*Dedication…*

*To all the people of Onekama, Michigan…past, present and future.*

**FOREWORD**

Almost ten years ago, my wife, Diane, our two dogs, Mattie and Sydney, and I moved to Onekama (pronounced Oh-neck-ah-mah), Michigan. The magnificence of the area’s natural beauty is surpassed only by the terrific friends we’ve made since our arrival. This place inspired me to begin writing in earnest.

Shortly after settling in, I heard of two different *force majeures* occurring in the early days of Manistee County’s development. One of these forces of nature happened right in Onekama, the other in Manistee. One created a rather positive result; the other, a disaster. The former was a purely manmade event; something locals called “the cut.” The latter was the Great Fire of 1871, which was a national tragedy involving a huge storm with high winds for a sustained period of time and is blamed for starting massive fires in Chicago, eastern Wisconsin and across the state of Michigan.

As is often the case, there are facts, rumors and legends that swirl around events like these. I had heard there were dozens of people and animals killed by the cut and the great fire in Manistee. It turns out that isn’t exactly true, thankfully. To my amazement, the cut yielded no casualties, and there was only one human casualty of the fire. Research, it turns out, does separate facts from rumor and legend.

I was honored when asked by the OneKama OneFifty committee to write “a story about those times.” Had I not been asked, I likely would never have known how serious the tensions between the farmers and the lumbermen were in 1870-1871. The two interests were feuding on a scale similar to the famous Hatfield and McCoy family feud. Likewise, I would not have known the struggles of a city to survive after it had burned to the ground.

The characters are, for the most part, entirely fictional as are their love affairs. What I’ve tried to remain true to, however, are the motives that pushed people to behave as they did in 1870-1871 in Manistee County, Michigan. It was important to me to get the setting right; to accurately depict life as it was in Manistee, the settlement of Portage, and on the farms around Portage Lake.

If you are among those of us who are lucky enough to live here, I hope this book will afford you an expanded knowledge of some of our local history. If, however, it’s been a while since you’ve visited us, or perhaps you’ve never been to Onekama, then I hope you’ll come and see us…and while you are here, please enjoy the read!

**PRELUDE**

***First light, Sunday morning, May 14, 1871***

The steamer *John A. Dix* was on a run between Traverse City and Manistee, Michigan. It had been late leaving Traverse City due to a delay in loading a mix of cargo and a few passengers. Though it was overcast and the night was moonless, the weather appeared to be calm, so to make up for lost time, the ship’s captain made the decision to leave in the middle of the night. It was just after 1:00 a.m. when the *Dix* cleared the mouth of Grand Traverse Bay. The captain kept the speed down as he directed the helmsman to steer a course that would take them well west of the Manitou Islands and out into some of the deepest parts of Lake Michigan. He’d made this trip many times, but almost always in the light of day. He considered the passage around the Manitous to be the most dangerous part of this trip, and he did not want to be caught by the constantly shifting currents and shoals around these two islands whose reputation was one of a graveyard for ships whose masters failed to respect their treachery. Once they’d passed the Manitous, the captain directed the engine room to go to full speed, and before retiring to his cabin, he joined two of the six passengers on board in the dining room just outside the ship’s galley for a small libation— an excellent port wine one of them had brought aboard.

It was just first light, and the trip had been, as it usually was, monotonous, until he was called on deck by the first mate knocking frantically on his cabin door. “Captain…Captain, come quick. I…I don’t know…I can’t figure how we…”

Groggy from sleep, the captain sat up in his bunk. “I’ll be right there. Let me…”

“No time, Captain. We’re in a forest. Quick. I don’t know what to do…I don’t know how…”

“A forest. What in God’s name?” the captain muttered as he scrambled down the passageway after the mate, still struggling to pull his pants on under his nightshirt. Fifteen or twenty feet ahead of the captain, the mate opened the main deck hatch, and as the captain stepped through, the green needles of a hemlock brushed his mutton-chop whiskers on the right side of his face as the ship slid past…*what the hell…What is this? A tree? How?* They were, in fact, in the middle of what appeared to be a forest of trees, some of which towered twenty-five to thirty feet above the water’s surface. *Not possible!* There were hundreds of them, on all sides of his ship, a mix of evergreen and deciduous trees. Adrenaline erased the grogginess of his rude awakening and he began to try reason with what he was seeing. *Trees! Huge trees! But we’re moving. We’re not run agound.* A minute later, the captain flung open the door of the wheelhouse and stepped in. The helmsman looked at him with a dazed and confused look. The captain pushed him out of the way and looked at the compass. The ship was on the correct south-by-southeast course.

The captain grabbed the handle on the Chadburn device that stood next to the ship’s wheel and yanked it to the Full Stop position. Simultaneously, the Chadburn in the engine room clanged and moved to the Full Stop position. These mechanically operated Chadburns were the primary method of communicating a vessel’s power requirements from the ship’s bridge to the engine room. But just to confirm the immediacy of his need to stop the vessel, he screamed into the voice pipe, “Full stop, now!”

Buried deep in the bowels of the ship, the *Dix’s* chief engineer couldn’t see what was going on outside but shouted to a seaman to close the valve delivering the steam that drove the vessel’s huge water wheel, located amidships. As its revolutions decreased, the vessel began to slow.

