

JOURNEY THROUGH
DESTINY
KURT BURNUM

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EDITED BY ANNIE COSBY

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated exclusively to my one and only big brother, Donald Burnum. A man who after serving 23 years with The West Wendover Nevada Police Force committed suicide in the early morning hours of July 2nd, 2015.

My thoughts and prayers along with all of his family will be there for him in all of his endeavors regardless. Forever, and in all ways. As for the many people whose lives that have been touched by him along the way, he will always be remembered by us for that.

That means that this novel, "Journey Through Destiny" is dedicated by me solely as a memorial to him. Maybe now he will rest with the knowledge of being ever so loved? Even up until this very day. We will carry his memories with us forever, and he will always be missed and never forgotten by us. His friends and family of whom he so hastily has left behind.

And, for whatever reason he deemed necessary to take his own life, one that was so dear and precious to all of us, and to so many others regardless of what their needs may've been at that time. I hope that all of this has the same meaning to us as it does to all of them, and that whatever pain he may've been in is now over with.

But, I will miss you until the day I see you again Big Brother. But, until that day comes, please carry on in good faith and in good hope for the future. Whatever, and however you see fit for it to be. Whatever it is that God still holds in store for all of us we will be well. But until then, in good faith and in good time until the day that I can see you again!
"May the Blessings Be?"

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECRETS FROM THE PAST	6
FLUKE INVESTIGATION.....	15
WAKING UP IN SULTRY RATS HAVEN	22
AN ABRUPT ENDING TO A NEW BEGINNING.....	33
ENDLESS TRAIL ON A MOONLIT NIGHT	45
“HALVE WINGS” MUST FLY	57
A LOSER FINDS IT’S TIME TO FOLD.....	64
BACK ROOM CONVERSATION.....	74
HORN BETS, CRAPS CHECKS, HI/LO’s AND YO’s.....	89
FOR RETRIBUTION THIS MAN AWAITS.....	99
INTEGRAL GENETICS.....	109
A PRECARIOUS ALLING OUT	116
FAIR WEATHER FARCE.....	128
UP AGAINST AGGRESSION.....	136
BANKER’S BURDEN	146
A TIMELESS UNDERTAKING	160
OPEN-ENDED AUTONOMY	175
OPEN-ENDED EVALUATION.....	190
THE MIGHTY COMPANION.....	206

CAVERNS OF THE WELL	212
TASK UNDERTAKEN.....	218
LOVER'S QUARRY	226
BAR ROOM BANTER.....	237
PARADISE IN A BOX.....	243
RACE TRACK REPEAT	254
AN AMAZING OUTCOME	260
ORGANIZATION INTEGRATION.....	267
LIVING ASPECT OF A SINKING WELL	275
FIVE TIMES A WINNING HAND	284
WATER WELL, NEVER ENDING	294
UNHOLY WELL OF THE ETERNAL	304
THE ENGINEERING OF THE WELL	311
HIDDEN HEARTACHE	317
LAST REMANENCE OF THE WELL	336
BREAKING THROUGH HEARTACHE	344
COMING OF AGE	357
HEARTBREAK AND HOMELESSNESS	364
A FINAL AFFAIR.....	376
HIGH DESERT SAGES.....	385

SECRETS FROM THE PAST

Cameron's, "Sweet Sixteen" birthday party was coming up this year on October the 21st, 2005. All her life she had been writing in her books. Outlining the chapters of her romance novels, and doodling in the margins while keeping note-pads filled with skits and poems written about different people. Mostly whimsical dream-like interpretations of her ongoing relationships with her imaginary friends. Friends that weren't actually real on this plane, but friends that weren't really not a part of this world either! So, when this whole thing had just started out, the people of Sure Hill Valley needed to realize that the relationship that was going on between the two, "Was just an innocent infatuation between an adult man and a teenage girl who, even after living life well into her twenties, could still turn sixteen all over again!"

All this time while she was growing up in the small town of Cherry Creek, Nevada just getting Cameron to and from High School was a long highway bus ride down into the township of White Horse located around thirty-mile marker with an elevation of just over the 6,241-foot mark when you were inside the city limits. Then there was the almost a 9,000-foot elevation at the peak of The White Horse Pass summit which was located between the two. The only thing that brought them together was that long stretch of highway down the single-lane mountain road known as Highway 6, or more affectionately by the young people who lived in the area as the Hicks Sticks Highway 6.

Hunting Sticks Madison was the local shaman there. Known to the white folks only as Henry, or "The Hawk" because Henry's real name was never used and most people found him to be a little odd. In fact, he was known to act downright crazy at times, chasing cattle, corralling deadly snakes, and just talking to the birds in public. He had a local radio station, Channel KDNA 108.6. The Hicks

Sticks Highway 6 Hits, where on every sunset that fell on the third Thursday of the month Henry and his band of tribal leaders would get together and dedicate their sweat lodge religious ceremonies to an audience of listeners who all seemed to appreciate The Native American's long held religious belief system. It was interesting enough, but it also gave The Native Americans who lived out on The Shoshone Indian Reservation a chance to listen in on their own live Indian Sweat Lodge Ceremonies! The whole thing was enjoyed by those in town but mostly by the one's living out on The Shoshone Indian Reservation located just outside of White Horse. The ceremonies were broadcasted live, but even up until this very day some still found it to be a little odd...

Just in time for Halloween though, Henry's birthday was also just around the corner. It was a special time because Halloween is the day Nevada became part of the union way back in the year 1864. One year, Henry gave Cameron a little Border collie named Charles. The dog went everywhere with Cameron. The real Charles, however, was a person that only Cameron could see or hear. Cameron was told that she was not to talk to Charles anymore by her parents who thought she was too old to be talking to an imaginary friend and that she needed to focus more on her schoolwork and the endless chores that came with the territory. Her parents were old-school ranchers, herding sheep and cattle and traveling around the valley in small travel trailers. They herded sheep and cattle alongside the old 1974 International Harvester wagons and the 1960's something Silver Air Stream camper trailers, which were as old as her parents were. They'd live in those as they tended to their sheep and cattle out on the range.

People had to remain vigilant if they didn't want to lose any of the herd to snakes, bobcats, or coyotes, not to mention some drunken redneck looking for silhouettes to shoot at. Cameron's days were spent pretending to talk to the dog Charles, while really carrying on with her childhood friend Charles. When he gave the Border collie to her, Henry said that she should take him as a work dog and had even named him so as to let her spiritual friend remain in her early adult life. Cameron had already been driving for two years already, granted a temporary legal driver's license to work on the ranch, but now she was supposed to start using her step-dad's old, sky-blue Ford truck to get back and forth from school. Most days she was forced to stay at home, snowed in when the highway closed because

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

of winter driving conditions. On other days, she was needed as a ranch hand more than a typical high school student.

She'd picked up the clarinet a few years back in band class. She was also quite proficient at learning to play the piano on her own. She had even won a talent contest. In addition, she was paid \$20 for doing a rendition of "The Wedding Song" as a couple walked down the aisle and was married in one of the small churches in town. She even had a song or two of her own, but mostly she was just plunking along playing the same old country western songs that were scattered throughout the music books in the ranch house. They were stowed away in the piano stool, just below the hinged door. Resting above the three-inch-deep cabinet space below the mahogany wood panel on top of the stool, she had an easy access space to keep her sheet music.

The piano was as old as the songs themselves! An old Wegman made of dark mahogany and fitted with real ivory covered keys created back in the early 1930's. By now it had seen better days but they kept it tuned up and none of the keys would stick and the sound was every bit as good as it was when the Dailey family, who owned the ranch, bought the piano way back when their grandma was still in diapers. The main ranch house had all sorts of memorabilia from the old days. Wooden stoves, coal-burning furnaces, and a basement and garage filled with all types of hand tools. And of course several broken-down cars and a small selection of tractors, all of them sitting around covering the countryside and being used for old parts. Dirt bikes and quad runners, snow machines, and side-by-side four runners littered the place. There were horses, and of course, cattle and ranching equipment. Her stepfather, Kal, was extra-good at fixing farm equipment and ranch vehicles of all kinds. He would even spend time working on different types of equipment for people and ranchers all over the valley. He ran the place for Big Jim and was allowed to live in the guesthouse rent-free when they weren't moving about the valley. He and his family— Cameron, her mother Brenda, and Cameron's brother.

A valley surrounded the ranch on one side, by the Duck Water Mountain Range, and Ward Mountain was on the other. Most people around these parts were Mormons out of Salt Lake City but Cameron was interested in other types of religion. Something with a little more flavor. Being a half breed Native American, she and her

friend Carrie—her best friend, really— had heard of some other types of religions from Cameron’s cousins who were from down south around the Henderson, Las Vegas area. Her father and mother had two brothers and three sisters but they didn’t associate much with that side of the family. Things hadn’t been right between them for a long time now. Considering the fact that one of Cameron’s mother’s sisters had run off with Cameron’s real father, and her stepfather Kal had been left to clean up the mess.

Her real father, Jeremiah, had been insanely jealous when her mother started to see her new father, Kal. When Jeremiah found out, he went crazy and started abusing her. He’d been coming home drunk every night after working a full shift in one of the casinos in town. He was a security officer in the Old Silver Dollar Club in Jasper, which was up north closer to the Idaho border with Nevada. When the club closed its doors due to gaming violations, Jeremiah lost his gaming card to the Nevada State Gaming Commission for allegedly being involved in illegal money laundering, or at least being scrutinized as such. Shortly after, Brenda needed to get a job in order to pick up the slack. After all, her mother had two children to support—Cameron’s older brother Tommy, who had been all of thirteen years old at the time, and of course Cameron, the youngest of the two and still in diapers. Apparently, Jeremiah came home one morning, still drunk, and swallowed a couple boxes of some type of over-the-counter sleeping medication. Brenda had called the cops after seeing the condition he was in, and he was forced into the back of an ambulance against his own will. He’d had the baby with him, and had baby Cameron not woken her mother up, her old man may’ve succeeded in killing himself. After that, her mother packed up and left, and when she did, she took everything that she could with her. “It had been the longest eleven years of Brenda’s life.” She’d thought.

“I should’ve known better even when she first met him, she thought.”

“He is going to be trouble but that was right after she was hung out to dry by her old flame that she only knew affectionately as “Chief.” “Or, “Chief Higgins.” He’d knocked her up and robbed her of her cash, jewelry, and bank accounts back in ’78. Not to mention the trust fund her father had set up that she was to receive on her eighteenth birthday and her father’s Indian Land Subsidy that he had received from the government for being a member of the Shoshone

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

Indian Tribe when he was in his 20's. All bank accounts were emptied, and Brenda was pregnant. So when she first met Jeremiah, he had a much-needed commodity: a vehicle. Shortly after she had gotten together with Jeremiah, Brenda decided her sister Megan and Megan's new boyfriend, Joe, should be the ones to have the last thing that Brenda had been given by her father—that hadn't been stolen by Chief Higgins anyway! The old car.

It turned out to be the final straw for Jeremiah. Brenda had given away this old, black and blue 1972 Lincoln Town Car, which just happened to be the only thing she'd had to recommend her when they met and she had happily turned it over to her sister Megan, who was apparently in need of a car more than Jeremiah was. The reason Brenda had come up with to explain her actions was "The two of them are also trying to get back up on their feet again. But she'd given it away without even talking to Jeremiah about it first, and that made him feel like Brenda was taking advantage of him. The same Brenda who had just been taken advantage of and cheated out of all her family's money. Or so the story goes. With nothing to her name, she was left in no position to negotiate.

Jeremiah figured she was out for revenge against any man that she could find after being abandoned by her one and-only true love. And Brenda had sworn to herself that she would never let a man hurt her like that again. So, Jeremiah flipped out. He found fault with everything all the time, even after Cameron was born, using any excuse to ostracize and belittle Brenda in front of her family and friends. So when she got the chance to leave him after his failed suicide attempt back in 1989, she took it with a vengeance. She filed a complaint with the police department for a restraining order against Jeremiah to keep him away from the kids. She got it, and he was never able to recoup after trying without success to recover what he once had in life. Not only was he an abusive alcoholic but he was also hospitalized for clinical depression for hearing voices, which was something that concerned Brenda. Because Cameron was still talking to her imaginary friends at the ripe old age of sixteen.

Cameron's best friend Carrie could understand this but Carrie also spoke with a lisp because of a cleft pallet and didn't hear very well. Her parents did have a nice home and a good business in town owning the local store and one of the two bars that lined the single-lane highway. Carrie's father spent most of his time there, tending bar

at The Lonely River Pass. His bar was located on the old lonely main street highway corner that was known to the Cherry Creek townsfolk as Allister and Pine, which just happened to divide the sleepy little cow town into two sections. Two halves. The north side of the street and the south side of the street.

Lonely River Pass. A name that Cameron's own father, Jeremiah, had given the bar after coming home from the war in Vietnam. He'd owned it back then. But why did he call it The Lonely River Pass? Nobody really knew why. Nobody in Cherry Creek, anyway. As for Cameron, she'd decided she'd try out some of Carrie's ideas on getting out of Cherry Creek for good. Some place like maybe a small suburb of Salt Lake City or even Ogden City in northern Utah. She didn't like gambling, and now her main concern was getting away from Kal and his little prying eyes. She didn't like the way he looked at her, and she was fearful of her privacy. So whenever she needed to bathe or relax, she would embark on the twenty-five-minute ride up to The Clear Water Reservoir on her favorite quarter horse Ruger and bathe there in the natural spring water that had been flowing up from under the earth's mantle for millions of years. Ruger, rightfully named for his speed and volatility upon being broken, was an old friend to the Pantalero family.

This wasn't Cameron's first rodeo with the local men and their crazy drunken lives. She did enjoy drinking wine and vodka when she could find it, usually tucked away in a farmer's chest of drawers or in the back of a neighborhood pantry. Alcohol wasn't off-limits or even hard to find. Most people in these parts either drank, smoked, chewed tobacco, or all of the above, and there really wasn't any "drinking age." Henry, on the other hand, was better known for his affinity with the afterlife and visions that were self-induced by smoking peyote, eating mushrooms, or, as it was speculated, smoking more than just tobacco in his medicine-man peace pipe, which, unknown to the locals, was going to take on a life of its own!" Henry's Indian name was Hunting Sticks. Appropriately named by his father for his ability to hunt barefoot without breaking the sticks that littered the forest floor in some of Nevada's high country. That October, Henry was upset about some recent animal poisoning that had killed "Little Jeophries" or simply, "Pup." His six-year-old Labrador that he had raised from a puppy.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

Of course Henry had other animals, but Little Jeophries was one of his sidekicks. He'd been allowed to follow Henry anyplace he went, including into the sweat lodge for as long as he could take it. Plus, he loved to drink beer. And that was part of what led to his demise. Little Jeophries was poisoned with battery acid from an old Duracell copper-top battery that had been peeled open and put in some food that was readily eaten by the dog in one of his drunken states. The scary part was it took place out in the front yard of Henry's property, a very old, small RV with a blown motor. The trailer was still livable but right next to that had been his radio shack for years. He called it "The Planet's Central" where he would broadcast his daily talk shows and put on old and new country western songs, oddly combined with pop culture and soft rock hits from the 70's, 80's, and 90's.

