t realized who it was. He turned his face to the other side of the bed and saw her sitting there, looking very worried. He smiled at her and squeezed her hand, causing her to smile.

“Bran?”

“Hey, Katie.” Seeing his sister come up beside Sarah.

“You hurt?”

“Yeah…..but ma fixed me.”

“Ma fix everyting….she docter!”

He closed his eyes as Michaela ushered everyone but Sarah out of the room. “Sarah, we’ll probably go get lunch and I’ll bring some back for the both of you.” Sarah nodded.

They went over to Grace’s for lunch. “We’ll stay at the clinic tonight, Michaela. I’ll take Katie, check on the homestead, feed the animals and get some clothes.”

"Thank you, Sully."

After they ate, they took lunch back to Sarah and Brian. Then Sully gave Michaela a kiss as he took Katie and left. "Sarah, with your parents in Denver, aren't you staying with your aunt?"

"Yes."
"We have enough rooms here, would you like to stay here tonight? Sully can go out later and let your aunt know."

"Thank you, Dr. Mike, I'll like that very much…..to stay near Brian."

Colleen and Amanda spent Saturday morning shopping and had a wonderful time. They found a model boat for Brian and a beautiful doll for Katie. For Michaela they got a shawl, a shirt for Sully to wear with his buckskins and a shirt for Colin. They each got a dress for the play and dress shirts for their husbands. They enjoyed lunch at a nice little restaurant before John drove them back to the hotel. After putting their purchases away, they sat in the hotel garden with Bob, telling him about recent happenings in Colorado Springs.

They went to the San Francisco Wharf for dinner, at a restaurant owned by a friend of Bob's. "Andre," Bob said as the owner came to their table, "you remember Amanda, don't you?"

"Why, yes. Miss Amanda, you look exquisite. Mr. Bob told me you have married?"

"Yes, Andre. This is my husband, Matthew Cooper, my sister-in-law, Colleen Cooper Cook and her husband, Dr. Andrew Cook."

"Ah, it is a pleasure to meet you all and have you dine here. May I select your meals?"

"Please do, Andre." Amanda replied, having already gotten agreements from the others. "Excellent. My sons brought in some wonderful stripped sea bass today." They were served a delicious meal.

"Colleen? Matthew?" Colleen and Matthew turned, in shock, at the sound of that voice. There stood Ethan, with his wife, Lillian. "My dear children, how wonderful to see you. You should have told me you were coming to our fair city."

"We didn’t tell ya cuz we didn’t wanna see ya," Matthew said in a tight voice. "And we still don't. Ain't got nothing to say to ya.....thought we said it all in Colorado Springs when ya tried to get Brian."

"Now, Matthew, please keep a civil tongue. Ethan is your father," said Lillian.

"No disrespect meant to you, Miss Lillian. But ya ain't got the facts. When he up and left ma, then kept coming back, getting the kids hopes up and then disappearing again, he gave up the thought of being our father. We've made our decision and don't need him in our lives. Sully and Dr. Mike are our parents. Thought we made that clear when he came to Colorado Springs a few months ago." Matthew turned back to the table. Colleen had turned back right after seeing Ethan, grabbing Andrew's hand in the process. Ethan and Lillian stood there a minute, then left. "Sorry, Bob. Didn't mean to make a scene."

"Don't worry about it, Matthew. I know the story and can't say I blame ya."

The rest of the meal was subdued. Colleen was upset at seeing Ethan. She hadn't given up on Ethan as long ago as Matthew and was still adjusting to it. "I think the ladies are tired.....at least Colleen is," said Andrew. "I'm tired, too. Why don't we make it a night?"

Andrew and Colleen were in their room and had gotten ready for bed. Colleen was huddled by the fire. Andrew sat down next to her and put his arms around her. “Colleen?”

“Oh, Andrew. I can't believe I still get so upset when I see him!"

“It’s okay, honey. You wanted to believe in him and he's dashed your hopes so many times, but he’s still your blood father and it’s hard to give that up.....I understand.”

“Sully is so much more of a pa and I know he loves me for me. Ethan always seems to be seeing what’s in it for him. I just wish, for once.....oh, Andrew, just hold me?"

“You bet!”
Bob, Colleen, Andrew, Matthew and Amanda were having dinner at the hotel before going to the play. "I’d like to ask you something. Do you think Denver is ready for a medical school?" Bob asked.

Colleen’s eyes lit up.

"I think so, Bob," Matthew responded. "Why?"

"I belong to a group of investors. Besides hotels, restaurants and such, we like to help colleges. We’ve been talking to the college at Denver about adding a medical school. They’re anxious to have us help them."

"Would they allow females?" Colleen asked.

"If I’m part of it, they will!"

Michaela was sitting next to Brian’s bed, dozing. Sully and Wolf were asleep on the floor and Sarah in the room across the hall. Brian opened his eyes to the daylight. There wasn’t a lot of noise coming from the street, so he figured it was early. He saw Michaela by his bed. "Ma?"

Michaela awoke quickly. "Brian. How do you feel?"

"Sore. Can I sit up?"

"Yes."