From his vantage point on the *Dix’s* bridge, all the captain could do was watch and listen as the gunnel of his ship banged against the watery green giants that surrounded them as the vessel continued to slow. The trees didn’t seem to be rooted. They listlessly tipped to either starboard or port as the ship’s bow collided with them. As he watched them harmlessly slide by one side or the other, he became less concerned about a collision, focusing instead on the possibility one of the trees might foul the huge water wheel propelling the *Dix*. But he knew he couldn’t just come to a complete stop in this…*What is this? A forest in the middle of Lake Michigan?* Thinking his ship had somehow maneuvered too close to the shore east of him, he spun the wheel to the right and watched the compass move slowly around to a westerly heading. As the ship continued to slow, the captain moved the Chadburn to All Ahead, Slow, and spoke into the voice pipe, this time more calmly, “Go to all ahead, slow, but be prepared to come to full stop if the helmsman directs.”

“We’ve got to maneuver our way out of this,” the captain muttered to his mate and the helmsman. In the wheelhouse they could feel the vessel slowly come back to life as the engine room’s crew reapplied power to the wheel that propelled it. When he was underway on a due west course, the captain gave the ship’s wheel back to the helmsman, “Maintain this course. I’m going to the bow. Keep an eye on me.” He drew an index finger across his throat. “If I go like this, then direct the engine room to go to full stop immediately.”

“Aye, aye, Captain.”

Making their way to the ship’s bow, the captain and the first mate dodged the branches of huge trees as the *Dix* crept past them. They were underway again, but not out of danger. The first mate asked, “Will a westward course get us out of this?”

“Damned if I know,” was the captain’s reply. “All I know for sure is that deeper water is to the west. This forest, or whatever the hell it is, can’t stretch all the way to Wisconsin.”

The trees continued to part as the *Dix* moved slowly westward. Both men continued to watch and listen for some sign that their water wheel had been fouled by either a tree or the lake’s bottom, but there was nothing. They kept looking behind them, toward the east, through their looking glasses. Now that the sun was up a bit higher, they could make out the beach and the sand dunes; the Lake Michigan shoreline lay behind them. Ahead of them, almost a hundred miles away, was Wisconsin. The captain scratched his head, looked at his first mate, and asked, “Where the hell did these trees come from? How did they get here?”

And then, as quickly as they sailed into them, they sailed out and found themselves once again in the open waters of Lake Michigan. Quickly, both men retreated to the ship’s stern. Behind them, to the east, lay the floating forest. They tried to estimate its size, but the closest they could come was to say it covered acres of the lake’s surface. “Where are we?” the captain asked.

“South of the Point Betsie Lighthouse. I saw her light about an hour ago. So, I’m guessing we’re abreast of Portage Lake, just north of the Manistee River channel.”

“And we’re well offshore?” He was sure they were, but he wanted validation from his mate.

“Aye, Captain, we are for sure,” the mate said as he pointed to the shoreline. “See for yourself. We’re at least a mile, maybe a mile and a half offshore.”

“Then how do ya explain these?” the captain asked as he pointed back to the vast expanse of trees, the tops of which towered above the surface. “My bet is those trees are like icebergs. What we’re seeing above the surface is just a small part of the tree. Under the surface there’s much more tree trunk, roots and dirt.” Pointing, he said, “Look at that. Look at our wake through the trees. It’s already almost disappeared. These trees certainly aren’t anchored. No, they’re floating.”

“I cannot explain it, Captain. None of the crew has done anything wrong. Our speed and our course were true, just as it’s been every time we’ve made this trip together, but we gotta get the word out to other vessels up and down the shore. We got lucky. The next ship might not fare so well. He gestured with his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the trees, “Can you imagine what might happen if a schooner were to get caught up in that! The trees would foul their sails and all the rigging. A schooner couldn’t get out of there like we just did.”

Two hours later, the *John A. Dix* sailed up the Manistee River and docked. Longshoremen waiting to unload and then load the vessel kidded the first mate as he met with them before work began. “Hey, where’d ya get the greenery?” one asked him, pointing to the rather large branch of a hemlock lodged between the ship’s gunnel and railing near the bow.

The *Dix* was one of the newer vessels plying the waters of Lake Michigan and considered to be a marvel of modern ship engineering. At one hundred seventy-five feet in length and twenty-eight feet at the beam, her crew took a lot of pride in her operation. She now sat safely at dock, her smokestack still belching black smoke as her boiler slowly cooled down. The first mate sneered at the offending longshoreman. “Not amusing. Not amusing at all. There’s an entire forest floating just offshore a few miles north of here, somewhere around Portage by the best of my reckoning. We were lucky to get through it without fouling the wheel.”

One of the longshoremen slapped another on the back and, loud enough for everyone to hear, exclaimed, “Well, if that don’t beat all. Means there’ll be plenty of work for us, boys. Looks like them lumbermen figured out how to grow forests overnight in Lake Michigan.” Everyone laughed, except the first mate.