His grandiose demeanor on the air was very well received by his loyal listeners who tuned in on a daily basis for the local weather and to hear him do his "Money Skit" once a week where he would give away money and prizes to the fourth caller who could answer the winning question. It usually involved old rock-and-roll music trivia along with raffle drawings from the local Elk's Club. The show was about a celebrity dummy apparently made of wicker and old straw shoots that would pop up in grass like humps during the spring and summer time. He was affectionately known as the "Money Suite." Spun from strands of gold spun by Rapunzel in the fairytale Rumpelstiltskin. This dummy was completely animated by Henry himself but was usually live on the air as Henry's sidekick. Henry's radio jock on-air handle was "The Hawk." Or "Henry 'The Hawk', Madison" with his good buddy Little Jeophries, who was called "The Jack" or "Jack of Spades the original hand of blackjack, whose original odds were that of 3 to 2. Or 3 chips for every 2 bet. Also known as, "Time and a half."

"Just like you would get if you were on overtime! You see, Henry liked to patronize any one of the casinos in midtown and downtown White Horse. As old as some of these establishments were, it was like a scene out of the late teens and early twenties of the twentieth century, when the largest and most extravagant hotels were constructed. Now their grandiose lobbies and hallways were transformed into row after row of semi-modern slot machines that were still coin-operated and a few low-limit blackjack and poker tables,

where everybody would gather and play as members of the local slot clubs that were run by the most prominent and wealthiest business owner anywhere in the White Horse area. That was Big Jim.

He was a fair man giving people in town opportunities to work—but without benefits. Working in a casino came with little to offer as far as fringe benefits are concerned, not to mention the daily monotony of performing the same exact task on a daily basis and having to deal with inebriated clients known affectionately as “customers” rather than “drunken lowlifes but that was just one more thing that came with the territory. Henry was a regular there at the ragtag gambling joint over on the west side of town called The Intrepid Star, built at the intersection of Highway 6 and junction pass on old Route 23 or “The Last Highway on Earth. It was partially called that because of the UFO sightings that people had been reporting there over the years, mixed with a combination of shrewd mystery. Some might have said it was because of the Bermuda-Triangle-like ability of people to get lost out there in the desert and never come back!”

But this little casino really did have it all. The western motif, with hand-painted murals of cowboys riding the range, signed by poets from The Cowboy Poetry people who would gather there once a year for its many onsite paintings signed by an artist as “Butte The reason Henry liked this place so much was because of the fact that his radio station was invited to move into it. The show had gotten so popular, it was broadcast to everybody in Sure Hill Valley, in the small ranch and farming communities that resided there and also with the regular flow of I8-wheelers that would use Highway 6 as a short cut from the north to the south, down into Arizona and Southern California to the Southwest.

Henry was invited to move the station above the casino floor on the second story of the casino hotel next to the executive offices located downtown on Main Street. Not all of the hotel was allowed to be occupied by guests in order to make room for the hotel and casino’s management offices, wardrobe, and the personnel offices, and, of course, for the employee break rooms and laundry facilities. The place was owned by Big Jim Dailey, who learned everything about being a casino business owner the hard way. Big Jim had started out working as a hired hand learning his trade in the gambling pits of the southernmost regions of the state. Eventually, he was promoted

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

and one day got lucky when he met Rhonda, the daughter of the guy who owned the club. Rhonda spotted his potential as being an excellent dealer who practically never made a mistake and handled the almost constant barrage of small-time gamblers who would sit in with the high-rollers at the craps table. He worked his way up to the position in security called “eye in the sky.” One of the most important jobs in all of the casino. It was his job to keep a watchful eye on the entire place, especially employees. Usually, if a fight broke out or a petty theft had occurred the offender was just sent on their way. But there was a problem.

When Henry walked in, he and his buddies from the nearby reservation didn't always get along with the casino staff. Some of Henry's cousins were often the ones causing everybody trouble. So, in exchange for a little respect from the boys on the reservation, Big Jim offered Henry space for his radio station to broadcast from the casino itself. And it would be piped into every corner of the casino floor. Country Music mixed with old rock and roll, and an occasional guest speaker, the weather, a few over-the-air commercials from the people in the town, but most importantly their favorite radio show. The one that used to have Little Jeophries as the star. The hit comedy show, “The Money Skit.” Performed by Henry himself.

Henry had gotten the idea for the character after being the winner of several very large jackpots while working as a dealer. So he knew a few things about the business himself. Now, with Big Jim Dailey in his corner, he stood to grow in wealth and popularity because Big Jim was the one who ran this town. He owned several hotels and bars up and down the little streets of White Horse, a few apartment buildings, some houses, and also, unbeknownst to Cameron, the cattle ranch in Cherry Creek run by her stepfather Kal. The Horseman's Trail Ranch... Big Jim had won the property in a game of poker, and had hit it big after bringing down over a million dollars in cash, beating everybody in the World Series of Poker Tournament that was held every year up north in Jasper County. That, along with a business license and a loan from the bank, had made Big Jim very wealthy in this great state. It was due to his luck in gambling but also in his ability to capitalize on a winning proposition.

FLUKE INVESTIGATION

One fateful day in October, Cameron decided to call on Carrie to go with her, Ruger, and Charlie up to The Clear Water Reservoir for a dip and to get away from their chores for a while. Maybe even shoot a few frogs with the .22 caliber rifle she carried with her at all times in case of a snake or animal attack. At the pond, they could swim in the spring water that seeped up out of the ground. It was on a mountaintop ridge on a dirt road that at one time was paved to allow for old-school traffic where the speed limit was posted at, "Fit and proper."

In these same olden days, before time as far as Cameron was concerned, that road led to the natural water spring and into the caverns and mines that still littered the mountainside, providing plenty of room to get into trouble. People went there for different reasons—catching frogs, which were in abundance, and snakes, which came with the territory, and tiny goldfish that were the only aquatic creatures that could survive in the heated pool of water. It was a concoction of mostly warm water laced with a small amount of sulfur, which can be a toxic combination. Luckily there was also a big, steel drum about five feet deep and sixty feet in circumference that collected and filled with the purest naturally accruing spring water that—even in the wintertime—was somewhat warm. So Cameron set out for the Grandts' place. Carrie's family also had a few horses. Her favorite was named "The Don" for short or "The Dapper Don."

So they just called him Dapper. Carrie didn't have a dog, which might seem strange to people who lived out and worked on a ranch, but she was kind of allergic to animals, except for her horse. That was fine with Cameron because having Charlie around was all they really needed to keep the sheep and cattle in a herd and protect

Jim's shoulder, and one stuck in the wooden façade of the building with an underhanded motion while the rest of them ducked behind the limo.

"Gun it!"

Walter yelled out, and the limo took off like a shot. So, while sing the sun at his back, Uncle Chin came at them from a westerly angle, temporarily blinding them with the sun. Moving as fast as the limo for a few short steps Uncle Chin found himself close enough for hand-to-hand combat. He went straight for the lower bodies of the boys of The Lonely River Pass Bar, finding it more effective when dealing with rednecks. He struck them in the knees with a fold-out telescopic pole that had a little rubber cap on the end to give the stick some weight. Now, moving behind his prey, he ducked back holding Walter by his waist in an obvious chokehold. He was leveraging his weapon under an elbow, around Walter's head, and back around his other elbow, wrenching his knee into the redneck's back, pulling him backward, and providing a human shield from the sniper on the water tower. Now surrounded on three sides, he turned his back to the wall, holding the man captive,

"Stay back or I'll kill you all!"

Brandishing a live grenade with the pin pulled out, uncle Chin hadn't expected Tabitha was a turncoat trying to protect her stepfather. Coming from behind the inside of the brick wall, she said very plainly through the open door.

"I don't think you want to do that, Mr. Chin. I've got a .44 caliber handgun and I'm willing to bet it can pass right through this old brick wall, and into your gut."

A moment of silence rose over the valley. So much so that you could hear the tumbleweeds as they gently rolled by in the cool, high-desert wind.

"Put 'um away boys."

Big Jim said.

"He's not going to do anything. Tie him up near Brenda in the back."

Slowly Kal walked up to Walter, cocked his pistol, and touched the tip of it to Chin's skullcap. Just then a shot rang out from above and Uncle Chin was struck in the lower leg. Moving in for the kill with his stick still around Walter's head and a live grenade in the palm of his hand, he went down like a ton of bricks! Tying him up

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

was hardly necessary but they did it to show control over him. None of them wanted to get into a fist-fight with Uncle Chin, so there he sat, bleeding out on the wooden floor next to the bar and hackled to the foot rail with a pair of old western-type handcuffs that were embossed with "The Lonely River Pass Bar" across the front of them.

"When I bought those to hang on the wall I never expected to use them. Wear them with pride, yellow man, because they seem to fit you perfectly!"

Brenda, sitting there at the bar, was slapped across the face and slapped hard.

"I'm only going to ask you one more time! Where's my sex tape at? And who in the hell is this guy with the slanted eyes? You know him?"

The man said, and then grabbed her by the hair and then letting it go again. That's when Big Jim said,

"Let's all just relax and have a few drinks? Shall we? What do you say, little man? You want a cocktail? Maybe we should give him a drink! What do you think Brenda? Do you think he needs a drink?"

Brenda said with her matted hair and with a guttural sound of disgust she said,

"No. I'm not taking it!"

FOR RETRIBUTION THIS MAN AWAITS

Finally, Henry convinced the white man at the counter that he needed to borrow a car. The boy behind the counter didn't have one of his own, but there were several vehicles parked in one of the hangers. After trying a couple different locked cars, Henry was finally able to score a brand new Dodge Ram pickup in the airport's safety and maintenance shed right next to the tarmac. Getting in, he punched the gas, heading toward town in search of Dusty Leaves who should've been down at The Intrepid Star keeping eye on the radio station. He had to find out more about this video tape and where he could find it.

But Henry's station was closed. It had been shut down by The Shoshone High Council for soliciting donations for the tribe. The sheriff and the DA were all too willing to provide the Indian Nation with the proper legal documents to shut it down. Dusty Leaves was waiting for Henry when he arrived at the bar inside The Intrepid Star. Henry walked straight up to him and began pistol-whipping him with the butt of a hunting knife.

"You stupid, ignorant, piece of crap! Where's the sex tape at?"

Grabbing him by the cheeks, Henry shook the young man, asking again,

"Where is it? Stupid pathetic fool!"

Hunting Sticks had a hunch that Alvin had it on him, but the young Indian wasn't swayed by The Hawk. The man right next to them slowly stood up to about a full head and shoulders above Hunting Sticks. This man was a big Indian Warrior who was probably around fifty or so, but stronger than an ox! The man latched on to Hunting Sticks, pinning his head to the flat top of a quarter-jacks-or-

“You heard the man, Henry. He’s going to call security.”

Just then Cousin Mike snatched him up by the back of the collar practically lifting Hunting Sticks off the floor and began escorted him outside the side door.

“Show him the door.”

Alvin said. Henry, now getting his wits about him, was able to get his foot propped up against the front of a slot machine and push back against Cousin Mike, forcing him to one side. With the first attempt a failure, he tried again on the other side of the entrance, this time bumping him into a cocktail waitress who dropped a full tray of drinks all over the tile entranceway. The big man went down hard, cracked his head on a slot machine chair that was bolted to the machine, so Henry took the chance to get away. At first he couldn’t break free but was able to get a hold on a half-open bottle of beer, smashed the bottle, and stabbed the man in the leg with the sharp bottleneck. The man let go and Henry wasn’t about to let him get the upper hand so he kicked the man in the side of the knee, severing his femur bone from its socket and leaving his knee cap off to one side.

“You still want to call security? Because I think this man is going to need a hospital, and when he does I’m going to sue the lot of you for his medical expenses. You can’t tell me he’s not on the clock!”

No one said a word. Then, the boy reached into his backpack and handed over what looked like a homemade DVD with the words “Late in the Evening, Into the Night” written on the front cover.

“What’s on it?”

Henry asked the man.

“Everything that you need it to show. I just was holding it for you. I was going to give it to you but I just wanted to have a cut of the profit.”

Alvin said,

“Where did you get it?”

Alvin looked away for a second and Henry slapped the boy’s face back in the right direction.

“Listen to me. If you lie to me I’m going to turn you over to Big Jim when I’m through with you. Got it? Good. Now, give me your keys.”

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

Everything had settled down out on the ranch. In fact, everybody was perfectly comfortable and ready to enjoy the evening. Brenda had been tied up for two days with no sign of the disc that was supposed to be sent to the house in the mail. A little bird named Tabitha had told Big Jim where he could find it. She said that they would find it in the mail. So Big Jim sent somebody over to check and sure enough it had turned up in her mail. Brenda claimed that she had nothing to do with it and that the real people who were behind it were just trying to put Big Jim off their scent, but the boys down at The Lonely River Pass Bar had enough of her so they did the sensible thing to do. They let her go. The next thing they knew, the little red phone sitting behind the bar started to ring. Walter and Kal looked up from their card game and Big Jim told them to answer it. Walter walked slowly back behind the bar and answered the telephone.

“Lonely River Pass Bar. This is Walter. Can I help you?”

Just then Cameron Dixon came walking through the front side of the two-way doors, followed by the old man. It was Lefty, who Big Jim hadn't seen since he ran him out of town back in the 80's.

“Yes, Walter, I think you can.”

Cameron said as she slowly walked into the bar.

“I hope you boys have a really good lawyer along with that serial killer Carrie over there who poisoned her own family. She poisoned them after receiving Her original birth certificate from this man over here. And...”

Gesturing to her right said,

“A certificate that stated she had just turned eighteen years old this year and that Walter wasn't her real father! A certificate that would entitle her to a half share of the insurance money from Georgia's death. Wouldn't it, Carrie? But, after the crime had been committed, she tried to hang herself out of guilt. And she tried to frame me for the murder of her mother and two siblings! Now, with that gun, I can prove that Carrie over here was working alongside Walter and Kal over there.”

Everyone listened in a raptured silence.

“Afterward.”

Cameron went on,

“They thought they’d gotten away with it after successfully framing Lefty and I for the murders! Isn’t that right, Walter? It almost worked, didn’t it, Carrie? As it turns out, a quarter of a million dollars wasn’t nearly enough money to split three ways for all of you. So, when you found out that there was another quarter of a million dollars in reward money up for grabs to anyone who could produce the other half of Georgia Grandt’s murder party, you guys knew just how to produce one! That’s when you all got greedy, and Carrie set Brenda up to use as bait! That way you could get rid of all of us by making it look like Hunting Sticks was in on the sex scandal and then you could all get a piece of the racetrack.”