Their conversation woke Sully up and he quickly moved to help Brian sit up. "Be careful, son."

"Thanks, pa. Did Sarah go home?"

"No," Michaela responded. "She’s asleep across the hall. She wanted to stay, so Sully went out and told her aunt. Are you hungry?"

"Sorta. But ain’t it kinda early? Miss Grace won’t be open yet."

Sully looked out. "It’s early, but not too early for her to be open."

Where’s Katie?" Brian asked Michaela.

"With Sarah," she said, smiling. "Katie wanted to sleep with her and she didn’t mind."

That made Brian smile. Michaela went across the hall to wake Katie and Sarah up and a few minutes later they came into the room. Katie rushed to the bed, followed by Sarah, who helped her up on the bed.

"Be careful, Katie."

"Will, mama! Don’t hurt Bran!"

"That’s right, dear."

Sarah sat down and Brian reached out for her hand. A little while later they heard footsteps, Sully came in the door, carrying breakfast, followed by Anna Marie and Daniel. "Look who I found coming down from the station."

"Mother, Daniel! Welcome home. I missed you," said Sarah, going to them for hugs.

"We missed you, too," Daniel said. "Brian, Sully told us what happened. How are ya feelin’?"

"Better than yesterday….sore though. Hoping ma’ll let me go home today. Rather be in bed at home."

"Glad you’re feeling better. Anna Marie, I’m gonna go see Hank. I’ll be back in a few minutes."

"Ma? Can I go home?"
"We'll see...after a little while I'll examine you. Then I'll decide."

By noon, Michaela declared Brian fit enough to go home. Daniel came to get his family and take them home. Sully brought the wagon around, with Michaela in the back and Brian's head laying in her lap, Katie sitting on the other side of Brian, and Sully and Wolf up front, the family went home. Sully helped Brian into the house and up to bed. Brian went to sleep almost immediately, tired from the trip and still weak.

Daniel went to his office early Monday morning. He found a farmer's wife and two children sitting on his bench. The wife's face was swollen from abuse. "Mrs. Wallace? What happened? Did Henry do this to you?"

"Yes, Sheriff. He done it before, but this time he hit Emmett here....show the sheriff......" Emmett turned and lifted his jacket and shirt. His back had red strips across it, obviously from a belt. "I'd take it on me, but not my kids. He was real drunk. I know there ain't much ya can do about the beatings, but it's what he said after he was done hitting me. He was playing with his rifle and he said he been takin' shots at animals out on the trail last Saturday. He looked at me with one of them evil looks of his and said he shot the Injun lover's kid. I know he meant Brian Cooper. Brian's a friend of Emmett's and it just ain't right. The kids and me are leaving on the train....before he can kill us.....going to my family in St Joseph, Missouri. He won't come after us."

"Thank you, Mrs. Wallace. But can you stay in town for awhile? We'll put you up at the boarding house. We'll need you to testify against him. Can you do that? I can assure you he won't come after you." She nodded. "Thanks. Come on. I'll walk ya over there and talk to Widow Smith." After leaving the family at the boarding house, Daniel went to find Hank. He wanted someone with him and wanted Wallace under arrest before Sully heard anything. He knocked on Hank's private door and one of the girls answered. "Hank here?" Daniel asked.

"Yeah. I'm here. What's ya need?"

"I know who shot Brian."

"Damn! Let's go!" They went over to Robert E's, got their horses and Daniel led the way out of town. Once they were clear of any one listening, Daniel told Hank what Mrs. Wallace had said.

"Ya know, I ain't always seen eye ta eye with Sully, but I'd never have taken it out on the kids! Ain't right!"

"I agree. I want to get him in jail, then I'll let Sully know. We'll wire the judge."

Wallace was sprawled out on his bed, sound asleep, when Daniel and Hank arrived. He woke as they put the cuffs on him. "What the hell?"

"You're under arrest, Henry," Daniel said.

"What fer?"

"Shooting Brian Cooper."

He looked at Daniel, then at Hank. "How'd ya know? Was it that bitch I'm married to?!"

"Shut your mouth, Henry. Ain't no call to talk like that about your wife. She's a good woman.....more'd you deserve," Hank said.

Brian glanced out the window from the kitchen table. "Pa, it's Daniel."

Sully went to the door to greet Daniel. "Come in. We're just eating. Join us?"

"Thanks. Maybe some coffee. I already ate with Anna Marie and Sarah." He sat down at the table with the family. "Thanks," he said to Michaela as she handed him the coffee. "I'm here to tell you we got the man that shot Brian."

"Who?!" Sully said, anger glinting in his eyes.

"I'll tell ya in a minute. First, I want ya to know we've wired for the judge. The man's in jail and there's no
way I'm letting ya near him, Sully. While I know ya normally ain't a violent man, a pa could turn so for his son. He told his wife he shot Brian, after he beat her. She's gonna testify before she leaves town."

"Thank you, Daniel," Michaela said.

Daniel smiled at her, then he looked at Sully. "It was Henry Wallace."

"That bas....."

"Sully!"

Sully looked at Michaela, then Brian, "Sorry. Why'd he shoot Brian?"