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From the middle of May 1871 through the early winter of that year, vessels plying the waters between Point Betsie and Manistee lighthouses were warned of *dense debris floating from the shore to three miles offshore. The debris poses a threat to ship safety and human life. Mariners are warned to beware.*

All this was the result of a feud between lumbermen and farmers that had been going on for quite some time.

Chapter One

***THE MEETING***

***Friday, June 3, 1870***

Lydia Cockrum and Alvin Price’s introduction was as funny as it was fortuitous. Lydia had just emerged from her Aunt Liliane’s millinery shop, walking east on River Street in Manistee, Michigan. River Street is almost always windy. Lydia knew that. She’d grown up here. She’d walked down this street a thousand times. Lined with two-and three-story buildings on each side for ten to twelve blocks, these buildings provided the perfect venturi, compressing the strong gusts of wind that blew in from the west off Lake Michigan, less than a half mile away and actually accelerating the gusts by five or ten miles per hour. The wind caught the basket Lydia had over her arm, tipping it sufficiently so most of its contents spilled onto the sidewalk in front of her. Fabric samples, packets of needles, spools of thread, and a few thimbles were suddenly scurrying along the ground as if they were trying to flee from her. She issued a very unladylike expletive under her breath and then bent forward, scrambling to collect what she could before the wind scattered everything into the street and beyond. The spilled items were important to her. Any one of the fabric samples was a possibility for the outer shell of a winter coat she and her mother were planning on making over the summer. Most importantly, the coat needed to be warm, but it should also be fashionable. Lydia would need it as she would be among the first women to be making their way this fall around the campus of The Agricultural College of the State of Michigan, located downstate in East Lansing.

At that moment, Alvin Price was walking west down River Street into the prevailing wind when fifteen to twenty feet in front of him, he saw the basket tip and the wind wreak its havoc. His instinctive reaction was to bend forward and start gathering the spilled contents. Neither of them realized the collision course they were on. Alvin was bareheaded, having left his usual straw farmer’s hat in his wagon at the mercantile because he knew what the wind could do. There was a collective “Ow!” uttered from each of them at exactly the same time. When their noggins collided, it was with a force sufficient to set both of them back on their keesters. Stunned, Alvin suddenly found himself sitting on the sidewalk, his legs splayed out in front of him. When he looked up, he stared into the eyes of a beautiful young woman, sitting in exactly the same position across from him. He managed to stutter, “I…I’m so sorry. Are you…are you all right?”

Lydia wore a small hat, pinned at a jaunty angle on the side of her head, that had done nothing to blunt their collision. A loosely knit shawl of white lamb’s wool was draped over her shoulders, its ends now dangling on the rather dirty sidewalk. Sitting there with her legs stretched out in front of her, she had never felt more unladylike. *This is the price you pay when you take the Lord’s name in vain,* she thought, recalling the expletive she’d muttered as she realized where the wind was taking her things. With their shoes nearly touching, a diamond pattern formed between them that seemed to trap most of the basket’s spilled contents. Her mind’s eye conjured up a picture of what someone watching them would have just seen, and a smile began to cross her face. She looked up and into the bluest eyes she could ever recall seeing and noticed the man across from her was busy retrieving the items that lay between them. “Oh please, never mind those. Are you all right, sir?”

Embarrassed, Alvin merely nodded and repeated, “I’m so sorry. I should have been watching…” Rather clumsily, he leaned toward her, stretched out his right hand filled with fabric samples he’d managed to recover and placed them in Lydia’s basket.

“No, no really. The fault is mine. I know how windy it can be. I should have been more careful.”

Alvin wanted to scramble to his feet and help her up but scrambling to get up was something that didn’t come easily to him. Alvin rolled heavily to his right side. As he supported his weight on his fully extended right arm, he pulled his legs up under him and stood. At six feet, two inches tall, he towered over her petite frame. As he turned to face her, he watched the expression on her face change from a smile to a frown as she noticed his disability. It had been seven years since it had happened. Alvin had become used to the reaction of others…almost. Extending his right hand to her, she took it and he helped her to her feet. Facing her now, he pointed to his left side and said, “Lost my arm in the war.”

Lydia stared back into his eyes, still struck by how blue they were. “I…I’m sorry.”

“It’s all right,” he said, smiling at her. “I’ve learned to live with it.”

Her smile returned as she extended her hand, “I’m Lydia…Lydia Cockrum.”

“Alvin Price,” he replied, shaking her hand.

For the briefest moment, awkwardness prevailed again. Both knew their unfortunate encounter was over, yet neither seemed ready to part ways. It was Lydia who asked, “Alvin, would you accompany me to the drug store across the street? I’d like to buy you a soda.”

“You don’t have to…”

“I know, but I’d like to thank you, not just for helping me gather my things,” she pointed to his missing arm, “but also for the sacrifice you made in the war. Would you allow me the privilege of doing that, please?”

Her smile was irresistible.

“Unless, of course, you have an appointment or something pressing that you must attend to,” Lydia added.