Cameron was on fire. She’d figured it all out.

“But you didn’t bet on Brenda writing that number in my journal that night on our way to the airport to tip me off about the sex tape once I was on the boat. She didn’t want Hunting Sticks to know about it because she didn’t want anyone to tip off Dusty Leaves that Big Jim was onto him. He found out about it anyway when he learned about my phone call back home to Brenda. That number had belonged to Dusty Leaves’ cell phone! All the while you, Carrie, were trying to tie up a few more loose ends. You found out about the tape after causally sitting down at one of the bars and getting drunk with Dusty Leaves. That’s when he told you about the tape. And for a certain type of favor, she got what she was looking for. She got a copy of the tape by sleeping with Dusty Leaves. Isn’t that right, Carrie? Walter and Kal wanted you to bring us back here, because you knew that the bar had defaulted back to Lefty. That meant you had to bring him back in order to get a conviction after identifying him as the man that you saw me with on the day of Georgia’s murder. So you had the cops waiting for us when we got here after trying to lure Lefty and I back here to rescue Brenda. But he showed up a few minutes late which is why this fight ensued. So, I guess Carrie thought that she had to defend herself.” Tabitha was in tears at this point, shaking on the spot and she he even still has that same sick and twisted .44 semiautomatic Biretta handgun that they never found at the scene of the crime Cameron that they convicted Cameron of doing.

“Although it’s not the same one that Kal supposedly busted me in the face with hard enough to dislodge a .44 caliber revolver from my hand! No, not the same .44 caliber revolver that you all turned into the police after the alleged “robbery but the one that you

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

all reported stolen when you were questioned by the police. That weapon puts Carrie at the scene of the crime or suggests that I got rid of the gun after the murders! So anyone with that weapon must have been the one who committed the crime! Right, Sheriff?”

Tabitha raised up her gun as if to fire at Cameron but when she pulled the trigger the gun jammed.

“That’s right, Tabitha. That gun is still missing that same spring in the clip that made it jam after two shots back at the Bare Mason Ranch, proving that it’s the same gun! Isn’t that right Lefty? Once you found out that Walter and Kal were looking for something from Georgia that she didn’t have, according to Lefty. Because of that, you overlooked the fact that you didn’t have an alibi. After that, you needed to have Lefty convicted of that crime, but only after learning that you were going to be entitled to half of that insurance money!

You thought that if you testified to the fact that it was Lefty and me that you saw out in front of the house that morning and later in front of the bar that same day, that you would be entitled to a healthy sum of money from the insurance company! Same as Walter, allowing him to keep the bar while at the same time drawing the heat off of The Lonely River Pass boys. So, you made up a lie! You said that my boyfriend and I—God knows who that could’ve been—had apparently murdered your whole family over a few thousand dollars’ worth of some crummy old jewelry. And if anyone was to ask you would say that Jeremiah and I had inflicted so much cruelty upon our victims due to the fact that they had cheated us out of being a part of our childhood! If only if you had gotten away with it, you could have had the money and a piece of the bar too! And you almost did get away with it, my fair-weather friend! If it hadn’t been for Jeremiah over here not arriving on time for this little party.

Now, all three of them were going to be tried by a jury of their peers and found guilty on the charges of three counts of first-degree murder which would leave them facing the maximum sentence allowed by the state of Nevada, which just so happened to be the death penalty!”

And Cameron went on,

“The sheriff here says that if you, Carrie, testify against these other two as being accomplices the DA has agreed to go easy on you. Isn’t that right, sheriff?”

it. But I do! And so does her! Rumor has it that you also hold a share of the map.”

“Me?”

Cameron asked denyingly?

“Not me!”

“You may not know it yet, but you hold the key to the destiny of all of the lost souls that live in and amongst us as we grow and change over time. The Well has spoken.”

“What is that supposed to mean? There’s no Well of the Eternal!

You’re making that up!”

She once again insisted.

“Stop lying to me, Jeremiah, it’s not funny! These were real people who died over there! Can’t you understand that?”

“What I understand is that Carrie got greedy after Walter and Kal started to notice, same thing as with you that it seemed something odd was going on around them in the households of Cherry Creek. When their wives and children refused to show a day of age over twenty-one, no matter how long it had been since they had known them.”

“You really are crazy, Jeremiah. You expect me to believe that there is some type of, Well of The Eternal?”

“At this point my dear, I don’t really care if you believe anything that I say at all anymore!”

Then, he looked her square in the eye and said,

“Believe in that, little girl, because you’re in this too, and don’t think that they won’t be coming for you too! Unless you plan on becoming plant food for the quaking aspen that surround us here in the valley you better learn who you can trust and who you can’t. And you had better do it soon because there’s a storm coming, and I would suggest that you not be caught out in the open when it does!”

It wasn’t long after that Hunting Sticks and Halve Wings had a beautiful baby boy, Eugene Red Hawk Madison on July the 28th of 2013. They were finally married on Nevada Day 2014 on the back lawn of the Horseman’s Ranch. Half the town turned out including most of the White Horse and Duck Water Indian Reservations. The little family moved about twenty miles south of White Horse, just across the Utah/Nevada border in the small ranching town of Plain View, Utah. Mr. Chin moved there too so that he could be close to

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

his old friend and war buddy Jeremiah “Lefty.” who he had rescued from the Vietcong in a small village just over the border and behind enemy lines in a valley only known as Lonely River Pass. Mr. Chin went on to own the racetrack that was subsequently located in White Horse, Nevada. It was operated by the Madison family after securing land and prosperity, but only for a short while. Jeremiah Dixon still manages to own The Lonely River Pass Bar and Grill on the outskirts of Cherry Creek, Nevada, up until this very day.

INTEGRAL GENETICS

There she was, just sitting. Freezing in her Briggs County jail cell. She tucked her legs up underneath her chin which was sill laid flat on the inside of her barely covered chest, hoping for a little bit of warmth late at night. It was almost the dead of winter in White Horse, and nowadays all she had to do was just sit there rocking herself back and forth, back and forth as if she were in a rocking chair far off on another part of the planet. Somewhere that was made of wood maybe. Someplace like that. Not a place made of concrete like this one was. She would do that every night before she went to sleep and up until the time she went to bed at night. But then she would fall asleep and wake up cold and hungry and start it all over again the next day.

It had only been several months since her most recent arrest, but this time she had been made to wait almost four months since the last time she had been charged with a crime. At this point in her incarceration Tabitha still hadn't been able to come up with a way to get the amount of bail that she needed if she wanted to get out of this jail cell before her trial—while she was still alive. It was a bond of well over half a million dollars, so, at this rate, she was never going to get out of jail. It was in no way within her means or within her financial budget.

In the meantime, she would have to do the time it took for her to reach the day of her scheduled murder trial, set for a day in September. She was going to have to, for the first time in her life, take the stand. Besides that, she was considered a “flight risk” because of her obvious mental illness. Apparently she was suffering from depression, considering she had attempted to hang herself from the rafters of her parents' barn, but that was all in the past. Now she was in for the murder of her mother, Georgia Dixon, and her siblings, Dominic,

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

twelve, and Jessica Daniel, who was only eight years old at the time. So it was almost time for her to finally go to court and face her own destiny. The same destiny that had placed her with the Grandt family to start with.

Right now she was just getting ready to have her breakfast. She couldn't leave her cell to attend the chow hall in the mess area in the central part of the jail because she was on constant suicide watch. But before she could have breakfast she had to shower. She had been just sitting there over however many months—she had sort of lost track of time just sitting there staring off into nothing as if she were gazing at a picturesque mural of the rocky cliffs of the Hawaiian shore or something like that. But instead of that she was just sitting there, reflecting, and thinking about what she had, or hadn't done.

Here she was, just turned one hundred and eight years old on the 25th of May. Tabitha couldn't quite remember what day it was even if it would've saved her own life, but she knew that on her last birthday she was still a free person and her stepmother and little siblings were still alive. None of this should've happened, and that's what Tabitha was just starting to figure out. She had never been incarcerated before, and she was starting to realize that what had happened was way out of control. She knew that what she did should be enough to sicken anyone who had perpetrated such a crime, but she hadn't done it! Kal, and Walter had.

She could see now exactly how she had gotten caught up in being accused of murdering her own family. How wicked that accusation was! And, now, facing life in prison, was quite a daunting experience for her, as it would be for anyone! The main obstacle for Tabitha was the fact that she was unable to die due to natural causes. Besides, she needed to gather her faculties and prepare for a public airing of her dirtiest laundry. In fact, it was going to be a study of the family's evil underbelly. A show of her darkest hour where she had seen Walter and Kal shamelessly torture and kill those people who just so happened to be of their very own flesh and blood. People who had trusted and cared about Tabitha now thought of her as guilty of torture, and murder!

It was Walter and Kal who were the ones to blame for this. But that was something that was going to go untold in court. No reason to drop a bomb like that one. Trying to trade her testimony against Walter and Kal for a plea bargain against the state just might

possibly get her life in prison instead of the lethal injection. But that wasn't something she was willing to face because during that time period she wouldn't exhibit any signs of aging. Not to mention she was getting tired of the blessing. It was starting to seem like a cruel punishment. Regardless, it wasn't something that could be undone. Unless, of course, you found the wellhead for the fountain of youth!

Which was something she was going to have to locate if she were ever going to be mortal again. Sure she could be killed in the same way that anybody else could. Just not from sickness or the deterioration of her skin, organs, and brain. It was precisely because this, her young appearance, that the people in the Briggs County Jail thought it would be fun to use her as a victim for their frustrations and cruel jokes. She was pretty, yes, but her slurred speech due to her cleft pallet and her hardness of hearing both made it hard to communicate with others in a way that didn't require a certain type of clemency. All on her own. And, due to the fact that she had attempted to harm herself after the killings that had taken place right in front of her in her own house, she was now on a daily regimen of psychiatric medications that included anti-depressants and mood stabilizers like Lamotrigine.

That also kept her solemn, cold, and without feeling, which came naturally when locked alone in a six-by-nine-foot concrete and metal segregation cell. That's where she spent her days. Only being let out for a shower, and an hour in a fenced cage out on the yard. Away from the general population where she was a shoe-in for mental torture, and downright physical abuse. Not to mention the fact that her life was in danger. Here she was, looking all of twenty-five years old. Her and along with her brother Jeremiah who was now back in possession of his old town bar located back in Cherry Creek, The Lonely River Pass (Which really wasn't that far off from the jail, or The Nevada State Penitentiary for women located behind a small mountain range just north of White Horse.) This was where she was going to spend the rest of her life once she was convicted.

Which was pretty much an open-and-shut case considering the .44 caliber Biretta hand gun that was used in the murders of the Grandt family? It led her back to the scene of the crime. She was going to argue that Cameron, and her sidekick (supposedly some young boyfriend who had tied up and killed the Grandt family while making her watch), had taken the gun with them when they left the scene of

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

and a trouble-free life. This was farthest from the truth, and there she was. Locked into a small, bathroom-sized jail cell for over three months without anybody to talk to. She had no idea why she had let greed and the curse of being poor ruin the blessing of immortality.

Tabitha had constantly had to struggle for every little thing for over a century now. In bouncing off the wall of time and moving from one generation to the next, paperwork is required, and an identity has to be established. And the only way to do that, besides to forge them, was to kill someone and steal their identity. This is a gruesome proposition, but if you're desperate enough over a period of time, greed, jealousy, the struggle for freedom, and the attachment to people who you meet in one's lifetime pass by, leaving you utterly alone and in a state of mourning. Almost as if you were sent through a war zone, and came out the other side. Considering that their children would also be born mortal was of no consolation, because one must first drink from the well to attain the curse, eventually longing to return to the fountainhead and relinquish one's self from the havoc that is bestowed upon any individual lucky enough and smart enough to have attained the serenity and peace of mind to all who visit its well. Those who shall attain the static state of immortality for the first time and those old souls who have lived the dream and now want to follow the path that their ancestors followed. That of living and dying without the never-ending drama that is laid out for one who is born poor. Or has been left without any type of real security against the heat, the cold, and all other elements that go along with being a poor person—which gave Tabitha motive, according to Detective Andrews. Truthfully, that wasn't what happened at all, but a jury would never see it that way. They wouldn't understand that she did it because she was immortal. That after her family was killed, she needed a new identity to collect her portion of the cash that they were going to give them from the insurance settlement. Even if she had killed them, now that they were dead, she wanted in on the action. She was going to try to take those lemons and make lemonade out of them!"

Her mother, Georgia Dixon/Grandt, was now trapped between this world and the next because she died before rediscovering the well and partaking of it to make herself mortal again, which would allow her to transcend into heaven. So she walked the Earth, sometimes visiting Tabitha in her cell. Even if Tabitha wasn't found to be innocent, then she still had to keep her family's little secret a secret!

That was something she could never disclose to anyone, for any reason. Tabitha hadn't perpetrated such an unspeakable crime, so a conviction of such a crime wasn't going to be acceptable to her. But from the way it looked, Kal and Walter were getting away with it, and stood to collect a full share of the insurance money. They really wanted the scrolls, but weren't able to find them. Little did they know Georgia didn't even have a section of the scrolls? Carrie did. But for now, a quarter of a million dollars in insurance money would do just fine. They were going to keep it all for themselves! They could find the scrolls later. And Kal and Walter had no idea that Jeremiah had birth certificates of Carrie and Cameron that were drawn up after the boys had gotten together with Georgia and Brenda Dixon. Jeremiah's wife, Georgia, was really his mother, the Indian wife of Delaney Dixon.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

A PRECARIOUS ALLING OUT

Georgia Lannie Jeffries was born on June 2nd, 1886. And Tabitha Lorraine Dixon, who was better known nowadays as Carrie, was actually born on May 15th, 1908. It all started way back in the late 1940's, and in the early 50's, when the U.S. government started handing out social security numbers to all of its citizens. That's when the family attained its first official identification with the government. Georgia and her son, Jeremiah, were listed as being a married couple because they looked the same age and had the same last name. At the beginning of the Vietnam War, Jeremiah registered with selective service. He just filled out the paperwork and didn't provide a social security number, so the United States government issued him a new one. After all, they just wanted to draft him into the war!

So, after being listed as married to his mother for thirty years, Jeremiah got a new identity. Just a few months after Jeremiah left home to fight in the Vietnam War, Georgia was left with The Lonely River Pass Bar and Grill on the outskirts of Cherry Creek. Jeremiah had won it in a game of poker from the Matheson Gang way back in 1948, and the deed fell to Georgia when he went to war. At the time, Georgia also needed a new identity so she became a Mexican citizen, and then married Walter Grandt after listing herself as a Mexican immigrant. Shortly after the war, Jeremiah met his true love, Brenda Leone, in 1978 just after Chief Higgins had got done with her. Brenda was born in 1960 in Salt Lake City, which is where Jeremiah met her. She had a son, Cameron's older brother Tommy, who was eight months old when Chief Higgins left Brenda high and dry.