"Mainly, he was drunk and taking pot shots at animals. Brian just happened along."

Sully knew his friend well. "Daniel, there's more to it, ain't there? Is it cuz of me?" Daniel didn't say anything. "Daniel, I gotta know. Sides, it'll come out at the trial, won't it?"

"His reason don't matter."

"It matters to me."

"Pa, Mr. Wallace's reason doesn't matter to me. I'm proud of you and for things you do for others."

"Thanks, son." Sully said, finally smiling. "I'll take it okay, Daniel, but I really would like to know."

"Okay, as long as ya promise to stay calm."

"I promise."

"He called you an Injun lover. That was his reason."

Thursday morning, Colleen, Andrew, Amanda and Matthew were standing on the Denver train station platform, when Matthew saw a familiar face. "Marshal Birch?"

The marshal turned toward Matthew. "Why Mr. Cooper, nice to see ya."

“Same here. Where are you heading?”

“Down to Colorado Springs. I’m working for the territorial government now. I’m going down with Judge Johnson and two lawyers. You still given up being a sheriff?"

“Yes, sir. I'm a lawyer now. When to school, took the tests and got sworn in a little while ago. We've a got us a good sheriff, Daniel Simon, and remember Hank Lawson, owner of the Gold Nugget?" The marshal nodded his head. "Well, he's our deputy and a good one at that.”

The marshal smiled, "Well, things sure seemed to change down there. I heard Mr. Sully's free now and those problems are over."

“Yeah, for the most part. But he still worries about the Indians.”

“With men like Custer around, there's always something to worry about."

"Why is the judge going to Colorado Springs?"

The Marshal looked at Matthew and the others, "Ain't ya been in Colorado Springs lately?"

"No, we've been in San Francisco for a week. Why? What happened?"

"Your folks didn't send you a telegram?"

Matthew glanced at Colleen, "No. Marshal? Is our family okay?"
"Yeah….sorta…..Brian got hurt."

"Hurt?" exclaimed Colleen. "How? And why would that take a judge?"

"Sorry you're hearing this from me and not your folks or Brian....he got shot...." as Colleen and Amanda gasped, the marshal said, "no, no, no....it's okay, he's okay. He was wounded, but your ma fixed him up. The judge got a wire from the sheriff and we're going down to the trial. Hear tell the wife will testify and then she wants to leave town."

The couples thought the train home was going awfully slow. As they pulled into the station, they saw Daniel standing there. Matthew hurried off the train. "Daniel? Is Brian okay?"

"He's fine, Matthew. He was shot Saturday and Michaela and Sully took him home Sunday. Michaela let him go back to school Tuesday. Sully's taking him right to the school door and picking him up the same place. Mrs. Slicker is watching him and making sure he doesn't go out and run around at recess. I think the only thing that keeps him still is Sarah sits with him!"

"Thanks," Matthew and Andrew picked up their luggage and with Amanda and Colleen, hurried to the clinic. "Dr. Mike?" Matthew said as he opened the clinic door.

Michaela turned around from her files with a big smile, happy to see her family home. She went to them and welcomed each home with a hug and a kiss. "I'm so glad you're home! So much has happened...."

"We know. Saw Marshal Birch on the train. He came down with the judge and lawyers. Dr. Mike, why didn't ya send us a telegram?"

"What could you have done but worry? Brian regained consciousness the same day. He didn't want us to notify you. We would have if there was any danger of losing him."

"Where was he shot, Michaela?" Andrew asked.

"One bullet was in his shoulder and I removed it. The other grazed his head, which is the one I worried about. But he went home Sunday and he's back in school."

"Daniel told us that. He's really okay, Ma?"

"Yes, Colleen. Now, it's almost time for school to let out and Sully is bringing him to the café. Katie is over there with Grace and the twins. Let's go over, meet them and have some pie."

The travelers, happy to be home, were thrilled to see Brian. Although he still carried his arm in a sling, he looked better than they thought he would.

The next day, the entire family and most of the town crowded into the church for the trial of Henry Wallace. The judge asked him how he pled to attempted murder, and to the surprise of everyone, he pled guilty. "Yeah, I did it. Ain't sorry either. His pa's the Injun lover.....I showed him. Sides, my older boy hung around with the kid and started talking about how I treated the family! Them's my family, they belong ta me and I'll do what I want!"

"Well, sir," said the judge, "you may think you can act the way you have been, shooting this young man and abusing your family, but you cannot. Therefore, I sentence you to 15 years at Colorado Territorial Prison."

"What!" Wallace exclaimed. "You can't do that! A year or two, mebbe, not 15....."

"Yes, sir, I can and have. I am remanding you to the custody of Marshal Birch."

"For that, judge, you'd better watch your back when I get out cuz I'm gonna kill ya!!!"

"Sir, it is against the law to threaten a judge. I am extending your sentence to a total of 25 years. I advise you to be quiet or the sentence will be increased."