He didn’t know a lot of women close to his own age. He was a farmer. Trips like this one to Manistee didn’t happen more than once or twice a month, and when they did, they had to be purposeful: supplies needed, bills paid, farm goods delivered, those kinds of things. And he was sure the few women he did know who were his age would never invite a total stranger to do anything with them. Alvin, however, managed to hide his surprise at her gutsiness. At this very moment in his twenty-six years of living, there could be nothing more pressing than stretching this encounter out. “No, Lydia, I’ve nothing else; it would be my pleasure.” In a rather bold move of his own, he offered her his arm; she stepped to his right side and took it. Together they set out across the street to the drugstore and its newly constructed and wildly popular soda fountain.

Chapter Two

***SMALL TOWN***

Fletcher’s Drug Emporium was nearly empty when Lydia and Alvin entered. It was one-thirty in the afternoon, and the midday rush of patrons looking for a bite of lunch had come and gone. The two took up stools next to one another at the soda fountain. Alvin looked up and down the recently installed counter and took notice of the glasses, dishes, taps, silverware, cloth napkins, etc. that lined the shelves behind the counter’s narrow workspace. Behind them were seven or eight tables, each covered in a crisp black and white checkered tablecloth. Food service in a pharmacy was an entirely new concept to him. Where Alvin was from, a pharmacy was a pharmacy, where powders were blended, elixirs were brewed to treat the infirmities of the local farmers, mill workers and their families. He said, “This is quite something. Do you come here often?”

Lydia nodded. “Oh yes. I was one of their first customers. You are going to like this, Alvin. You pick your flavor of ice cream. I like chocolate. They put it in one of those tall glasses,” she pointed to them on one of the shelves, “and then they add this wonderful sparkling soda water to it. I don’t know more than that except that the flavor is just wonderful.” The clerk approached and asked what they would like.

Lydia asked, “What flavor ice cream would you like?”

“I’ll go with your choice—chocolate.”

“Two chocolate sodas, please.” After the clerk nodded and stepped away, Lydia asked, “Are you from Manistee, Alvin?”

“I guess Portage would be the closest settlement. Do you know it?”

Lydia nodded.

Alvin continued, “My family has a farm on Portage Lake.” He pointed to his missing left arm, “The work is a bit tougher. Can’t throw a bale of hay the way I used to. Everything takes longer, but it still gets done. So, I count my blessings that my family has the farm and I was able to go back there after this happened,” he said, again pointing to his missing arm. “A lot of men weren’t that lucky,” referring to the nearly half a million deaths on both sides in America’s Civil War.

Lydia had been protected from that terrible conflict; first, as just the simple result of geography. While many Michiganders had fought in the Civil War, no battles had been fought on Michigan soil. And second, Lydia had enjoyed a rather privileged upbringing. So, it was natural her curiosity was aroused by this man with his war-related disability, and it gave way to a sudden insensibility. “You must have been quite young when you went off to…” She cut herself off. As she heard herself utter it, she realized the inquiry was impertinent. *Who’d want to relive that?* She changed course, “Alvin, I’m sorry. Forget I said that...”

He’d been facing the counter, but as he sensed her unease, he shifted around to face her. “I don’t mind. I was sixteen when I enlisted.” Then Alvin deftly shifted course, “How about you? Is Manistee home for you?”

Before she could answer, they were interrupted. From his vantage point at the pharmacy counter, Herb Fletcher, the store’s owner, had watched the couple come in. “Hello, Lydia.”

“Oh…Hello, Mr. Fletcher,” she replied, a hint of surprise in her voice as she hadn’t seen him come up behind them. Looking first at Alvin and then back to Fletcher, she said, “I’d like you to meet Mr. Alvin Price.”

“Pleased to make your acquaintance. I haven’t seen you in here before, have I?”

“No, sir. I’m from Portage. Lydia and I just bumped into one another.” They both chuckled at the inside joke, but the humor was short-lived.

With a superior edge to his voice, Fletcher replied, “Portage. Not much there. The mill and farms. Which are you? Lumberman or farmer?”

“My family owns a farm there.”

Fletcher offered a dismissive, “Ummm,” before turning his complete attention to Lydia. “Aleta and I will see you in church this Sunday?” He didn’t wait for an answer, knowing Lydia and her parents were in church every Sunday as were the Fletchers. “By the way, Richard will soon be home for a month from his studies in Ann Arbor. I hope our families can get together.”

Completely aware of the judgement Fletcher had already made of Alvin, it took everything inside of Lydia to control both her embarrassment and her temper. “Yes, see you in church,” Lydia said, determined not to commit to visiting. She was glad he had to break away to assist a customer at the pharmacy counter. She gave a glance to Alvin while shaking her head, and said, “Mr. Fletcher owns this place. He’s a friend of my father’s.”

Alvin gave her a serious look, and mocking Fletcher, said, “Ummm.” Lydia giggled. He continued, “Well then, I might guess your father is more partial to lumbermen than farmers. Am I right?”

Shrugging her shoulders, Lydia began, “Lumber is king around here. My father’s business relies on it. He’s an engineer. We’ve lived in Manistee all my life, but he’s traveled all over the country building railroads. Last year, some of the lumbermen started to discuss narrow-gauge railroads as a quicker, more efficient way to move more logs to the mills.”

“Saw a lot of railroads while I was away at war. There aren’t any up here yet, but it’s only a matter of time.”