That was eleven years before Jeremiah tried to kill himself in '89, just after Cameron was born. It was all because of the man Brenda

had been sleeping with ever since they moved to Nevada where Jeremiah could find work. It was a man by the name of Calvin Pantalero. After Jeremiah's wife had hung him out to dry he was able to find a way to have new birth certificates made up on both Cameron's and Tabitha's behalf. When the opportunity presented itself, Jeremiah took Big Jim up on it, saying that he didn't want to be responsible to his ex-wives for child support when their so-called mothers, and their children had moved in with new men. So he made one making Tabitha an infant named Carrie, the daughter of Georgia and Walter Grandt, who went along with the proposition for the child support and as a favor to Big Jim Dailey. Walter had no idea that Georgia was as old as she was or that she even had this birth certificate for Carrie. The other birth certificate made Cameron and her brother Tommy belong to Calvin Pantalero.

Calvin was set to collect a fortune in the form of an Indian Land Subsidy. And all of this because they were immortal and needed new identities in order to start over fresh and be able to live happy lives in the near future. It would really come in handy for the girls, especially Tabitha, giving her a new identity after twenty or thirty years had gone by. It would cut decades off of her age! And it was the only way Jeremiah could get a new identity that would allow them to be self-sufficient again without raising too much suspicion. Something they couldn't do without an up-to-date state ID, a driver's license, and a social security number—something that's hard to come by, let alone create on one's own. Strings had to be pulled. It wasn't long after 2004 that Walter started to catch on and wonder what was going on!

Neither Georgia nor Tabitha had aged a day since he'd known them. Georgia told him Carrie was only fourteen when they first got together back in 1966, and nobody told Walter about the new birth certificate made on her behalf in 1989. Why should they? Walter was harmless. But after a few decades he began to catch on to the fact that nobody was aging around his house! They should've left him before that, but they really didn't want to leave the money, or the bar for that matter. And to tell you the truth, they didn't care if he knew or not! After all, Walter was harmless. So, one day, Tabitha had decided it would be best if she just told Walter the family's secret. They didn't want to lose the bar in a sticky divorce or draw unwanted attention from the authorities.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

But how he could've killed his wife and children was beyond Tabitha! But he had, and there wasn't any changing that now! It was all a part of the family curse, and until they could find the well of the eternal again, they would remain as such. The identity of the family had to be updated again, but just not at this exact time! Not just yet, thanks to Jeremiah forging their new identity back in '89, when he was fed up with living the life of a poor immortal that couldn't keep a job, especially after he found out his wife was sleeping with another man. They had just gotten Cameron home from the hospital, which pushed him over the edge! But the suicide attempt didn't work! And now the girls' birth certificates stated Cameron's father was Kal Pantalero.

The fact was, Cameron hadn't drunk from the well just yet. She actually was a baby at the time, but Tabitha wasn't, and she was living with Walter and her mother, who was now over one hundred and twenty-eight years old, but didn't look a day over twenty-five.

Then there was Jeremiah. Jeremiah, who was actually Georgia's son, who was born way back in the year 1906, delivered right there in the back room of The Lonely River Pass Bar and Grill, which was known at the time as The Clear Water Saloon. He was Tabitha's older brother, but he still ended up paying child support to Walter and Georgia. Jeremiah would later end up on Social Security disability payments after experiencing symptoms of psychosis, and shortly after was deemed unable to work by a doctor. This was following his suicide attempt after finally losing control and telling the cops and the people in the hospital's emergency room the truth about the Dixon family secret. They locked him up. Put him in a mandatory seventy-two hour hold inside the psychiatric hospital in Sparks, Nevada. All because Georgia was actually Jeremiah's real mother, Tabitha was really his sister, and Cameron was actually Jeremiah's flesh-and-blood daughter, and they all needed to keep this whole thing quiet.

Which brings us back to Tabitha in a jail cell. If she was to have a DNA test done, it would prove her to be Jeremiah's sister, and that would deny her any form of an updated ID, and without a court-ordered DNA test. All of which Tabitha's defense attorney was able to squash by proposing a plea bargain to the prosecution for a guilty plea which would give her fifteen years in a state prison with a possibility of parole after ten. That was the reason why Tabitha pled guilty to the charges of killing her family when it was really Walter and Kal

looking for the scrolls. The only reason they hadn't tortured and killed Carrie, too, was because they didn't know she was the one who actually had a piece of the map.

Somehow Tabitha was able to escape out the back after getting her mother's .44 caliber Biretta from the top drawer of her bedside table. The same gun that Tabitha had used to defend herself against Kal and Walter, the one she couldn't turn over to the police because it could connect her to the murder. After torturing a one-hundred-and-twenty-eight-year-old Georgia Grandt to death in search of the scrolls, they were going to kill Carrie, too. But they needed her alive in case she was the only one left who might be able to lead them to the scrolls. But she got away after finding her mother's .44 Biretta, and escaping out the back of the trailer house, shooting at Kal and Walter as they ran after her.

She had used it to fire shots from the barn into the back of the house in an attempt to kill or wound Kal or Walter. Shortly after that, Cameron Pantalero was spotted by the boys coming down the road on horseback with her dog, Charlie, so Walter and Kal calmly walked around the back of the barn where they had parked their 1998 half-ton Ford F-150 pickup truck, and drove it directly over to The Lonely River Pass Bar and Grill where they started to drink. After being saved by Cameron showing up unexpectedly and scaring off the likes of Kal and Walter, Carrie said that she had no choice, and absolutely couldn't go to prison as an immortal, so she tried to kill herself. And because it just happened to all be her fault. If she had just kept her mouth shut about the scrolls nobody would've been hurt.

After being unsuccessful in suicide, she used all this information to frame Cameron, because she had miraculously escaped death by eluding Walter and Kal and she wanted to go on living as a free person. She was eighteen years old according to her birth certificate, so she would have been tried as an adult for the crime, and she couldn't do that! She had no choice, because Cameron just had to save her from the noose. Cameron would be tried as a juvenile if she was caught and charged with the crime. And if found guilty, she wouldn't even have to serve time at all after her 21st birthday. And, there wouldn't be any DNA test. And on Tabitha's birth certificate, Georgia was still Carrie's mother, which would've allowed Tabitha to collect half of her mother's insurance money. Money that she thought that she should've been able to get for her death!" Too bad it also

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

listed her as being over the age of 18. Because now she was the prime suspect in the death of her own mother! Her real mother. Who had been paid child support all these years for having Carrie listed as Jeremiah Dixon's daughter. The reason they had the paperwork drawn up reading that the girls were of different ages was because they didn't want to add fuel to the fire if anybody was to glance over the paperwork. Then it wouldn't look like it was all done at the same time! That kind of information wouldn't get her off the hook with the law for having killed her mother anyway!"

None of this would give her a bargaining chip with the district attorney or bolster her criminal case, either. All it would do is bring down more heat on her and her family. If she said anything about it she might get another trial, but she had decided not to do so. The circumstances in the case would've been that she'd need a DNA test, and by doing that they would discover that she really must be an immortal—or something—because of her bizarre family dynamic. She was also afraid she'd have to take the stand if she had a retrial because of having Jeremiah as blood relative and Georgia as her real mother, her actual honest to goodness mother. To try to explain that to everybody all by herself with no help would be an impossible task in and of itself. It just wouldn't add up!"

They would all think she was crazy and that was something she could never bring to light. Unless she wanted to become a human science project for some doctor or for some geneticist scientist. So, for now she would keep quiet, and to herself. Everything would be in accordance with the new birth certificate Jeremiah had made all those years back. The same one that had been forged by Big Jim Dailey in the 1980's. The same one that was created in return for a winning bid on a prize-winning horse on a Sunday. Race day.

This same forged document would allow Tabitha a proper identification that she needed in order to live a happy and free life, able to have money, carry an identification card, and keep a bank account. If she got out of prison, then maybe Jeremiah would help her get back on her feet. For that, she would need an identification card. He could also help her by actually acting like her older brother. Because she was in a defenseless situation if she kept the family secret, even though it wasn't financially beneficial to her. Their true father was a man by the name of Delaney Sanford Dixon. Born on July 15th, 1874, east of the Mississippi River, he made his way out west shortly

after the turn of the century, and had died back in 1921 under suspicious circumstances in a mining accident somewhere south of White Horse Pass. At least that's how the story was told. The man was their real father, and nothing was going to change that. Tabitha just hoped that he would understand one day when everybody knew the truth.

All of this happened way back when Delaney Dixon was still working for The Ore Lander Mining Company, they had said. It was located right in White Horse and in Cherry Creek, Nevada, and its story still adorns the walls of the local inns, casinos, cafes, bars, restaurants, and other businesses to this very day. There are pictures of the old steam shovels in action, along with some old trains, and of course some black and white photos of some of the mining company's workers. Even murals painted on the sides of buildings. No official pictures of the Matheson Gang, though. At least not that anybody could find. They didn't have any photos of the estranged Matheson Brothers. Them, or their alleged infamous mining gang, supposedly including five men of the bravest stature in addition to Ken and Jerry Matheson.

Jeremiah and Carrie barely remembered their father, considering they were both somewhere around one hundred and nine years old at this point in their lives, and at the time they knew him, they were only about twelve or thirteen. Their mother remembered him well, but seldom spoke of him or his magic well. Even though all three of them, Georgia, Tabitha, and Jeremiah, had all partaken from the well at the same time, none of them could remember its exact location. Shortly after the discovery of the well the land it was located on was sold out from under them by the federal government who was given the rights to the land just after the sudden death of Delaney Dixon, who owned the land in 1921.

The same land that he had built his log home on was eventually turned over to the Shoshone Indian Nation who unknowingly turned it into none other than a sacred burial ground for their dead. Anybody who was caught digging in that area could be shot. Not to mention that this land they had lived on had grown over with a forest of quaking aspen, and the well had been covered over with a thick layer of blasted rock and the darkest brown topsoil that could be found anywhere in the highlands or that the forested countryside could provide. Being forced off their land shortly after the discovery of the well, over ninety-three years ago, made the well seem like a

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

dream to the remaining Dixons. Almost like it had never happened, except somewhere far off in an unknown land that could only be visited in a dream. Their memories had grown faint when it came to the power and location of the well, and they had lost track of it because of the intoxicating effects brought on by the spirit of the well.

So, the three of them would have to rely on the three triangular scrolls that they'd pirated from the cavern of the well, because they were a long way from their youth, where their father was. Yet they still looked like they were around eighteen to twenty years old. Jeremiah looked a little older than the rest, but no more than in his late twenties or early thirties. This couldn't be allowed to come to light, either, because the well had nothing to do with a mere civil dispute between two people divorcing and fighting over some measly child support and custody case. That was just a front put on for Big Jim Dailey to throw him off the track, disallowing him the knowledge of The Fountain of Youth.

Any of the false documents would've exposed their little family secret about the enigma of a magical water well whose spell had been cast all across the family dynamic and that the family's birth certificates were untruthful and couldn't be explained away. Nobody had planned on DNA testing becoming available. If tested, the family secret would be discovered, as well as the fact that Tabitha's real father wasn't Jeremiah after all, but a colored man by the name of Delaney Sanford Dixon. A man who had been dead for ninety years. It would be a huge catastrophe, ruining everything in their lives!"

Either way, she was going to have to deal with the consequences of killing her own mother. Caught in Walter's web, she would have to leave the situation up to the powers that be.

God would take care of this. Even he couldn't discount the human race, and its willingness to destroy itself. Tabitha listened in the jail cell. It wouldn't be long now before the guard would be down this way with her leg and arm shackles, handcuffed both at the wrists and the ankles with a chain connecting them together, forcing you to do the convict shuffle. One small step in front of the other. Down past central processing, and out to a waiting passenger bus that sported not only tinted windows but also a painted jet-black silhouette with the county sheriff's logo embellished across the side of it. This rolling man cage also sported little room for your knees or padding on the seats and the sick, stale air that resembled everything else

inside the county jail system—hard, cold, and lifeless both inside and out.

Finally, her day had come this fifth day of September, 2014.

Now she had some idea of what Cameron must have gone through after having her life literally destroyed, shattering her innocence and basically ruining any chance she may have had of living a normal life. The posttraumatic stress was visible on her even years after having such an experience. Right now, even the thought of Cameron having toughed out her time spent in hell couldn't calm Tabitha. And even considering the fact that she had over a century of life experience, she couldn't help but find herself in a state of anxious solitude, afraid of everything, including her shadow. Which at this point in time wasn't even going to be visible—and if it was, it would only be across the cement courtyard to the Briggs County courthouse on the corner of Lane Street and Allister Avenue. A place some people were all too used to, but for Tabitha this was just the beginning. And it appeared she was in for quite a ride. Her lawyer was waiting for her in a conference room adjacent to the courtroom, coaching her as he had so many times before, "Keep your head up!" He said.

"Don't overreact! It won't be a big deal unless you make it one. And finally, whatever you do, don't look at the jury. Don't engage any of them by looking them in the eye. They will see it as a threat. Keep your head up and focus on me, the bailiff, and the judge. No one else. I don't care if Jesus Christ himself is in the courtroom, never turn and look. No matter what! You got all that He spoke in a simple kind of tone, cocking his head to one side, staring directly at her and covering her open hands as they were resting on the table in front of her.

She gently pulled away from his grasp, sickened by his outfit and the smell of cheap aftershave. She would've preferred him not shower at all. Regardless, it was time. Time to gain control over her own emotions before they gained control over her. Rehearsing this over and over back in her cell, she'd practiced exactly what she was going to say. But now that it was time she merely asked,

"Am I going to have to take the stand?"

He said.

"Keep quiet and let me do all the talking. The jury isn't going to be sympathetic after viewing the crime scene photos. We need to

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

get this over with as soon as possible. The longer we draw this out, the worse it's going to be for us."

Posturing he said,

"Now pull yourself together. We've a trial to attend. I'm not going to get paid for this so in return for my services I want you to tell me. Where are the scrolls?"

This stuck Tabitha head-on, with a tinge of disbelief and shock all at the same time. What had he just said? Never mind that. She had a trial to attend.

"You'll either shut up and walk into that court room and defend my life against the state, or you can walk out that do."

She said.

"But I'm telling you right know: if you know what's in your best interest you'll realize you're just a guppy in a sea of sharks. Barely even noticeable. Barely a blip on the screen, and if you think that you're going to get me to plea insanity, then you will soon find that you're the one considered to be nuts, because I'll never allow you to get inside my head. Not now, and not ever! Just remember."