Wallace started to say something when his lawyer stopped him, said something to him. Wallace glowered at
the judge, turned and gave an evil, hateful glare to Brian and Sully, then sneered at his own family. Marshal Birch took him by the arm and led him out of the church, followed closely by Daniel. The next morning, with Hank assisting him, Marshal Birch took Wallace on the train to Denver.

It was the week before Thanksgiving, Michaela was sitting at the café having coffee and pie, spending time with the twins, Elijah and Louise. Grace had brought them over when Michaela sat down. Grace wanted the twins' godmother to spend some time with them. Dorothy came over to her, "Michaela, it's only 10. You'll spoil your lunch."

"Oh, no.....I'll be hungry again in two hours! At five months, I'm hungrier with this one than with Katie. Please, join me?"

Dorothy smiled as she sat down as one of Grace's helpers brought her some coffee. "Each of my pregnancies were different. I'll bet this one's a boy. Course, I thought that with Katie."

"I'd like a boy, but as long as it's healthy and I carry it full term, I'll be satisfied. I'm further along now than when I miscarried and I'm feeling good. I don't anticipate any problems."

"That's wonderful. I'm sure things will be just fine." Dorothy started shuffling the papers she had been carrying and put on the table. "Michaela, I finished my book about Cloud Dancing and his people."

"Dorothy, how wonderful. Is that it?"

"Yes. Before I give it to Cloud Dancing to read, would you read it?"

"I'd be honored."

"Thank you. But first, I need to apologize for two past incidents that have been on my mind."

"Dorothy, you don't...."

"Hush. I do. The first is when Jake shot the Indian. Before we knew all the facts, I told you that you were on the wrong side......because I only saw one side.....the white side. I thought along with the others when they said Indians were no good and were lying about Jake shooting one of them. I believed the story about the Indians attacking Jake, Loren and Horace. Even after we knew the truth, I never apologized to you, my best friend, for my attitude. I am sorry."

"Thank you, but it's okay. I understand......you didn't know them.....Cloud Dancing......"

"Yes, but as a journalist I should have looked at both sides. The second incident is about my other book. When you told me you had never been with a man, you had already made sure you were talking to a friend, not a journalist. I ignored that when I wrote my book and I justified it to you by saying I had a right to write about things I knew....And I remember being mad when I said it......I know now I wasn't mad at you for questioning me.....just myself.....I knew I shouldn't have written everything, but I couldn't admit it. Those things you said that day were told to me in private and should have stayed private. It's been bothering me a long time and the other day I told Cloud Dancing about it. He agreed I was wrong. He said anyone should have the right to talk and not have their personal thoughts told to others. He said I should have only written about things others knew.....for instance what I wrote about Jake, everyone in town knew those things, or if the person telling me something knew I might write about it. I accused you that day of not being my best friend, but I'm the one that was guilty of that. I am very sorry for that, Michaela. If I could take it back, I would."

"Thank you, Dorothy, I appreciate what you have said. Most of what you said in the book didn't really bother me, just that part. But Sully got me through it and told me it wasn't worth a friendship.....which it isn't. But you have grown as a journalist since those incidents. You are careful now to get both sides and I think you appreciate things that should be kept private."

"Oh, Michaela, I do......very much. Before, everyone here knew the things in my life.....Marcus beating me......my surgeries......but now I have something to hide....." She looked around to make sure no one could hear, "my marriage to Cloud Dancing. I can now see that some things aren't meant to be shared with everyone."
Dorothy took Michaela's hand in friendship, both understanding how far they had come. Dorothy handed the book to Michaela.

There was a scurry of activity leading up to Thanksgiving. Most of the town had voted to have Thanksgiving at Grace's, with everyone contributing something, to make up for the previous Thanksgiving when most people had been at their own homes. It had been a sad Thanksgiving, what with Sully in hiding (although Daniel had helped him sneak into the homestead, past the soldiers) and with the deaths of Marjorie and Becky from the diphtheria. There had been so many changes in the past year, new people, marriages, new babies, and those babies yet to come.

Brian, at 14, was very proficient with the bow and arrow. The family was having lunch at Grace's, when he announced he wanted to contribute a couple of turkeys. "I'd like to try by myself, Pa. Could I?"

"Sure. As long as ya remember all I taught you about using the arrows. I trust you to be careful." Sully could see Michaela was not quite in agreement, but she held her tongue.

Brian smiled, "Thanks, Pa." Grace was standing next to Michaela and Brian saw she was giving him a funny look. "What's wrong, Miss Grace?"

"I was just remembering a few Thanksgivings ago, when we had it at Palmer Creek, when you wouldn't eat the turkey cause you had named it George. Now you're wanting to kill them."

"I was just a kid then. I been hunting with Pa since then and got some turkeys. Can I go tomorrow, Pa?"

"Sure, son."

After lunch, Brian was running some errands for Michaela when he saw Sarah at the store. School was out for a week for Thanksgiving and he hadn't seen her in a couple of days. "Hey, Sarah."

"Brian. It's good to see you. Mother and I are making some pies for Thanksgiving. What is your family bringing?"

"Ma, Colleen and Amanda are making pies, too. Miss Grace needs some more tables, so Pa and Matthew are making those. I'm going out hunting tomorrow to try and get some turkeys."