“Father says it will be a while. He says it’s because the forests north of Manistee and all across the northern tip of Michigan are so dense, they must be cut back before the railroads can be built. He guesses maybe they are ten years away, but he says when it happens, it will happen quickly, and there will be a lot of money to be made.” She paused, and then said, “So, yes, my father is very partial to lumbermen.”

Alvin didn’t like the way big lumber was stripping the land around Manistee, and he was even angrier at the lumbermen for their disregard of the farmers around Portage Lake, where his family’s homestead was located, but he had asked the question and appreciated her honesty. With a certain twinkle in his eye, he asked, “And what about you, Lydia? Where do you stand?”

She blushed, lowered her head and stared into her lap. The clerk placed a soda in front of each of them. Lydia thanked him and then said to Alvin, “Taste it and tell me what you think.”

He could see he’d made her uncomfortable, so he didn’t press her for an answer to his question. It was not his intention to either embarrass her or distress her in any way. He was smart enough to realize he was balanced on the razor’s edge of propriety. He tasted his soda, turned to her and said, “This is delicious, Lydia.”

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That evening, after Lydia’s father asked the blessing at their evening meal, he didn’t waste any time getting to what was on his mind. “Lydia, Herb Fletcher came by to see me this afternoon. Says he saw you and some man…a farmer…sitting together at his soda fountain. Want to tell us what that is all about?”

Lydia glanced at her mother who nodded. The two of them had already carefully gone over how much she should tell her father and, equally important, what she should leave out. She recounted the strong gust of wind, the tipped basket, the scattered contents and how the two had managed to recover them. Laughing, she included the details of their collision. She told her father Alvin’s name and that his family owned a farm near Portage Lake. She told him of his war injury and that she’d taken him to Fletcher’s to buy him a soda for his help today and for his sacrifice in the war, knowing her father was a devout abolitionist and unionist.

Reilly Cockrum, harrumphed a snort conveying to Lydia a double meaning; first, he accepted her story as a meaningless first-and-last encounter, and second, he was not pleased her companion this afternoon had been a farmer.

Irene Cockrum quickly changed the subject to some new flowers she’d planted that afternoon; the secret between Lydia and her as safe as if it were locked away in a bank vault. She firmly believed Reilly Cockrum did not need to know that Lydia and Alvin were going to meet in two weeks at the beach at the end of First Street in Manistee, a place where Herb Fletcher’s prying eyes could not see them. She also knew full well that her daughter was already looking forward to her next encounter with this farmer, Alvin Price.

Chapter Three

***THE RIDE HOME***

It was late in the afternoon when Alvin left Lydia at Fletcher’s Drug Emporium. He had two errands to run on River Street. His mother had asked him to pick up some sewing supplies. In the course of their conversation, Lydia had disclosed that her Aunt Liliane owned the town’s only millinery shop. Laying his purchases on the counter, he asked, “Excuse me, ma’am, are you Liliane Burke?”

Somewhat surprised, she looked up at him, “Yes, I am.”

“I just met your niece, Lydia. We bumped into each other on the sidewalk just down the street.” He recounted the story of his and Lydia’s meeting, and concluded with, “I’m Alvin…Alvin Price.”

Liliane giggled at the thought of her beautiful and quite proper niece sitting there on the sidewalk on River Street. “Well, Mr. Price…”

He held up a hand, “Alvin, please, Mrs. Burke.”

“Well then, if it’s going to be Alvin, it has to be Liliane.” She smiled, “I’m glad you both survived your collision. This street can be windy, especially if that wind is out of the west as it is most days.” Alvin laid his money on the counter; she made change and packaged up his purchases. “Thanks for stopping in, Alvin. It was a pleasure meeting you.”

As he stepped out of the shop, he was glad he’d mustered up the courage to introduce himself. As he thought back on it, he could not recall even the slightest indication that she’d noticed his disability. Alvin had gotten used to the fleeting glance, perhaps a wince, and then a quick look away. Liliane Burke’s nonchalance was a good thing, he thought. He was curious, however, about her last name; Burke, not Cockrum. He’d noticed she wasn’t wearing a wedding ring.

After the millinery shop, he stopped at the tobacconist to pick up some pipe tobacco for his father.

By the time he returned to his wagon in front of the mercantile, he estimated it was five o’clock, give or take a few minutes. While he’d been away at war, he’d carried a timepiece, a gold pocket watch and chain. They had belonged to his grandfather and had been passed on to him by his father when he left to enlist. Time then was something that had been important to him, but at some point during the war, the watch had stopped working. After that, knowing the exact time became rather meaningless to him… *It’s early morning, midday, late afternoon.* But still, for the rest of the war, the watch never left his side. It became his beacon of hope, a constant reminder of his family and home. Once back home, he’d had it repaired. It lay now on the top of the chest in his room. He kept it wound, but seldom took it with him. He was home. He was alive. Time now only needed to be a generality: *early morning, midday, late afternoon*…that was good enough.

Kip, Alvin’s dog, sat on the wagon’s seat and gave a single bark as Alvin approached. “Hey boy, thanks for keeping an eye on things.” The black and white border collie barked once again and then lay down on the seat, as if his duty to guard the wagon was now complete with the return of his master. While Kip waited, Alvin went inside the mercantile to settle the bill for the supplies they’d loaded for him from the list he’d given them earlier in the day.