He said,

"Say as little as possible when on the stand. You have to get it over with as soon as humanly possible. By the time you reach prison, you will have gained a new respect for our little relationship. You'll see. We're going to be friends. Good friends. Just keep your head up. You're not getting out of this any way you look at it. Just keep that in mind. The part about the jury. Do, and say what you want. I mean, listening to me seems to be against your constitution. Once you learn to agree with me things will start to go much smoother for you by way of creature comforts while you're on the inside. A friend can be a nice thing to have. Especially being the position that you're in. I can't imagine having to do it all alone. Sooner or later, neither will you."

Just then there was a tap at the door and a midsized gray-haired old guy appeared in the doorway. He was dressed in brown polyester and a button-down sheriff's shirt with a brass badge, handcuffs, a small nightstick, and polished loafers as if he were going to a church convention or something,

"Never mind him for now."

The man said with his silver-plated name tag exhibiting his full name across the front of it: Jerry Price, Briggs County Jail. It

wouldn't be long knowing before this whole trial would be over with, and she could rot somewhere in some jail cell for the rest of her life. Unless, of course, the judge decided to throw the whole thing out of court before things ever got going for the prosecution. As Carrie entered to courtroom she hastily looked around searching the crowd and jury box for any familiar faces. With her first glance she found no one, but there was a pretty large crowd. She hadn't really met most of the people in town, preferring to remain at home or out on the range, herding sheep and cattle. Usually from the back of a horse, because it was still the best way—vehicles with motors of any kind spook the animals and cause stampede. That's the way she felt right now. Just like she was going to stampede right out of the courtroom past the bailiff and directly out into the hall. Only her many handcuffs and shackles prevented her from moving any more than just enough to use the can. She took her chair at the table to the right of the judge, and without facing the jury off to her right, she tried to settle in and relax, suddenly ignoring everything and everyone. She could hear the packed courtroom slowly start to mingle and begin to get louder, and louder.

“All rise!”

The little old bailiff called the court to his honor's attention.

“Judge Jeffery Jenkins presiding”

He said. After mentioning that the stenographer began to type and record for the record as the judge came into the courtroom through a door opposite the one Carrie had come through. Then the bailiff walked up to the judge and handed him a slip of paper calling out,

“Number twelve on the Docket today, Your Honor. The People verses Carrie Lorraine Grandt on trial for three counts of capital murder—two of which were perpetrated against a minor, resisting arrest, tampering with evidence during a murder investigation, possession of a stolen firearm, armed robbery, and assault with a deadly weapon with intent to kill, Your Honor.”

Slowly flipping through the pages that were just handed to him Judge Jenkins asked the defendant to plead her case.

“Guilty or not guilty? How do you plea?”

“You're Honor . . .”

Just then her defense attorney interrupted to say,

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

“She’s already entered a plea of— ‘No Contest’—to the extensive charges that are being brought against her at this time.”

Then the judge said,

“It clearly states here that your client has already been offered a plea agreement with the prosecution for three counts of aggravated assault with the intent of doing bodily harm that resulted in the death of that person. It’s a plea deal that I suggest your client accept, because if you allow this to go to jury the prosecution is asking for the maximum sentence allowed under the law in the State of Nevada, and as a judge I would be inclined to give it to.”

“But, you’re Honor?”

Carrie’s attorney started in again.

“This crime has already been solved. Tried under Nevada state law against a Cameron Nadine Pantalero, age sixteen who was found guilty and has served out the sentence imposed against her by a juvenile panel of judges who tried and convicted her of these same crimes! It’s already been tried, Your Honor.”

“Things have changed in light of the new evidence attained by the Briggs County Sheriff’s Office, specifically the weapon that was found to be missing at the scene of the crime that was used to rob Walter Grandt, owner of The Lonely River Pass Bar and Grill and in light of her apparent confession that she had verbally recanted to the Chief of Police and Detective Dane Andrews of the Briggs County Police Department.”

Tabitha had to agree to a plea bargain of thirty years to life in a Nevada State Prison for Women with the possibility of parole after fifteen years. All to be served consecutively in The Nevada State Maximum Security Prison for Women located in Lincoln County just south of here with time served.

“Now.”

The Judge said slowly and quietly, turning toward the council.

“How do you plead, councilor? Guilty or not guilty?”

Then the judge began staring at Tabitha’s lawyer directly in the eye.

“Wait a minute, Your Honor. You can’t in all honesty let this case go to the jury!”

The judge interrupted the councilor,

"Councilors, approach the bench."

"Yes, your Honor."

The defense attorney said. It was barely loud enough to even be audible throughout the Briggs County courtroom. He casually walked out from around the table, holding his neck tie close to his chest. Then by taking a small sip of the ice water that was provided to both councilors he gained himself a few moments. The water was served in a black and silver carafe with plastic cups so as to not be broken and used as a weapon in the courtroom.

"Okay, council."

The judge said, staring at the defense attorney.

"If your client refuses to give a guilty plea at this point I will be forced to bring in the jury and proceed to try your client for the charges mounted against her under The Nevada State Law Statute Number 43.54, referencing Lariby verses The State of Nevada, stating that if a juvenile is convicted of a crime at an early age in the State of Nevada, and tried as such, those records are then sealed, leaving room for the County Sheriff's Office to further investigate the case, and yes, they can bring new charges against a new, or different, defendant for said crime. That would leave me with every right to send this case to a jury! It's right here in black and white, councilor. I strongly suggest you take the plea!"

And after a long silence, Carrie's attorney reluctantly said,

"Guilty as charged. You're Honor I guess I'll see you somewhere around 2029, and that's if you're lucky."

At that time Tabitha slowly turned to her lawyer and said,

"Sometimes when things are completely out of control that is when the good Lord is in the most control. I'll see you in fifteen years."

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

FAIR WEATHER FARCE

The day was warm. A slight breeze coming off the cool running water of one of the natural inlets to the Columbus River—who knows which one. It was one of many scattered across the face of the Oregon Territory which had only just been established and made a part of the United States government. The river formed the border between Idaho and the fledgling Oregon Territory, purchased from several Indian tribes, American settlers, and miners, with money and whatever it took to secure a massive land deal. The territory's established form of government had only become a full-fledged member of the United States of America about 75 years ago, once again connecting the United States with the West Coast and a state that was formed previous to the Oregon settlement called California.

California was settled by miners and the like after being purchased and fought over by the United States government and the Mexican Council that governed all the lands and territories south of the Rio Grande, starting where Texas ends and continuing on all the way to the coast. They gave away the Baja Peninsula in the treaty in the year 1860, following just behind the California Gold Rush of 1849. The Mets had just won the World Series, and if there ever was a day like this one, you could go on living forever. Charles was born on the twelfth day of June 1896 as a huge Philadelphia Athletics fan, but they hadn't won the World Series that year. The New York Giants did, but that wasn't going to keep Charles from enjoying what he did best, which was fishing one of his father's favorite watering holes. Delaney was his father's name. Delaney Sanford Dixon nonetheless.

A good name for a colored man. Through being a free man and hard work, he had established a business of his own as a well-

digger for the locals and budding communities all across Oregon, and even as far as Idaho, just west of their hometown Richmond, Oregon. A small settlement of mostly those of African-American decent. One of the few that were found this far west of the Mississippi River, where Delaney Sanford had grown up. On days like today, he would take his boy Charles down to the Snake River, and fish from the bank with sinkers, a rod, and a reel, coupled with a few lures of the common spinner variety that they were able to acquire after picking up some live bait at the fish and tack store in Rigby, Idaho during the spring of 1905. It was some ways away from Richmond, but when you're a well-digger, you have to travel all over the place in order to work. He had a small crew of about five men.

None of them were a permanent fixture in the small colored business with a fairly frequent overturn of employees due to the fact that they were only stopping off for a quick buck on their way to achieving the American Dream of owning a prosperous gold-mining operation. They wanted copper, silver, gold, emerald, and a few other precious metals like magnesium—used to strengthen America's growing steel industry back in Illinois, Wisconsin, and the coal mines in Virginia and Massachusetts. All states of the Union, including the South, now that the Civil War had been won. Catching the fish in the Snake River was easier done from a bridge. Or at a river's bend where one could cast out into the center of the river without having your empty line pulled downstream. They mostly fished the inlets to the river because they enjoyed tying flies and doing what they called "Floating the line". In other words, they would use homemade lures designed to look like an insect of some variety. Mostly called "flies, or "tying flies."

These lifelike creatures were made with chicken hackle and peacock feathers tied onto a generic hook of a certain sized depending on the fish or the bug that you wanted to use on your expedition. Most anything would work if you could get your line to lay right on the water after first striking gently on the surface of the stream. The water majestically flowed through the forest, past the trees, and exposed smooth-sided rocks lining the banks and shores of this relatively large river, rocks that had been present for thousands of years. The river sometimes showed an ugly flood zone next to its banks where the trees and landscaping seemed to have been covered over with foul, smelly river weeds from the bottom of the river and what

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

was left over after the tootle bushes had been abandoned by the river. It left a white line halfway up the rocks and trees that had been inundated by the river. These low-lying areas were dangerous to fish because of the mud, but sometimes you could catch large-stranded catfish if you really wanted to, and maybe sell it to someone or something.

But Charles and his father weren't here for that. They wanted to master the skill of catching the best fish, next to salmon and catfish. Their favorite and most-prized fish, if caught at the prime of its life, making it about 12 to 15 inches long, was the German Brown Trout. It had swum in the waters for centuries and had always been sought after. They bit mostly on these artificial flies gently dancing across the cold open water of a fast-moving fresh water inlet flowing down off the many glaciers and snow-packed mountain peaks of the Grand Teton Mountain Range that ran south down the length of the state where they meet up with the Wasatch Mountain Range.

At this point, Charles had several fish on the line, and had even turned one loose after using a tied fly he had made with his father's expert hand. Now it was time to take them home. They would be leaving for Richmond right away. Delaney had work to do, and these fish would be easily cooked on the long ride home, probably traveling all night and into the next day. Delaney wanted to get it done at night because, believe it or not, that was the safest time for a black man with a new, modern, Model T pickup truck.

It had two seats and a quarter-ton flatbed with solid iron tie-downs. Good for just about any job he needed to accomplish. Getting back to town also meant that they would have to settle in for the winter, and Charles? It would be back to school for him. With a small class, he received a little more attention from the teacher, who was a white lady, than just about any of the other students in his school, who were colored. He was only in the fourth grade, but a fourth-grade education was much better than some had, and he was looking forward to returning to school to make his dad proud of him.

On the way home, Delaney stopped off for a few gallons of gasoline. Not moonshine, but gasoline—some thought of them as one and the same. At the stop, Charles spotted a bird for sale. It came with its own cage and seemed not to bite when you tried to clean its cage or give it food and water. It was yellow and green with a red head. Kind of an exotic bird.

As it turned out, the bird came cheap. The lady who had it was of Native American descent and had no use for a caged bird. Worthless, they were thought. Not even able to take care of their own water dishes, let alone find seed or escape a predator. It wasn't a sparrow or a parakeet. She said it was a lovebird and that it was making her sick, so if Delaney was willing to take the bird off her hands, she would only charge for the gas and not the labor of filling his tank. Charles was elated with the idea. The woman had even trained it to sit on your hand or your shoulder. Besides, if it was to escape, because it was domesticated, it would surely not survive without the assistance of a 9-yearold boy. It was his first pet. He wasn't allowed to have a dog because most outdoor dogs carried diseases and were often feared by people so such they'd often kill them on sight. Unless it was a bloodhound, but even they hadn't come this far west, because they had to be able to survive even the toughest of conditions. Just like the settler himself. Hardy and robust. Survivors. People who lived in the woods and back country of this once open frontier. Never before had Delaney seen such a creature as that bird and frankly wasn't happy with the noise that it made, but if Charles was good and kept up his grades he would be allowed the bird. Good for incentive and a proper learning experience in and of itself.

Nothing was going to stand in his way this year, Charles had thought after having such a terrific off-season spent with his father. His mother, a full-blooded Indian that Delaney met in his travels south of Oregon and into the Nevada Territory, was now living in the city by the Great Salt Lake that the Mormons had settled just a matter of decades ago. She'd decided that the rugged outdoor life just wasn't for her, considering what she had gone through in order to survive out in the open. Even though she was a full-blood Indian woman. After meeting Delaney Dixon, she'd slowly learned to speak English well enough to make her way in the world. It was a man's job to live in the woods, and Charles would just slow her down. Besides, what man would want to take care of her if she had a child to raise?

The classy city guys all had several girlfriends and they threw money at these women who were willing to have a good time, and that's what Georgia Lannie Dixon had set out to do. After having Charles, she moved off east out of the forests, and back to what she decided was a good example of a civilized community, always wanting to improve her social status and feed her hunger for lavish gifts and

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

fancy clothes. She wanted the best restaurants and clothing stores, and she always drank. Delaney didn't, but every now and then he would buy a bottle of whisky for medicinal purposes. Sometimes even stopping off at the local saloon for a stout drink. Back when she was still around, she would always find a way to start an argument with him over it after he'd had even the slightest bit of alcohol. She hated him for it. Then, one day, she just got up and left.

Delaney had come home from being away and found Charlie on the front porch with a note. It read:

"Mr. Dixon. Our time together is through. Don't bother looking for me, I'm going to live in the city where I can have a halfway decent civilized lifestyle. No rougher necking for me O.K.? And do make sure Charles is fed, and that his clothes are clean if you want him to stay in school. Ms. Knuckles over there has a temper and uncleanliness isn't taken lightly. In fact, she's so staunch her legs rustle when she walks! Keep a good eye on him. He's all you've got it was signed "Georgia."

She'd had the boy write it down in plain English that anybody could understand. She was over that now and it was time for her to move on. That was it. It was final. Georgia "Wolf Paw" Dixon had finally had enough of Delaney and moved five hundred miles to the east. All the way south to California. God only knows how she got there. Probably rode a canoe down to the river and went by way of steam train from Portland to San Francisco. She had taken some of Delaney's money, which was only in the form of gold and which could easily be converted into cash once she got into town.

At first, Delaney thought,

"How could this be What kind of person would just get up and walk out on her son and on someone who was bringing home a steady paycheck, in a relatively nice place with lots of beautiful scenery? There was hunting, fishing, and that tribe that she belonged to. The Shoshone Indian Nation?"

He'd met her close to the Oregon-Nevada border just inside Nevada when she was still completely native through and through. She learned how to communicate with Delaney via drawings and the speech she had learned from the white men who would ride into the Indian camps where they were living and collect workers for the gold mines they were running. The Indians had to learn English in order to please the white man and for the "The Twelve Day" program.

They were hired but if they hadn't learned to speak English in the first twelve days, at least enough to declare peace and wish the white man prosperity in their endeavors, they'd be eliminated. That trip was basically being hauled off to work camps all over the mountain valley and the foot hills of the greener part of Oregon, next to the coast. East is where you would find the farms and grassland where the Native Americans, and so many occupants of the general vicinity, had learned to communicate using English over the last few years.