"By yourself?"

"Yep."

"Is your shoulder okay now? Wouldn't shooting a rifle make it sore?"

"Oh, it's a lot better. But I ain't using a rifle. I'm using bow and arrows like pa taught me."

"How exciting! May I go with you if I promise not to get in the way? I'm riding very good now....you've said so..... and I could keep up. But I would stay back if you found any turkeys."

"Well, we'd be walking some....and in the brush......your dress may get caught."

"Mother just finished making me a riding outfit, a lot like Dr. Mike's. I could wear it."

Brian smiled at the thought. "Okay.....long as you do what I say."

"Oh I will, I promise. Thank you!"

"I'll come by for you about seven am. Okay?"

"I'll be ready."

After dinner, Brian told Sully about Sarah going along. "That's okay, isn't it?"

"Sure. As long as you stay careful. Part of ya's going to have ta keep an eye on her. Don't be surprised if you
Sully and Michaela were cuddled in bed, discussing the day’s events. He told her about Brian and Sarah.

"Do you think that's wise?"

"I don't see a problem. Brian knows how to handle things. Sides, he's gotta start making his own decisions. All we can do is guide him. He'll be okay. Don't worry."

She smiled and laid her head on his chest. After a few minutes, she said, "Sully?"

“Hmmm?”

"You know I've been reading Dorothy's book?"

"Yep."

"I finished it today, gave it back to her and told her it's very good. After she has Cloud Dancing approve it, she's going to send it to Morris Nelson and he's going to make sure it gets published. The company who published her first book let her know although they wanted another book, they wouldn't accept one favoring Indians."

"Good fer her. I bet Morris'll get help from Senator Selkirk."

"She's so excited. And she's already talked to Terrace about writing one of his Army memories."

Sully chuckled, "That ought'a be interestin'!"

“Have you noticed how many of the unmarried ladies in our town seem to have their eye on Terrace?”

“Yep….some married ones too…”

“Sully!”

“Well, it's true. Course ain't nothing wrong with looking. Men look at women, so why can't women look at men?"

Michaela smiled. "What a free thinker I have for a husband. I notice other men, but I only have eyes for you."

He laughed. "And I only have eyes for you. Since the day I first saw ya, it's only been you."

Michaela kissed him. "For a long time, even once I knew you didn't return her kiss, the thought of Catherine hurt. She wanted you so bad and wasn't afraid to show it. I wanted you just as bad, if not more, but I didn't know how to show it."

"Well, we got through all that.....and ya sure know how to show it now."

Michaela blushed. "Sully!"

"Well, it's true, ain't it? Ya aren't afraid to show ya enjoy our love makin'. And you sure let me know when you're wantin' to be held, to show enthusiasm!"

She smiled. "Yes....I do enjoy it....I enjoy you!"

"And I enjoy you." He claimed her lips for a very satisfying kiss. He smiled, "'Member when we were in the Yellowstone and we talked 'bout you not always wearing your nightgown? Sure wish ya'd try it sometime! I'd like getting' into bed with a naked wife."

She saw the twinkle in his eyes. "I've thought about it a few times, but if you are still downstairs, the door
isn't locked...."

"True...but if the kids are already in bed....."

"I know. I just worry...."

'Well, don't. You can hear anyone in the hallway and the kids been real good at knocking. You'd have
warning to put your robe on. Just don't worry so much."

"I'll try. I really will."

"Good," he said as he started unbuttoning her nightgown. "Course this discovery process ain't so bad...."

Brian arrived to pick up Sarah. Daniel had already saddled one of their horses for her. "You kids be careful,
okay?"

"We will, Daniel," said Brian.

Brian admired Sarah's new outfit. It sure fit her form and that was a little distracting. He was glad when she
put a jacket over it, but he decided to ride a little ahead of her anyway. They rode up to Wilderness Valley.
Cloud Dancing had told Brian he'd seen a number of turkeys there. They reached the valley and Brian tied
up the horses where they could eat grass. "Now, stay behind me and walk softly." He was hoping she could
walk quietely like he could.

They had been moving through the woods quietly, Brian was amazed at how quiet she was, when he heard a
turkey call. He stopped, put his fingers to his lips and pointed. Sarah saw the turkey. Brian made sure no
one else was near the turkey, then brought up his bow and arrow, pulled back and let go. His shot was
perfect and he brought the turkey down. He picked it up and brought it to show Sarah. It didn't take Brian
long to get his second turkey.

They carried the turkeys back to the horses. Brian tied them together and threw them over his saddle horn.
"Would ya like to go exploring?" he asked Sarah.

"Yes, I'd like that."

They were enjoying their exploration. They found a deer trail, which was so narrow they had to go single file.
Brian was in the lead.

"Oops! Brian!" he heard Sarah exclaim. He turned quickly in time to see her tripping. He reached out to
stop her and as he did she turned slightly. Brian ended up catching her under an arm while his other hand
covered her breast. Sarah gasped as Brian made sure she was steady before he removed his hand, as quickly
as possible.