The climb onto the wagon’s seat was a steep one even for a person with two hands; to do it with one hand had required Alvin to perfect his technique. He lifted his right foot up to a step that was about two feet off the ground. From there, he dipped slightly on his left leg and then pushed up with both legs while grabbing the side of the seat with his strong right hand, pulling himself up. Now, keeping his upward momentum, he swung his left leg another two feet or so over the side, into the wagon’s bed. It was all well-practiced, even somewhat graceful, although mastering it had been difficult. Living with a disability like his was all about adapting, and even though he’d been without his left arm now for seven years, there were still occasions when he’d begin to do something only to discover he couldn’t do it the way he’d been able to with both arms, both hands. He’d have to study it, analyze it, figure out how he’d have to adapt and then practice it, over and over again. How to board this wagon had been one such skill.

He sat down hard on the wagon’s wooden seat padded by a piece of folded canvas. Before setting out, he looked at the clouds building in an ever-darkening western sky. He rubbed the dog’s ears and said, “Looks like a storm’s a-brewin’, Kip. Let’s see if we can get across the river before it starts.” Two draft horses stood patiently in front of him. He took their four reins into his right hand, one rein laced between each of his fingers, another skill he’d managed to master over time. He whistled. Each horse’s head bobbed in response. “Wake up, boys. Time to take us home.” He slapped the reins gently across their backs, and the huge animals pulled the loaded wagon forward.

This time of year, the days were still lengthening. He was in no rush to get home, but as he continued to watch the sky, he knew he needed to make it across the bridge over the Manistee River and get a ways down the trail that led west, along the southwestern edge of Portage Lake before the impending storm hit. He had a particular spot in mind, really just a wide place in the trail rather than a campsite, and he hoped no other traveler heading in that direction would beat him to it. The place would be a good spot to take cover from the storm.

As they emerged from the congestion on River Street Alvin slapped the reins one more time to speed the horses’ pace a bit. Once satisfied their gait was sufficient, he turned to his traveling companion and said, “She’s quite something, Kip.” The dog’s eyes were riveted on him as if he could understand Alvin’s every word; his tail thumped against the wagon seat. “She’s beautiful—with a smile like nothing I’ve ever seen before. I’ll see her again in a couple of weeks. We’re going to have lunch together. Maybe you can come along.” Then he added with a laugh, “But only if you behave yourself.”

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For nearly seven years now, this dog and Alvin had been nearly inseparable. Exactly how they’d come together defied explanation. He’d long ago stopped trying to figure it out. He was just thankful they’d found one another when they did.

The Battle of Gettysburg had raged for the first three days of July 1863. When it was over, the South had left their dead on the battlefield as they retreated; nearly 5,000 corpses. The North was little better, being slow, very slow, in recovering their dead; another 3200 bodies. The massive task of burying them was undertaken by locals, disease control being as much of a motivator as mercy. There was no formal pattern to the burials. This would not come until November 1863, when Lincoln would say as he dedicated the new cemetery there, “We cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow this ground.” But for now, in these early, dreadfully hot days of summer, the dead were buried either right where they’d fallen, or moved to fence lines or along stone walls and buried there. Amazingly, most of the human remains were, at least temporarily, interred by July 10, 1863. What remained on the battlefield to rot in the hot summer sun were the carcasses of hundreds of dead horses and mules, and the stench from them hung over the area. In his nightmares, Alvin could to this day, seven years later, still smell that stench.

It was on the second of July, around midday, when a Confederate cannonball hit the ground some fifty feet in front of him. He’d actually seen it coming as it skidded off the ground, tore his left arm off and then exploded in a cloud of dirt and smoke some hundred feet behind him. After that he had no memory of what happened to him until he awoke in a crowded field hospital not far from the battlefield. His first vivid memory of the place was the stench of blood and death. To this day he cannot recall how long he’d been conscious, before realizing his left arm was missing and with that a deep despair began to beset him. It wasn’t long after that when a nurse appeared over him, *like an angel,* he’d thought at the time. She told him he’d been unconscious for three days. He tried to sit up, but she put a hand on his good shoulder and told him to lie still. He needed to rest. There was still a good chance his wound could become infected. The best remedy against that was to lie still, keep calm, and let his body do all it could to fight it off. She was right. He was in that field hospital for fifteen days before he could even sit up. In that time, every time she would pass his cot she would offer words of encouragement. When he’d become ambulatory, he’d been discharged from the hospital, but told to come back every day for someone to take a look at his wound and change the dressing, if necessary. On August 30, 1870, he was discharged from the Union Army.

On the last day of August 1863, he could no longer abide the misery of Gettysburg, and with the assistance of a few other wounded survivors, he mounted a horse he’d bought using nearly all of his mustering-out money. He headed for Michigan and home, but he didn’t get very far that first day. Fearing that he’d pass out and fall, further injuring himself, he stopped at a Pennsylvania farm only eight or nine miles from the battlefield. The farmer and his wife took him in, fed him, put him up in their barn, as there was no place in their small cabin, and cared for him for a couple of days. The food they offered him was the best he’d had in months. He was far enough away that only occasionally could he detect the stench of the battlefield when the wind was just right. He slept soundly. This brief respite was all he needed. On the morning of September 3, 1863, they fed him a hearty breakfast, and Alvin resumed his long journey home once again. But less than a quarter of a mile from the farm, he realized he was being followed by a dog. Thinking it was the farmer’s dog, he led it back to the farm when it refused to be shooed in that direction. “He’s intent on following me,” Alvin told the farmer. “I would hate to repay your kindness by stealing your dog,” he joked.