Kenny and Jerry Matheson ran the mining operations throughout northeastern Nevada where Delaney had met his Indian woman in his many travels as a well-digger. He found out about this now-notorious mining gang when he was working down there. They were the ones who paid him and ran the bars in town. These guys seemed to have a hand in everything as the leaders of this new and already-infamous Matheson Brothers Gang. They were the people who had control over most of the mineworkers, and of course, the precious metal that one received mining his own claim. This was not unheard of, as slave labor had begun to spread to the Native American tribes out west. So far, it was just a bunch of rumors as far as Delaney was concerned, but his thoughts and actions were centered only on his work and on his little boy, Charles. Charles who was doing so well in school.

Georgia was right. The boy needed a good education, and as long as he was still learning then Delaney was apt to keep him clean and stocked up with new winter and summer clothes. And he'd keep on teaching the boy the ways to survive as a man out here in the rolling hills and steep mountain passes of Oregon, and of course how to get along with the people with money who lived in the sage-filled valleys that occupied the land to the south. It wasn't long before he was back in Richmond, Oregon, where he had just purchased the land and paid for the labor and building materials for his new log cabin home. It was constructed on an embankment so that it wouldn't wash away if the river flooded which did happen on occasion when the rains came. This was not only practical, but allowed Delaney a good view of the land around him. A good way to keep an eye on a young boy with lots of energy.

Charles loved the outdoors, and he was afforded the entire countryside to play in. After showing him the ins and outs of staying

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

out of trouble and not wandering too far off the trails, Delaney basically let the boy do whatever he wanted. He enjoyed school, and Delaney was determined to keep the boy in school. Now that they were home, and he had checked on Charles who seemed to be able to take care of himself pretty well when Delaney needed to be out of town, he didn't see a problem with visiting Daffanie's, the local saloon in town.

He came on horseback, allowing for having a few drinks and a good time at the poker table they set up every evening at six o'clock. Tomorrow he would take the boy for a day out hunting in the woods, and maybe expand his knowledge of firearms, and what to do while out on the hunt, but for now it was time to relax and have a few drinks with the boys down at the local watering hole. There were even a few people who had worked with him in the past or that he had met around town, maybe at the market, or the barber shop. Maybe tack shop. Who knows? It could've been anybody. Until the fire started. Not in the saloon, but up the hill towards Delaney's house. It was Delaney's house.

Was this really happening to him? There couldn't be a fire, and if there was, it couldn't be at his house, but as he got on his horse and rode slowly in that direction, it became clear there was a fire. And the closer he got, the more it looked like it was coming from his home. Charles was at home. Maybe he was trying to put it out. But he wasn't trying to put it out. By the time help arrived it was too late. Instead of taking the time to check and see if anybody was still in the structure, they went back to the local saloon, notifying the bartender who, in turn, told the cocktail waitress who leisurely walked over and gave the news to the boys over at the poker table playing five-card stud. By the time anybody got back up to the log cabin house it was fully engulfed in a searing hot, oak-wood fire that was impossible to put out.

By the time the boys had wandered down to the shack that had the water pump and buckets that were supposed to be ready in case of a fire, the fire was out of control. It looked like it was heading toward the woods at the south end of the house. That was the way the wind was blowing, and hot embers were shooting up into the sky, threatening the entire mountainside.

The townsfolk decided this could be a problem and began to get water on the fire. But it was completely out of control, and all they could do was wander around, putting out as many hot spots as they

could. After about five hours of running around and putting out forest fires to prevent the whole town going up in smoke, Delaney was beside himself. Where was the boy?

He couldn't have been inside. He was too smart for that.

But he had created a huge accident. After opening the bird's cage and trying to coax it out onto his finger, he slowly opened the cage door and used a stick to retrieve the bird, gently attempting to put his pointed finger under the bird's breast. One finger after the other, over and over, playing with the bird. It finally got excited and took off flying. But it was in a panic when it tried to land on the chimney on top of the red-crystal kerosene lantern. They did have some electricity in the home, not a lot, just enough for a small lamp or two. But Charles always wanted to be like his father, and lighting the lamps reminded him of his father. Now, there was nothing left. Nothing but ashes. Ashes, and the endless memories that would continue to haunt Delaney Sanford Dixon into eternity. The townspeople would never accept Delaney back into the community. Not now.

They believed he'd been cursed for marrying an Indian woman who, after putting a curse on him and all those around him, left to live with another man. Leaving a little half-Indian, half-black boy who was neglected and left to his own devices. Only the work of the devil could've brought on such a catastrophe. Had Delaney returned to town that night, things may not have gone so smoothly. After spending the night in his truck, he spent what little money he had brought with him in the fuel shed. He barely had enough money to buy about five gallons of gas. Not enough to get out of town. Just wanting to get rid of him, the nice lady at the fuel shed convinced her husband—who wasn't going to do business with the man—to let him have just enough gas to get to the next town. That would be in trade for his horse nonetheless, and along with the fact that he and his curse were going to leave town. As he was leaving, people who saw him driving away were throwing stones at his pickup truck and shouting obscenities, making darn good and sure that he had gotten the message,

“Don't come back!”

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

UP AGAINST AGGRESSION

Back down at his bar, The Lonely River Pass, Jeremiah was perfectly at home. He knew everything there was to know about this place, and well he should. He'd built the place from the ground up! Mostly, he was low on business, but Cameron and Hunting Sticks were regular customers, stopping in to visit with her father who she had forgiven for anything he had done to anyone in order to get by. Sometimes you have to do what you have to do, and that's the end of it. There's really no reason to judge, Cameron thought. Life was too short not to allow your own father to be part of your life after not being able to know him while you were growing up. Nowadays both her and her husband were partners, employed by the Holiday Park River Bend Horse Racetrack located just inside The White Horse city limits.

The place was run by Mr. Rosenthal Chin, who had gotten the licenses and permits to build and open for business in the spring of 2014. Opening on the 19th of April, the entire grandstand was completely covered by anxious spectators who could barely wait to place their wagers, drink beer, and buy pretzels from the peanut vendors. The brand new professional horse racing track was almost exactly three quarters of a mile in circumference, and it was set up specifically for both horse and dog races, offering up pedigree animal racing. They started out with two races a day, except on the weekends, and on Fridays they would hold several different racing events all open for wagers, the odds determined by the premise of eighty-eight percent payout on all profits made. So the track wasn't deciding the odds, or what the return would be.

Every race was averaged out on a scale of eighty-eight percent, so eighty-percent of the wagers bet would be returned to the customer. Those were the rules laid down by the White Horse City Council, which was willing to provide water, electricity, garbage, and sewer services at no cost from the city. Not to mention tax breaks with the IRS. In return, the town itself was to be given fifteen percent of the profit. That meant everybody at the track had to be on their A-game in order to continue to turn a profit. The track not only featured wagers on the races that were held there, but also on the futures. People could bet on races that hadn't even been run yet—anywhere within the foreseeable future.

You could wager even if you thought a certain horse was going to be in a specific race up to a year in advance, which allowed the track to book hundreds of thousands of wagers on races that hadn't even been run yet. This gave them the ability to actually create stock in the company, making money off the interest on money the track had in its reserve bank account. Sort of like an IRA, or an open spending account. They would pay in to the account, collect a certain percentage in interest, and purchase stock in the company similar to that of a 401K. That way, the company would always have a cash reserve in advance that they could use to pay down their interest on the loans that they held with the bank. All the while, the track itself already had its bills paid for at least two years in advance, a prerequisite of obtaining a legal gaming license in Briggs County. The best part was, Mr. Chin had more money than people had originally thought, allowing him to pay off the deed to the track well in advance, all the while leaving just enough of a balance on the books in order to allow for some type of a payment for a lending institution. This virtually guaranteed that he could borrow just about any amount of money against the track, by keeping a good credit score with the bank, because you have to give if you want to receive.

Cameron was managing the horse stalls, and Hunting Sticks was in charge of grooming the track and performing all kinds of odd jobs. Whatever needed to be taken care of, he was the one to talk to about it. Of course, Mr. Chin oversaw the booking of the horse races, and the everyday monotony that went on in dealing with the public and also with the gambling. He hired a manager to look after the bar and keep the drinks flowing to the crowd.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

The track also came equipped with its very own kitchen so there was food served at all hours of the day and sometimes into the night! The bar was open twenty-four hours, and featured several bar room tables including a dart board, juke box, pool tables, flat-top quarter poker progressive slot machines that were multidenominational, and a whole list of other slot machine games one might want to play. Mostly dealing with poker-like jokers wild, double-bonus poker, or just plain old jacks or better. This place had it all. Flat-screen televisions showed the track and other sporting events. There was a sports book where you could bet on all kinds of sporting events. If you could find it on television, chances were that you could place a wager on it, and covering the point spread was the name of the game. Besides, with an eighty-eight percent kickback policy, everybody needed to keep the seats filled, the bar stocked, and the sports book all up and running. Or, "In action!" They would say.

Nothing had been left to chance. This place was going to make everyone involved flush with cash and others rich with envy. They tied off the end of every day with of a nightcap, just enough to keep the old ball turning. Jeremiah, on the other hand, had little in the way of customers what with his location being so far off the beaten path. It was also not the only bar in town. The Lucky Lady was just down the street and was always open for business. No last call. Happy hour every day from five in the morning up until high noon. The funny thing was, Jeremiah could care less about his patronage at the moment.

What he really wanted to know was if his little secret had been kept safe by this lovely lady that he called a bar. He waited until a few months had passed, and then one day when nobody was around he couldn't stand it anymore. He had to find out if his secret had been kept. It was time. It was finally time to bring out his corner of the scrolls. God knows how many corners there originally were, or where to find them, but his corner was special. It was embellished with a very important clue that had to be deciphered before one could locate the treasure, or in this case, The Holy Grail. For lack of a better word "The Fountain of Youth."

Jeremiah knew that Tabitha wanted out. Jeremiah, on the other hand, wanted to locate the wellhead to The Holy of Holies. He wanted control over it. He was interested in its power over the sands of time, and Jeremiah knew that, as crazy as it sounded, there were

actually people out there who wanted to destroy it. Send it back to wherever the hellish thing had come from! But with his corner of the scrolls being the only one that contained the most important clue of all, he had little to worry about. Hell, he couldn't find it again, and he had the most important corner of the scrolls! The corner had a verifiable essay on it, paragraph upon paragraph. It read: "Break not the code of silence that has been sent down to protect the human race from unduly harm and ungodly worship which is due only unto the holy cross. Jeremiah had the bottom corner of the three-sided scrolls that were made up of four triangles.

One triangle for each corner of the scrolls, and a fourth made to be placed in the middle. A place where a hand print was visibly etched into the stone facade. When all four deerskin pieces were placed together with their seams aligned, laid out on a flat surface like a table, a chair, or a counter top, they would form one very large triangle-shaped scroll that pointed downward. And it had come with a warning! "Three corners and one in the center and another one, below, on Jeremiah's corner of the scrolls. The one that had revealed the prophecy to opening the well!"

"Look forward toward the future with great clarity my friend, and share in one's own best knowledge of the Water Well of the Eternal with only those that you love the most! As to how you are to succumb to these pages that you have written for yourself in a previous life, remember that in this life you are made to be in this world, and not of it! Beware my friend, for these pages are made to be real unto you Jeremiah read the rest and it said;

LET IT BE KNOWN UNTO THEM:
THOSE OF THE PROPHECY OF SCROLLS:

THE FIRST HEAD OF THE WELL

The first head of a prophecy is of a nature which no man must abide by. Lest it be born unto him like lightning in a stormy darkness of midnight summer's sky.

THE SECOND HEAD OF THE WELL

The next are the laws that govern the sheer ferocity of power that only the thunder and lightning worlds that lie above the tri-mountain peaks and valleys can provide.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

THE THIRD HEAD OF THE WELL

Standing alone against the wall while waving goodbye the one that he didn't want to bury the hatchet with regardless of the salty tears of his newborn baby's cry.

THE FOURTH HEAD OF THE WELL

The fourth head is of no consequence to anyone and it belongs to those who aren't afraid to try! But to the victor goes the spoils and in that good conscious you cannot truly buy.

THE FIFTH HEAD OF THE WELL

The fifth head was made from truth and forged in a way that you can always rely! But beware this man's truth for it is told with forked-tongued knowledge or is it that of a beggar's lie?

THE SIXTH HEAD OF THE WELL

The sixth head was made of destiny, but it was caused by the ramblings of a good man's spying eye! Also, by that of the son who was needed to guide them for what reason I know not why?

THE SEVENTH HEAD OF THE WELL

Pay no attention to the last head of the well or to those who are merely passersby. Save only those travelers of the god worlds who have trained themselves to see using the mind's eye!"

A WARNING FROM THE WELL

Heed not in due time the first waning of a sigh that of the first whispering sound of a newborn infant's cry. That of an infant's first breath the baby will try, but allow this not because this baby has been born to die. Disallow him that one short breath that he takes just before he exhales on the very first try. The one which mankind cannot live without, the one that you must to that baby deny.

It also read,

"The first of many curses bestowed upon those who are unfortunate or brave enough to find and drink from the Well of the Eternal. That of the water well, or Spring of Ever-Lasting Life! Now, they become better known as Time Walkers, or those who can never

die! At least of natural causes. Which with it leads to the eventual longing for the end of one's own poverty or that pain caused by the loneliness of solitude. The anger brought out by greed or the eventual death of all those around you after you have passed them all by! All of those except for the ones who have also drank from the well. They can never move on! Even if they do die! A Time Walker must drink from the power of the well because if it is trapped in the worlds between worlds it must stay there until it can be freed by another soul willing to take its place. Unless one was allowed to drink from the well a second time, returning one's own mortality, they could never truly move on unless freed by the soul of one that is your second or third generation. Without drinking from the water well a second time, you could become trapped in your spirit form. Forced to walk the earth alone!"

And then the scrolls read,

"Fear not the sins of your fathers for they will not be unto you, but beware of one's own following, for this might be your undertaking as well."

So Jeremiah thought that if you were born without it then your destiny must follow, because according to the scrolls, apparently since God had created man in his own image mankind's life on Earth has come full circle on this planet. Not only that, but according to the warnings that were placed on the scrolls, this knowledge was only for those who had previously partaken from the well, or only those by whom this knowledge would be understood. Whether it was going to be the first time, allowing one the curse of immortality, or the second, allowing one his own mortality, or even his last drink from the well which would do nothing. The drink that stops the curse from allowing one's soul to enter the God-like worlds above, or the different planes of existence that fall short of the physical plane, must first be granted by the Mighty Companion. The true embodiment of the guardian of the well. Trapped in a body that cannot be destroyed. If it were to be, then the soul of such an individual would become trapped inside. Just like a person who was incarcerated, and never received a proper trial. This is what had happened to Georgia.