He was shocked and could tell from the look on Sarah's face, she was too. "God, Sarah, I'm so sorry! I didn't
mean ta....."

"I know. It's okay. I could really have been hurt if I landed on the ground. I know you didn't mean
to.....to.....touch me......there....it just surprised me...."

"Me, too. I feel bad."

"It's okay.....really.....let's forget it. Thanks for catching me."

Brian nodded, deciding they needed to go back to the horses. They rode home in silence. Neither was sure
what to say. They got to Sarah's and after making sure she was okay, Brian told her he'd see her later, then
headed for Grace's. After leaving the turkeys with one of Grace's helpers, he headed home. He rode slowly,
thinking about what happened. Sarah had said to forget it, but he knew he never would...to touch her....like
that. No one was home and that was okay with him. He took off Taffy's saddle and let her go in the pasture.
He sat down on the porch with thoughts of Sarah.

He saw Sully and Matthew coming down the road, with Matthew breaking off towards his homestead. Sully
rode up, waved at Brian, then put Wind in the corral with Taffy. "Hey, Brian," he said as he sat down on the
stairs next to Brian, "saw Grace and she said ya brought in two good turkeys. I'm proud of ya, son!"

"Thanks, Pa."

Sully noticed Brian was not quite himself. "Somethin' wrong?"

"Well….no….not really….."

"Brian?"

"Well…..when Sarah and me were walking in the woods, she tripped….almost fell……I caught her...."

"So?"

"Well.....when I caught her, I.....well.....I touched her....up here," Brian said, gesturing to his chest.

"Did ya mean to?"

"NO!"

"Did Sarah think ya meant to?"

"No. She said if I hadn't caught her, she woulda fallen and maybe gotten hurt. She thanked me and said to forget it."

"And?"

"I tried, pa, but I can't!" Brian said, obviously distressed. "I mean, when I touched her .....something happened ....down there....I didn't mean for it too....I couldn't help it.....and the feeling of Sarah......I mean, I know I shouldn't think of it, but...."

"It's okay, son. What you're feelin' is natural. And your body reacting is natural....I told ya that before. Ain't much ya can do about things that happen by accident. Ya ain't gonna forget about what happened....about Sarah....but ya gotta put it back in your mind and go on. Ya don't wanna act any different with her."

"It ain't wrong to look at her, is is Pa? To like how she looks?"

"I don't think so."

"I like kissing her....."

Sully smiled. "I know what ya mean. I like kissing your ma and did a lot before we got married. It's pretty good. But remember, Brian, don't let the kissing lead to other things."

"No, sir. I know....not til I'm married."

"Good boy."

Thanksgiving dinner was a wonderful time. The good and plentiful food was truly something to give thanks for. As they had a few Thanksgivings ago, both Cloud Dancing and the Reverend gave thanks for the food. The Reverend especially mentioned the babies that had come and were coming: "This is certainly a time to give thanks for the new lives. Our beautiful twins, Elijah and Louise, always smiling and giving their parents great joy. And the ones we are waiting for......Teresa and Jake's, Josie's and mine, and Michaela and Sully's. And the weddings.....and the new people who have moved to our town, like Mr. McKay there. And we are thankful that Brian recovered from his injuries. May the time from now until the next Thanksgiving be as wonderful."

After dinner, folks broke up into smaller groups or went home. A few of the young, unmarried ladies gathered around McKay, trying to impress this handsome bachelor farmer.

"Look at McKay," Sully whispered to Michaela. "Right now I bet he wishes he was back in the Army!"
After watching the spectacle for a few minutes, Michaela turned to Sully and gave him a kiss. He could see the mischief in her eyes. "I'll bet, Mr. Sully, you wish you could be with him right now, having those ladies fawn over you, inside of sitting here with a pregnant lady."

"Hmmph! Right now, Mrs. Sully, I wish I was at home, in bed, with this pregnant lady," he whispered in her ear.

She giggled, "Sounds good to me. Think we could manage that?"

"Yup! Our little one is just 'bout asleep. Brian's got Taffy here in town and probably ain't interested in leaving Sarah too early. So how's 'bout we tell folk you're tired and need ta go home?"

"Okay. Can you make my excuses?"

"You bet."

Sully found the rest of the family and told them they were leaving. Brian told him Matthew and Amanda had asked him to stay with them that night and he was going to. Sully told their other friends goodbye and took Michaela and Katie home.

"Sarah?"

"Yes?"

"Would you like to go for a walk?"

"Sure, Brian."

They headed off, hand in hand. They wandered over to the bridge by the church. "Sarah, I wanted to tell you again how sorry I am for what happened the other day."

"It's okay.....it really is....."

Brian took both her hands and pulled her around to face him. "I don't want ya to think that what I'm gonna say now has anything to do with that.....cuz it don't."

"Okay...."

He looked down a minute, then looked up into her eyes. "I love ya, Sarah. Have from the first time I saw you."

Sarah smiled, "I love you, too." Putting his arms around her, Brian kissed her. Then Sarah laid her head on his shoulder. "Brian, I have a confession."

"What?"