“Not ours,” replied the farmer.

“Oh,” Alvin replied. “Any idea who he might belong to?”

“Got neighbors on both sides of us. Know ’em pretty well. Never seen this dog before. Don’t know where he might have come from. Seems like he’s meant to be yours,” the farmer said, smiling. Since then, one rarely saw Alvin without Kip nearby.

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The storm held off until Alvin reached the wide spot in the trail he had remembered. This part of the trail was cut through a dense forest of hemlock. Some earlier traveler had created a space for the horses by removing some of the lower boughs of the hemlock. Alvin tied both securely to the trunks of a couple of trees, the branches over their heads providing some shelter from the rain which had just started to fall, lightly at first. He gave them sufficient tether to reach some grass that grew a short distance from the trees.

Kip had already taken cover under the wagon while Alvin removed the folded canvas from the wagon’s seat along with several canvas bags from the cargo area. He tossed all of it under the wagon with the dog. Then he pulled out two long rolls of canvas from the wagon’s bed. One he unrolled over the wagon’s length, the other over its width. He weighted each end of the canvas with five or six large rocks he took from a nearby campfire ring some previous traveler had built. Several stronger gusts of wind came up, but the canvas covers remained in place. Satisfied they would be protected from the elements, he scrambled under the cargo area with Kip just as the rain began to fall harder.

Out of the elements now, Alvin spread the canvas he’d removed from the wagon’s seat on the ground under the wagon and strung some netting to protect them against the mosquitoes and flies that were just beginning to populate the late-spring, early-summer nights.

All of this was well practiced. Since his return to the farm, Alvin had spent many nights just like this adjacent to the fields he’d worked during the day. He’d once calculated that over the course of one summer he’d saved himself the equivalent of an entire week just because he didn’t have to travel back and forth from the farmhouse. But there was another reason he didn’t mind nights like this one, camping under his wagon with Kip. There was something about the solitude of nights like this that appealed to him.

This was difficult for him to understand, and as much as he tried, he wasn’t able to make much sense of it. He loved his mother and father dearly. And then there was Jebediah, a fellow wounded veteran he’d met on his way home from Gettysburg, who lived on the Price farm with the three of them and was like a brother to him and another son to Alvin’s parents. Yet, he was never more content than when it was just Kip and him, alone, outside, night closing in, rain or shine.

Under the wagon, inside their canvas shell, Alvin could hear the wind and the rain picking up. Tomorrow morning that rainwater would collect in puddles on the canvas, and thoroughly soak every square inch of the closely-woven fabric, making it even heavier than it had been to roll out and harder for him to pack it all up.

The storm began to rage. A thunderous boom pinned Kip’s ears back, flat against the side of his head, “It’s okay, boy.” Kip sidled just a bit closer. Alvin mixed some oats and a portion of pure maple syrup in a bowl for Kip. He reached for a bag of venison jerky, broke a few strips into smaller pieces, and added those to the bowl. Alvin set the bowl on the ground in front of the dog who barked once, his ears now perked up, his tail wagging.

As the light faded, Alvin chewed some jerky, looked at Kip and said, “Glad I’m not home tonight.” He didn’t want to go home because he didn’t want to go to a meeting—one his father wanted him to attend. As he thought about it, Alvin couldn’t be sure if a feud was in the offing or if it had already arrived, but farmers, his father chief among them, were becoming more and more distressed by the lumbermen’s non-compliance to an injunction against damming Portage Creek, the only natural outlet between Portage Lake and Lake Michigan. The lumbermen used water from the dam to power a water wheel, which in turn drove a muley saw, a huge contraption used to cut logs into lumber, shingles and the like. But it was the dam that created the bone of contention. It caused the water level of Portage Lake to rise dramatically, the high water then rendered hundreds of acres of farmland untillable. In the specific case of the Price Farm, it was his, his father’s and Jeb’s collective opinion they were losing fifteen acres of land from flooding caused by the dam. That meant they were losing almost fifteen percent of their available land, which limited the number of livestock the farm could support, the amount of food crops they could grow and—perhaps of greatest concern—cut down on the available land for the orchard they were hoping to expand. Alvin’s father made no bones about it. “That damned dam costs us; first land, then money.” The farmers’ discontent with the lumbermen had become more and more vitriolic over the last two years.

Ten years ago, Alvin watched as the rhetoric rose to open war. He hadn’t liked it then and he certainly didn’t like it now. He was glad he would not be at this evening’s meeting. He would hear enough about it from his father tomorrow when he returned home.