She was now locked inside the thunder and lightning worlds that lay just above this one. So Jeremiah was determined to set out to free his mother and also his sister from the prisons that they were in. He could it, now that he had worked up enough courage to locate the

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

box where he'd stashed his corner of the scroll, hidden on top of a wagon wheel light fixture. Not really a chandelier, but who was paying attention anyway? That was the whole point. For it not to be found by anyone with prying eyes. Someone who could recognize the corner of the scrolls as being more than an old deer-hide piece of leather.

The time for the search had come, and the reason why now, after all these years that it had never been found by anyone? The answers to these questions had to come from within. Jeremiah knew the local Indian culture very well, having been married to Brenda Leone, who was a full-blooded Native American, and his mother, Georgia, having been of Native American decent. Although his father was black, Jeremiah was still considered a half-blood member of the Tribe. And although Jeremiah wasn't eligible for the Native American Land Subsidy, he was still pretty aware of the Native American ways and traditions, considering he'd grown up around them. On top of that, he was just over one hundred and ten years old this spring. He was born just after the turn of the twentieth century right there in the back room of The Lonely River Pass Saloon, which at the time was a thriving downtown business.

He was delivered by the local tribe's shaman. A local man who went by the name of Eagle Feather. Eagle Feather had taken the time to introduce Jeremiah into the worlds that lie within. Just like Hunting Sticks had done for Cameron back in 2013.

So, now that it was finally time to relocate the existing well-head, he knew just how he was going to do it! He picked up the red phone that sat behind the bar, dialed the numbers, and called up Cameron, who was busy working over at the Holiday Park River Bend Horse Racetrack. She loved her work there, but she always could find a few minutes out of her day to say hello to her father! Her cell rang twice. She saw who it was on her caller ID and picked it right up immediately.

"Hey, Dad. What's going on?"

"Hey, Cameron! How's things going for you on this fine day?"

"Fine. What's up?"

"I'd like it if you would stop in to the bar tonight around eleven, and bring Hunting Sticks and the boy with you. There's something that I want to show you! It's sort of a surprise. So, do me a favor, and come see me tonight, okay?"

"Sure, Dad."

Cameron said in a high-pitched voice, but asked,

“Why so late? Don’t you have to call last shot?”

“Not tonight, hon.”

He said in the most giving sort of way.

“What’s wrong Dad?”

“Nothing at all!”

Jeremiah began to laugh.

“Just bring Red Hawk with you.”

“Yeah. Sure thing. I’ll see you then.”

“Tonight is going to be just for us. Now, don’t forget. Eleven o’clock. Okay? Bye.”

And he hung up. There. That was done. Now all he had to do was pour a shot of his favorite whiskey—Southern Comfort—and drop it, still in its glass, into a frothy mug of his favorite American lager beer. Something of a boiler-maker, or so they called it. A healthy mix of whisky and beer. His favorite drink.

He would wait here, play his own slot machine, and try to relax. As excited as he was about the scrolls, and pleased with his own mental prowess in hiding the darn thing, he was just beside himself with pride. He was very smart. Now he was going to collect on his old debts. He was going to finally be able to find the Well of Eternal Life, and wield its great power. The ability to heal an individual of whatever it was that ailed him just by pouring it over one’s head, or, if it were to be drank, then everlasting life and ageless beauty.

He was going to be all-powerful in his quest for world domination!

The world was in his grasp, and now it had come time for him to squeeze. Nothing could stand in his way now. Nothing! Because Tabitha was also given a corner of the scrolls. The upper right-hand corner, which displayed the four points of the compass. North, South, East, and West. Without that, you would be running around in circles trying to locate the right path. Sure you could find the place through process of elimination, but by the time you discovered you weren’t on the right path, it could all be just a little too late! These woods were treacherous and full of danger. Protected by the Native American ancestors, those of the dead, the holy of holies was defended by fierce warrior apparitions, or banshees. Not only were that, but the caves down below the surface a maze of natural caverns and old mining shafts. All linked together, giving one a sense of hopelessness and the

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

feeling of being lost. Most people who went down there never returned. Jeremiah, on the other hand, had firsthand knowledge of these caves that littered the mountainsides and hilltops.

There were caverns below the water table, filled with thousands of miles of underground tunnels that had been forged at the beginning of the Earth's creation, caused when liquefied H₂O molecules were buried under the molten hot lava as the Earth's crust began to cool and steam pressure was released, giving way to open spaces in the magma. The cooling of the Earth's crust over the top of a body of water trapped it below, and as it cooled, so did the water, taking on a liquid mass that could create a bubble-like pocket far below the Earth's crust. With the heat and pressure of the rock formations lots of minerals were created over millions of years, jewels beginning to form.

Once the planet was cast out from its lunar orbit around the sun and out into space, it had eventually cooled after being struck by comets that were made of ice. The molecules that made up matter in space were crushed together by an immense force of gravity that still boggles the minds of physicists around the world. There was an area where the rock had cooled because of the comet's water, where softer metals formed with little calcification, making it less and less acidic as time went by. It eventually formed a soft, pliable substance that shimmers like the sun rising or setting over an ocean of water as it slowly gives way to the darkness of moonlight. It was a metal that was soft even when at the same temperature as the human body— 98.6 degrees.

These caverns were chock-full of surprises. Some good, and others not so good. There were bats, rats, bugs, strange animals, and a pitch-black darkness that was so intense one would immediately lose his bearings and become disoriented. Sometimes to the point of falling down and not knowing which way was up! Most of the old mine entrances were demolished or caved in. The ones that remained were only left open to supply the water table below with an open-air suction similar to that which closes a door when it's cold on the inside and warm on the outside—if you crack the door, it should close all by itself. The same suction that allowed the water table to drain into the many caverns and tunnels that provided water to places where there really wasn't any.

Without this rush of air to replace the water as it moved through the caverns below the water table would overflow, flooding the region, and leaving many areas high and dry. A virtual man-made catastrophe brought on by humanity's own ignorance and fear of the unknown. There were plenty of camp-fire stories about the supernatural entities that had perished down below that would come out of the caverns and kill the campers as they slept! Little did they know, that's exactly what was going to happen?

These stories weren't just to keep teenagers out of the tunnels, but also fair warning: Do not underestimate the treacherous caverns below. Even spelunking experts suggested that you do not enter. But somewhere along the line, Jeremiah had actually mined these hills and forest rock formations that surrounded the Sure Hill Valley. Now all Jeremiah had to do was convince Tabitha, who never really did get along with her older brother because of his apparent stupidity that she talked so much about. But now, she was not in a position for negotiation. She would somehow use her knowledge of the scrolls to bargain her way out of this prison cell, and that's exactly what Jeremiah had in mind. He, Cameron, and Hunting Sticks were going to get her out of there before something happened and she got hurt. Maybe even murdered. If that happened, then her section of the scrolls would never be found again. He even had a plan. He was going to use small talk on Cameron and Hunting Sticks, serve them a few drinks, and explain to them how and why they were going to bust Tabitha out of prison. Because he knew just how to do it!"

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

BANKER'S BURDEN

After Delaney had been chased completely out of Richmond he spent the entire next day looking for a place where he might be able to find something to eat. He had been on the road since before sunup, and it was midafternoon in downtown Portland. He had lost everything in the fire. Except for the clothes on his back, an old jacket, and whatever amenities he had tucked away under the dash. He usually found it useful when dealing with certain types of people that you don't want to know you've been paid for a job, or that you might have some money to spare. In those cases, it was really easy to be robbed at gunpoint. So, Delaney kept twenty-five dollars under the dash.

Things weren't looking so good for Delaney. He was now homeless and without a family. No tears came to his thirty-five-year-old eyes. His whole life had just gone blank. He knew he wouldn't be able to make a go of it in the city. For one, he was just a colored man, and two, he didn't know anybody who may've been able to earn him enough respect to allow him to perform certain tasks.

He had noticed that in the back of the truck there were some digging tools. Mostly a few shovels, and surprisingly enough, a full box of TNT, or dynamite. Well-diggers would use these to loosen the soil. As they brought up the freshly loosened gravel or dirt they would pack dynamite into small crevices and things of that nature. Anything that would embed the explosive charge into the ground. The last guy who had been working for him probably didn't know where to put them after he was done working for the day, and Delaney just so happened to get lucky, or unlucky. He wasn't sure.

Right now he just wanted one good reason why he should go on living, but the Good Lord had seen fit to provide him with enough tools and equipment to maybe dig two, or maybe three, common-

water wells. Same principles apply to any well, rich or poor. They all brought up the same water that Mother Nature kept underground. Everybody was able to partake of it. Rich or poor.

Right now, he was going to find a dive bar or a backcountry-road saloon where prohibition hadn't made it just yet. Prohibition was spreading across all the land, but it hadn't made it this far west yet, so all the bars and pubs were still owned by the common person without an organized crime family running the show like on the East Coast and in the Midwestern states like Illinois and cities like Chicago, and farther east like Atlantic City. Sure, people got paid off, but out west but, "That was just the cost of doing business."

Out here, things were a little more relaxed as far as drinking was concerned. It hadn't been that long ago that people were still using gold dust as currency against a debt. All the way up until paper money had been circulated, putting the gold and silver locked up in the Cities Bank. The fact was, they were the ones bringing in the gold, and they were going to be rich beyond their wildest dreams. People were bringing in more and more gold every day! The stuff seemed to be everywhere, and surprisingly enough, the prices were still going up thanks to the population boom that occurred after the Civil War. Those warriors were now getting on in life, but that generation's children were now heavily populating the towns and cities all across the nation.

Out here in California, life was excellent with its mild temperatures and fertile grasslands that gave way to grape vineyards and wine country. Up in the mountains though? There seemed to be gold everywhere. This new mining boom wouldn't last forever though. Gold was flooding the market, and the wealth needed to be distributed in a different fashion, because some people had formed a monopoly on the gold trade, disallowing any profits to be shared with the government or the people who were used to being kept within their own boundaries. So scuffles began to break out, and usually once it started, there was no way to know how or where it would end. People were dying on a daily basis, living under the terms of a government that had no control over its metal assets. Leaving everything up to the mining gangs that seemed to be popping up everywhere, under intense pressure from the poor who claimed they'd been cast into slavery.

If the United States government found anyone enforcing slave labor now that the slave trade was illegal, whether it be against an

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

Indian or a black person, the punishment usually meant death in one way or another. So the mining companies had to hire workers to mine their property, but they had to pay their workers, provide a town with living quarters, and provide a bank to store the precious metals in. This is where paper currency started to appear—because the U.S. government found that they could no longer collect taxes in a fair way by leaving it up to the head honcho of each mining camp.

Basically, each honcho had his own rules, and he was required to make sure that they were followed to the letter. If someone received a stealing conviction that person usually had a hand removed, and for more serious offenses, they would hang the perpetrator by the neck until death.

So if gold could no longer be traded as currency, the government was able to collect the proper amount of tax money from each and every individual who worked anywhere in the state. These laws were federal but the law at that time hadn't allowed for a lawman who could cross state lines. Which all changed shortly after J. Edgar Hoover took over the country's finest law enforcement officers. They were put into place to enforce the federal laws handed down by Congress.

These laws started out in the House of Representatives, made up of Congressmen whose numbers were determined by the size of the population in each state, and the laws were then approved by the Senate, whose numbers remained at 100. After making its way from the Speaker of the House and through the Senate, the President would pass the law into effect, but he also had the power to veto the law and send it back to Congress. These federal laws had to be enforced on a national level. Not left up to the locals to do as they pleased. With that in mind, Delaney decided to set his sights on the nearest bed and breakfast. He asked somebody on the street,

“Where is the local inn or the closest bed-and-breakfast?”

He was snubbed by the whole crowd of people all going in different directions without even noticing the people around them. Delaney's truck wasn't going to run forever on the gasoline that he had purchased back in Richmond. He thought of returning to Nevada, which might be possible with a little luck. He had several contacts for new wells to be dug. Not just for wells, either. Most of the miners worked very hard at what they did, but they were also paid well because the work was dangerous and could be backbreaking la-

bor. Either way, they got paid, and that was better than nothing, considering that's what he had at the moment. Nothing. No mourning, no crying, only a blank screen that contained everything that happened back in Richmond. He would never speak of it. Nor would he spend his time dwelling on it.

Although the thought of ever getting that close to someone again was more than he could bare. Never again would he care for another. His responsibility was to his work and to taking care of himself before he ended up in the same boat as Charles, who seemed to whisper to him from the trees. In the lightest, most daunting voice you ever heard. There was no getting around it. Charles was still a part of this realm and somehow Delaney knew it. Just as Georgia had learned the ways of the industrial nation. The ways of the white man's world. And she was going to milk it for all it was worth. Jeremiah had learned a few things about life, not only from being around

Georgia, but from what men of the tribe would tell him in his sleep at night,

“How is all of this possible?”

He thought to himself?

“If any of this was ever discovered by another he would have to blatantly deny the allegation and accuse that person of practicing witchcraft. Or accuse them of being one of those mentally ill people who were locked down in a reformatory of some sort surrounded by men in white coats who strap you to a bed and feed you three times a day. That was never going to happen to him. He was going to move on with his life, Charles or no Charles. His mind was made up and by God he was going to stick to it! Come hell or high water!”

After some more verbal abuse from the people on the street he finally discovered a black couple a few yards off just as they turned and went into one of the shops that lined this busy downtown establishment. The sign read, “The Nickel and Dime Club.” and as he got closer, it started to appear to him that this was where the black people were allowed to do their drinking. Because as he pulled open the street-facing front door of the shop he could see that it was a bar. A bar! Right here in the old west. Just before prohibition! And the customers were all black! How exciting, he thought, as he happily strolled in only to be greeted by a small, skinny black kid who was immediately poking his finger into Delaney's shoulder, all the while asking

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

Delaney, just who do you think you are and who invited him to come into this shop, because that's all it is? "A shop!"

"I don't know who you think you are coming up in here. Probably that big, dumb, child-murdering scourge from up in Richmond, all the way down here in Portland looking for a little action with one of the local girls! Is that why you're here? Boy, you got a lot of explaining to do! Yeah, that's right. It was in the paper first thing this morning, wasn't it? It just so happened to have your big dumb face plastered all over the cover of it. So, is that you, or should I just show you the door right now!"

Just then, and without warning, Delaney lost it. Everything started to come out all at once as he was hammering down the wrath of God upon this stupid, skinny, half-wit punk who wanted to know just who it was that he was talking to! Pretty soon they had multiplied, including a couple of working girls who were just trying to break up the fight by jumping up onto Delaney's backside in a futile attempt at bringing the big man down to the ground. Delaney wasn't the biggest man on Earth, but at this moment, his rage was larger than life, and all those days spent working outdoors digging wells had made him strong. But the more he beat this scrawny little foulmouthed know-it-all, the weaker Delaney got. Finally, the beating stopped, but only just in time for Delaney to notice what he had done. This guy wasn't getting up. Everybody just stood over the man, looking down at him.