"The other day....when you touched me.....there.....well, it wasn't....wasn't bad. I felt something.....I felt....I don't know...."

"I know....me too.....but we gotta be careful.....my folks have warned me about giving into those feelings......we're too young to....."

"I know....."

"I mean, someday, when we're a lot older, I want to marry ya. But I want to go to college first, and decide what I want to do. Do you want to go to college?"

"I don't know. I haven't thought much about it. But I'm very interested in what your mother and sisters do, well mostly Amanda. I don't want to be a doctor, but I think I might like to be a nurse."

"Talk to Amanda and ma about it. In a few years, when we're 17, we'll be out of school and have to decide. I like writing and been thinking about taking journalism.....I can do that up at the college in Denver. Maybe..."
you can take classes about nursing."

"I'll talk to Dr. Mike and see if I can find out what I need to do."

"I would like to travel some, but I really would like to settle here.....live here in Colorado Springs. I mean I liked the big cities....Boston, Washington....but I like it here the best."

"I agree, Brian. I wasn't sure I'd like living in a small town, especially after Atlanta, but I love it here. I would like to live here.....raise our children here....." as she said this, Sarah blushed. The thought of having children with Brian.....and all that entailed.

Brian hugged her tighter, "Me too," he whispered.

Sully helped Michaela out of the wagon, then carried a sleepy Katie up to bed. Although it was earlier than she went to bed, not quite dark yet, she had worn herself out at the Thanksgiving party. He came back down to find Michaela sitting in one of the wing back chairs. He went to the fireplace and built a fire to take the November chill out of the house. Once he got it going, he knelt in front of a smiling Michaela. He took her shoes and stockings off, massaging her feet and legs as he went.

"How are ya feeling?"

"Just fine....not tired at all..." she said laughing. "I guess the ride home revitalized me!"

"Hmmm...that mean ya interested in some loving?" he asked as he put his hands on her growing abdomen.

"Very much so......but going to bed this early...."

"Who said anything about bed? Brian's staying with Matthew and Amanda.....Katie's sleeping sound......we'll hear if she gets up......" he said as he started unbuttoning her dress.

Michaela smiled at him and brushed the hair back from his forehead. "So it's the floor is it?"

"Eventually....I sure like these dresses that button in the front.....the back ones aren't handy when....." he said as he spread open the front of her dress and started working on her camisole ribbons. Soon he had the camisole untied and spread open to gaze at her burgeoning breasts while he gently caressed them. Michaela sighed with contentment. "Michaela? Do they hurt?"

"A little sore, but your hands feel good." He spread her knees so he could lean between them in order to kiss each breast and burying his head in the valley between them. He leaned back and continued to caress her, watching her breasts respond to his touch. Michaela moved her hands to grasp his arms, feeling his muscles ripple beneath his shirt. "Sully? Take your shirt off...please." He stood up and took not only his shirt off, but his breeches and boots as well. Michaela smiled at the sight of her naked husband......enjoying the sight immensely.

He reached down, pulled her to her feet and continued taking her clothes off until she was as naked as he was. He pulled her against his chest, melding her body into his, feeling his baby pushing against him. He loved feeling every inch of his wife's body pressing against him. He covered her mouth with his and kissed her deeply as she responded to him.

She felt the tingle of his passion from her head to her toes. Then the baby kicked. She moved back a bit and looked into his eyes, smiling. He smiled back. "I think the baby likes how mama feels when papa kisses her," she told him.

"I'm glad, cuz papa sure don't wanna stop kissing mama!"

"Then don't....."

He chuckled and pulled her back into his embrace, claiming her mouth again and moving his hand up to gently caress her breast. Then he reached behind her, grabbing the quilt from the chair and tossing it on the rug in front of the fire. Slowly, he guided her to the quilt, laying her on her back, lying besides her, on his side, putting his hand on the mound of baby. The baby moved under his hand. He smiled up at her. "Think the baby knows the difference between my hand and yours?"
"I don't know about the hand, but the voice, it does. The baby moves differently when you're talking than when I'm talking."

He put his lips against the stomach, "Hey baby, it's your papa. Love you, baby." The baby's movements became very active.

"See! The baby never moves like that when I'm talking to it!"

He moved to hover just above her lips. "That's cause mama's voice soothes it while papa's voice riles it up. Now papa wants to rile mama up." He touched her lips with his, using his tongue to open her mouth and go exploring as he moved his body over hers.

She reached down to grasp him, loving the feel of him. Slowly, gently he entered her, making sure to keep his weight off the baby. It seemed that with every thrust, the baby kicked out. Her hands were digging into his back, urging him on. They ended almost together, in shattering fulfillment. Finally, he moved back to his side, one leg hooked over hers and hand back on the baby.

"Byron....oh, Byron," Michaela sighed. "I love you so. And obviously, so does the baby...."

"Obviously.....and I love you, my heart, my soul....."

Sully woke in the middle of the night. Michaela was spooned against him, her back to his front. The fire had gone out and the quilt was barely enough to help their body heat keep them warm. His arm was outside the quilt and he could feel the chill. He scooped her up in his arms and headed for the stairs and their room. "Sully?"