The thunder and lightning portion of the storm passed rather quickly, but the rains persisted. He was tired, and apparently, so was Kip, who settled in next to him. He reached down and rubbed Kip’s ears. As Kip drifted off to sleep, Alvin’s thoughts turned to the young woman he’d met earlier. From the beautifully tailored outfit she wore, to her perfectly coifed hair, her sparkling eyes, her easy way of talking to him, all of these things made him anxious to see her again. It had taken every ounce of his courage to ask her if he might be able to do that, and as much as it thrilled him, it was also something of a surprise to him when she had agreed. He lingered on these thoughts for a while and then said, “It’s going to be a long two weeks, Kip.” There was no perk of the ears, no thump of the tail. Kip was already fast asleep.

Chapter Four

***IRENE COCKRUM***

Irene Cockrum didn’t like keeping things from her husband, but when Lydia came home earlier this afternoon and said she’d met a farmer and was planning on seeing him again, Irene had grown cautious. She knew both her daughter and her husband well. Lydia was smart, ambitious and could be precocious. Reilly, her husband, was loving, protective, and a bit too Victorian, especially when it came to who his daughter should or should not be seeing.

Outside, lightning flashed followed shortly by a loud bang of thunder which rattled the bedroom’s windowpane. Irene lay in bed reading. Across the room, Reilly was changing into his nightshirt and said, “Herb Fletcher told me today Richard is due home soon for a month. I think we should plan on our families getting together. Maybe a week from Sunday, after church.”

“I really don’t think you should…”

Somewhat rudely, he didn’t allow her to finish her thought. “I’ve already told Herb to plan on it. It will be fun and it will give Lydia and Richard a chance to become better acquainted.”

*Why is he so set on this? He knows she heads to college in September. There’s no way she’s going to fall hopelessly in love with Richard Fletcher, nor is he going to fall for her,* Irene thought. She said, “He’s eight years her senior. He’s nearly completed medical school. Lydia’s just eighteen. How can you…?”

Reilly turned toward her after pulling his nightshirt over his head and flashed a mischievous smile he knew she had trouble resisting. “Let me remind you, my dear, that you were a mere eighteen when we were wed.”

“Her heart is set on going to college, Reilly. That may not be your plan for our daughter, but that is her plan. All your finagling with Herb Fletcher to match his son up with our daughter is doing is complicating all of our lives. I wish you’d just stop all of this…this matchmaking.”

“I am aware Lydia thinks she wants to go to college, and you know how I feel about that. I cannot understand how that school can waste precious admissions by giving them to women. There must be dozens of men waiting to attend. Neither can I understand why in the world Lydia is determined to study agriculture. Why does she need a college course of study to stick a seed in the ground and watch it grow? Look at me. I’m an engineer…self-taught at that. If I didn’t need college, why does she?”

Irene took a deep breath to calm herself so she wouldn’t sound too harsh. But she wasn’t going to just let him potentially ruin their daughter’s life. “So, your plan is to just marry her off?”

“She could do far worse than Richard Fletcher…soon to be Doctor Richard Fletcher, I might add.”

Irene closed her book, extinguished the kerosene lamp on the table next to the bed and rolled onto her side facing away from him. When she could feel him settling into place, her back to him, she said, “Lydia is determined to go to college. I want her to have that opportunity, an opportunity I passed up when you came into my life.” As she said that, she suddenly realized how harsh it sounded. She turned toward him, placed a hand along his cheek and looked into his eyes. “I’m sorry. That wasn’t fair. I want you to know I have no regrets. The two of you are the light of my life, but times are changing, and I will not deny Lydia her chance to do something different with her life.”

He put his arm over her and snuggled close. “Let’s not go to sleep angry with one another. Let’s just see where this thing with Richard Fletcher goes. Maybe the two will hit it off from the start.”

“And if that is not the case?”

He kissed her softly on the cheek and said, “Well, let’s just give it a chance.”

She rolled away from him. He infuriated her at moments like this even though she’d spoken the truth when she told him she had no regrets. Together they’d prospered. He had made a good living designing railroads. Timing is often everything in life, and he’d gotten in on the ground floor of that industry. Now, especially after the work he’d done for the Union during the Civil War, he was a recognized expert. He was generous to a fault with both her and Lydia, a fact she could never deny—would never deny. But in all the years of their married life, Irene felt he’d never given her proper credit for her own intellect. This house had been built under her oversight while he was off building a railroad somewhere. She’d managed to cope with a builder who sought to take advantage of what he thought would be her inability to understand construction plans. She’d fought tooth and nail with that contractor to keep to the budget and won in nearly every instance of dispute. Reilly didn’t know how much money they had in the bank; Irene managed their personal and his business accounts to the exact penny, freeing him up to concentrate on the engineering end of his business.

Even without having attended college, Irene Cockrum was a woman of letters. Socrates, Thucydides, Plato—all the classical thinkers’ works appeared in the extensive library that lined the walls of their drawing room. But her tastes were not confined to the classics. Tonight, she’d been reading a short story from the collected works of Edgar Allan Poe. She found his work extraordinarily dark, but was drawn to it because of what she considered to be his rather tragic life.

*I could have gone to college, Reilly. I would have succeeded there,* she thought as she heard the heavier breathing of his sleep behind her. *You will not deprive Lydia of that experience. I won’t have her lying next to a man in twenty years and having the same regrets I now feel.*