"Shhh....sleep.....we're going ta bed...." Michaela snuggled in his arms and closed her eyes. He went into their room, placing her on the bed and pulling the covers around her. He got in the other side and assumed their spoon positions.

"Sully...thank you..." she whispered.

"You're welcome. Now sleep."

"Mornin' Ma, Pa," Brian said as he came in to find his parents and Katie at the breakfast table.

"Did you eat with Amanda and Matthew?" Michaela asked.

"No. They ain't up yet." Michaela started to get up. "Stay, Ma. I can get my own breakfast!"

She smiled at him. "Thank you, Brian," said Sully.

"Hey, baby sister," Brian said, tickling Katie. She responded with belly laughter.

"Did you have a good time last night?" Michaela asked.

"Yeah. Me and Sarah took a walk. Don't get this wrong, ma, but last night we talked about getting married." Michaela looked alarmed. "Now, I knew you'd react that way. We talked about how we love each other and wanted get married some day, but not for a long time, Ma. I wanna go to college and I think she does too. She's gonna talk to you and Amanda cuz she's interested in being a nurse. I think I want to be a journalist. We both want to do some travelling, but we agreed that when we do settle down, it will be here. I want you both to know that we ain't gonna do anything stupid when we're together. We got our plans and don't wanna mess them up. We know it's gonna be hard sometimes, cause we like being together, like kissing and such, but we know we're too young and have a lot more growing to do."

By the time he finished, Michaela was smiling, but there were tears in her eyes. "I'm so proud of you."

"Then why are ya crying?"

"Because you sound so grown up. I'm losing my little boy!"
"And that my son, is what being a woman and a mother is about!" a laughing Sully exclaimed as he put his arms around her and comforted his wife.

The entire family was together for Saturday night dinner. Amanda and Colleen had come to the homestead early to help Michaela prepare dinner. As dinner ended, Sully stood up. "I have a few things I want to talk to you about. First, I want ta thank all of ya for coming to dinner. My wife seems to miss having the house full of her kids. Can't understand it myself." This brought a lot of laughter to the table.

"You know, Pa," Colleen said, "You're as bad as Ma....you just handle it a little better!" Again the laughter filled the house.

"Thank you, Colleen. I can see my children appreciate my attitude," said Michaela.

"Well, Dr. Mike," said Matthew, "You do go crazy on us now and then, and you sure start to sound like Grandma, but we love ya anyway. You, too, Sully."

The family love was obvious, which made Michaela and Sully very happy. "To get serious, Michaela and me been talking about it and we would like to start having family dinners once a month. As the family's been growing, we tend to lose track of time and it sure goes by fast without seeing all of ya."

"That's a good idea, Sully. Amanda and me were saying that we go days and days without seeing some of you."

"And it looks like ya all agree from the nodding of the heads. The second thing we wanted to bring up was Christmas. In the last few years it seems we've bought more presents than we've made. I know Christmas is barely a month away, but I think we could all do it....make gifts instead of buying them. What do you think?"

Michaela could tell from the glances and nods that her family liked the idea of making presents. "Now don't say you think it's a good idea if you really don't. Sully and I won't be offended. Please, is there anyone who doesn't want to."

Andrew smiled, "Doesn't look like it, Michaela, so I guess we all have a lot of work to do in the next four weeks."

"Good. The last thing is we would like to have Christmas Eve dinner here and besides the family, we would like to invite McKay, Cloud Dancing, Dorothy, Loren, Grace, Robert E, the twins, Daniel, Anna Marie and Sarah to share it with us. This means a real house full, so we wanted to be sure it was okay with you. Christmas Day would be just the family and we'd do our gift giving then." There were nods all around.

"Amanda, do you think Colin will join us? I know it's hard for him to be away from the hotel on holidays. And maybe Bob Peterson would come over from San Francisco."

"I'll make sure father comes, it's only one night and I won't take no for an answer. And I'll wire Uncle Bob tomorrow."

"Okay. It's settled then," said Sully.

And Michaela told them, "Thank you, our dear children, for catering to your parents."

There was a flurry of activity among the Sully/Quinn/Cook homes as they scurried about making gifts. They all got in the habit of calling out before they entered rooms at their homes or at the clinic. Amanda heard back from Bob and he advised he would arrive on December 23 and that he was thrilled to be asked. The invitation was extended to all their friends and the answers were all affirmative.

The family and invited guests were gathered around in the living room, except for Amanda, Colleen and Grace who were finishing preparation of dinner. Michaela was reading Charles Dickens' 'A Christmas Carol'. She was not finished when dinner was announced. "I will finish it later," she told the listeners.

Family and friends were gathered in the living room after dinner. Michaela picked up the book to finish reading it. When she got to the last chapter, she asked Brian to read the ending. He smiled and took the
book from her to continue the reading. As he reached the end of the story, he looked up at everyone, with a smile and a tender glance at Sarah, he finished, "God Bless us, everyone."

Do you hear my Love, sense my Aura,
touch my Thoughts ...
enjoy moments as our
Spirits merge on the Horizon?
-----Chan Heawak

The End