"Well, don't just stand there grinning! Fetch a bucket of water or something! Do it now!"

And before Delaney could move, somebody else in the room had wrapped a wooden pool queue halfway around his bald head, starting the rumble up all over again. It took no time at all for Delaney to get the upper hand against his assailants, putting one of them through the back wall of the small ballroom off to the left of the bar, and another through the front window and out into the street. Suddenly, with the fire of a shot, a cowboy appeared. He was obviously not one of these city folks dressed in their pocket watch sport coats, neckties, collared shirts with button-down cuffs on the end of the sleeves, and penny loafers with silly little hats wrapped in silk ribbons, standing there in disbelief. This cowboy looked nothing like that at all.

He was dressed down for horseback riding with chaps and a holster for a six-shooter. Two more shots rang out and the street seemed to part in all directions, some people running in the opposite direction of the shots, others merely falling to one knee and covering their loved ones.

“Hold it there, big fella.”

The cowboy said.

“Put the man down, and walk outside. I want to have a word with you the man walked slowly, holstering his sidearm. He had a Western drawl, not that of a Southerner, but he obviously wasn’t from back East either. Delaney was guessing, but if he had to place the man, he would’ve said Nevada, Arizona, or somewhere like that.”

“I think you ought to get up, get back in your little model T truck and get yourself out of town.”

The man said.

“Here’s my card.”

The man handed him a professionally printed business card that read:

“Reginald “Willie” Pantalero, Ore Lander Mining Company, White Horse and Cherry Creek Mine. Nevada area code 702.”

“Give this to the man at the front desk of the local inn, and tell him that you’re ready to work.”

Delaney took the card saying,

“Just like that?”

“Yup. Just like that.”

Then, the man said.

“Now, get a move on, and don’t stop until you get there. I’ll telegraph the operator at the train station that you’re coming. On second thought, sell that rattle-trap you’ve been riding around in and take the next train to White Horse. Now go. The local Portland Railway Station is that way. When I get back next week I had better see you there. You got that?”

“Okay. Thanks, Mr. Pantalero I’ll be there. You’re not one of the Matheson Brothers Gang are you?”

And to that he replied,

“That would be my boss, or bosses, I guess I should say. Ken and Jerry Matheson. If, and when, you happen across one or the other you’ll know it. Happy trails, mister. I’ll talk to you again real soon!

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

Talk to your friends inside about that truck. Good luck, mister, and don't be late!"

And just then, with a nod of his head, he turned and walked off.

"Looks like you got a job, mister one of the foulmouthed working girls?"

"I'll think you're ready for a really good time?"

The madam asked.

"Say what?"

Delaney asked.

"Well, if you expect to get anything out of that old, beat-up pickup truck of yours over there . . ."

Delaney looked, and now noticed the two flat tires and the broken windows.

"Then you better start thinking of something really quick before anything gets any worse!"

She finished,

"Like what for instance?"

She said with a sharp eye.

"You'll take her with you!"

She said, nodding in the direction of an innocent looking Native American girl.

"She's worthless to me."

The lady said, as she cocked her hips to one side of her petty coat dress, silver and gold garters worn on her sleeves (and in other places no doubt),

"What's her name Delaney asked? "

"I don't know you damn fool! Ask her for yourself. She doesn't speak a word of English!"

In order to get the girl moving in the right direction, this black bar room madam gripped this young Indian lady around her forearm, and began to drag her over to where Delaney was by the front door of the building." The girl stumbled over to him, because she wasn't used to wearing a dress, and her hat fell off, which was normally grounds for punishment. But with Delaney close at hand that wasn't going to be a factor in today's reflections. Reluctant and unwilling, this young lady was trying to shoot forward while being pulled out of the bar room door by Delaney. Sort of like what happens when you try to force a donkey to move by pulling forward on its reigns,

“No. No! No, no, no!”

The girl started to mutter. But with a strong sudden upward lift, Delaney scooped her up and placed her inside the Model T. It wouldn't go far on its wheels but they were known to travel some distance with a flat tire. Driving it to the repair shop wasn't going to be that hard once he had looked up a nice downtown location as close to them as possible. He dropped a nickel into the newspaper man's bucket on a nearby corner and took the paper without even stopping to say hello. He knew how the blacks were treated in the city. He looked for the information he needed in the local newspaper. Then jumped back into the front driver's seat just as the young Indian woman started to fish around for the handle. Delaney quickly grabbed her by the upper part of her petite little left arm and said in Shoshone.

“What's your name?”

She suddenly stopped struggling. She pulled her arm back and turned to him, lining up her eyeballs to his. Now, face to face, she said in plain English,

“What's your name?”

Delaney replied slowly, hoping that if he talked carefully she might understand him. Then she immediately returned his words right back to him saying,

“I'm Delaney. What's yours?”

And then immediately after he replied again, his words were quoted directly back to him once again as the young-looking little Indian woman pointed out,

“Delaney.”

“Yes!”

He said.

“My name is Delaney. What's yours?”

“My name is Delaney. What's yours?”

She would say back to him in a thick and heavy un-American-sounding accent? She just kept repeating to him word-for-word whatever it was that he had just said to her,

“Enough small talk.”

He said, which was quickly iterated back to him. So that was it. No more conversation between the two. At least not until she had changed her mind and decided not to travel with him down the coast to San Francisco where he would board another steam train east until he got to Jasper, Nevada, up in the northern part of the State. He

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

really didn't need her to be tagging along with him. But from there, there was a dedicated track built specifically for the rugged high-desert hills and mountain ranges of Sure Hill Valley. The same valley that was run by The Matheson Brothers.

Both White Horse and Cherry Creek Mining Corporations had to grease the palms of the Matheson Brothers if they wanted to get the ore that they had mined out of the valley. Which meant, they would have to go through Ken and Jerry who owned the tracks. They had power over the banks in the area because all the banks in the area were, by law, supposed to only carry a certain amount of gold in reserve. Nowadays they dealt mostly with cash from the U.S. government, so whoever it was that was entitled to gold in the form of cash would wind up leaving his gold with the bank. That bank would then send out a steel lockbox by railway.

All of the account information and book-work documenting and keeping information with legal signatures, telling what belonged to who, would finally be transported into the closest city with a gold reserve, which just happened to be San Francisco. Then the gold that had been extracted from all over the northern part of the state was shipped out in lockboxes aboard a heavily guarded caboose on Mondays and Fridays. Brought in bright and early first thing in the morning. Usually around sunup or six o'clock, whichever came first? The gold would go out, and the cash would come back in. All done through the banking system, yes, but the Matheson Brothers had been the ones who had come up with the amount of gold that was necessary to build a railroad junction forty miles off the main line that wasn't an express route. Meaning it didn't continue on the opposite direction from the main line. In fact, it was routed straight back up to the place where the train had come from. The main line that ran from San Francisco, California, all the way across the old prairies just west of the mighty Mississippi River, and beyond.

All the way to the East Coast. A transcontinental railway.

A beautiful sight to behold by any man. It demonstrated that American power which was exhibited by the mighty freedom enjoyed by those of the American Heartland, and farther east as well. All the way to the coast. That which could only be achieved by traveling on a train. Everybody knew when a railroad train was passing through town because a truly magnificent thunder accompanied by the high pitch of a steam whistle and the sounds of a mighty black steam train

as it effortlessly rolled through on rails. That, and its all-too-familiar clickity clack rhythm was quite hypnotizing as the train moved through on its way back to the East Coast, or maybe even over to the new-found territories that had just been settled out West, traveling all the way there as you went to sleep in your bed late at night. Maybe even down through Mexico to the Panama Canal! Who knows? The railway seemed to make everything impossible seem possible. If they could complete that, then what else could they do? The land was still rugged and untamed but the birth of a new economy was bringing Americans out of the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression and into a more industrialized nation.

First to build a car and fly a plane, American knowhow was the spirit that drove this great nation. And Delaney was just happy to still be a part of it all. He'd decided he was going to forget about a dealership or repair shop, and go straight over to the train station. The last thing he wanted was to get lost looking for the place to sell his truck, have it break down completely, and have to find his way through unfamiliar territory to get to the train. Once he pulled in, they barely budged, due to his inability to coax this woman out of the truck and onto the train. Why he was doing this in the first place was beyond him. Maybe it's some kind of test from the Lord. Just to see how strange things can get before you start to lose your mind, he thought. So, he parked the truck, opened the door, and stepped out into the parking lot. Kicking the rear tire on the driver's side, Delaney recognized the telltale signs that his wooden wheel was about to collapse any second now. After kicking out one of the spokes that held it together, he managed to bring the back end all the way to the ground. He started pan-handling the people who walked by for train ticket money by being very boisterous and obnoxious.

"Keys to a Model T, ladies and gentlemen, free for the taking! Who wants a free Model T pickup truck? It could be yours right now!"

That's what he was saying when a man in uniform asked him for his identification and the paperwork proving his ownership of such a vehicle. As he led the man over to the truck to get the proper paperwork, he noticed that the girl had disappeared. He was, at first, tempted to look for her. But then he realized: why should he? She wasn't his responsibility, and even if she was, what was he supposed

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

to do? Chain her to the vehicle or something? That would be ridiculous! As of right now it was just one less thing to have to explain. After fighting with the passenger-side door, Delaney was finally able to get his key to open it. This side of the truck would always stick in place if you tried to use the key,

"I'll have a look at that the officer said, pushing him aside with his night stick. He began to shuffle through the papers in the glove box, and found the documents that he need."

"Hey, you must be that dumb S.O.B who let his house burn down with that kid in it? Aren't you the guy who...?" Delaney closed one eye.

"What the hell! I'll tell you what. If I get you on that train will you promise me that you'll ask for nothing in return and never come back?" "Just me and my wife, sir. She's coming with me, too "What wife?" The man asked.

"I'll go find her and meet you in the terminal at gate one. The first train out of here. I'll be right back."

"You'd better!"

The man told Delaney to hurry up before he decided to change his mind and as he was jogging back toward the train depot Delaney heard a faint voice call out to him. It,

"Delaney? What's your name?"

After a moment, he recognized the voice and turned around, and there she stood. All dressed up in one of his old work uniforms from the back of his truck! When he saw her he began to laugh. Something he never thought he would do again. That, along with her not having a hat, to him, was hilarious! He walked over to her and took her by the hand and said,

"Let's go to a nice place called Nevada."

"Let's go to Nevada she said, shaking her head yes!"

They were both able to board the train in return for the vehicle, but they would be given no cabin or sleeping quarters. Their seats were just behind the locomotive. Generally, these seats are reserved for the crew of the train to take a break in, not ideal for passengers. But today, they were going to be, and these passengers were informed that unless they had to get some water or use the bathroom, they would stay put in the "carriage car." As it was so affectionately called. Food would be given to them after everybody had eaten. If there were still food left over.

Delaney actually got two hot meals on that trip down the coast, and his lady friend the same, although they were inclined to share with one another. Delaney started to call her Georgia. Once she started to feel like Delaney was going to be an alright guy to be around, she started to lighten up. But it would be a while yet before she spoke her first few words. It wasn't that she didn't talk. It was just that she spoke in her Native American tongue, which Delaney found fascinating, but she went on and on. The whole time she was talking Delaney was listening, but had no idea what to say, so he just started to talk to her in return.

Not in her native tongue, but in plain English. Something that this woman would probably never understand. It didn't matter, because she wasn't going to be a full-time thing. He was just going to bring her along far enough to get her to the Nevada mining town of White Horse and turn her over to the Indian nation that lived in those parts of the woods. Once he had done that, he would be through with her, and he could move on with his life.

Shortly after disembarking from the southbound train out of Portland, they boarded a different train called "Matte never had he seen a train that had a name painted across the side of it. In this case, it was short for Matheson, because that's who owned the train. And about four hundred miles to the east it would turn onto its very own set of train tracks that would bring it all the way back home from California into the clear, fresh air of the six-thousand-foot high valley town that they were going to.

She was going to White Horse to be dropped off at the Indian reservation, and he was going to find his way back up the tracks about thirty miles where he would finally reach his high desert destination of Cherry Creek, Nevada. He would check in and go straight to work in an attempt to make his new boss happy. It wasn't long before they reached the Nevada border with California, considering that it would've taken them two or three weeks to come this far on horseback. Maybe even a week or two in an automobile, but by train they made it in two days! They planned on departing Reno, Nevada, that night, and then they would be halfway across the state in just a few days. After they stopped off in Jasper for the night they'd take the first train south to the Matheson Brothers' Ore Lander Mining Company, Cherry Creek, Nevada.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

The ride was quite tiring, and the smoke and soot from the coal burning locomotive was covering them from head to toe by now. Even though the doors were closed, they had to leave some of the windows open just so they could breathe. Sitting up the whole way allowed them little sleep over the next few days. Aside from being uncomfortable, it was degrading that they couldn't join the rest of the passengers in the dining cart to at least get a bite of some decent food. Right now, they were lucky to eat twice a day with little water and a constant barrage of heat, smoke, ash, and noise. They couldn't even talk to each other; it was so loud. Not to mention the fact that they barely knew each other. Between that and the fact that they didn't communicate in the same language, they had a hard time.

Georgia actually did understand English. Just not if it was coming from a man. She disliked men. All the ones she had met up until this time of her life were cruel and heartless to her. She wasn't that kind of giving herself. She'd decided a long time ago when her father mistreated her that men weren't good for anything unless you needed something from them. Like money, mostly. She was also a small-time thief, picking pockets and skimming off the till at the bars she was forced to work in. She wouldn't even give an honest day's work for an honest day's pay back in Portland at the Nickel and Dime Club where she used to work. She would just collect from the men and then injure them in a way foulest. Just short of a beating, she would rather be slapped around for her money than please a man. She'd made a pretty good profit working there after her tribe rid of her when she was accused of being with a white man.

Truth was, she'd been beaten and raped by some greedy cowhands who caught her when she was real young. Somewhere around nineteen or twenty at the time. But since she hadn't killed one of them the tribe decided that it was mutually agreed upon. Even though she wasn't pregnant, her tribe treated her as an outcast, forcing her into the city to work for a living. With no understanding of the white man's language it had been very difficult for her to stay out of jail. The sheriff decided one day that he was tired of feeding and taking care of her when she couldn't even speak English. The whole problem with locking her up was it gave her a safe place to be. The rough and rowdy white people with their ten-gallon Western hats had a tendency to use weapons in place of words, and they hated being locked up. That meant, no whiskey, no card games, and no six gun. A very

unacceptable way to be. So, he cut her loose, not caring what she did as long as it wasn't killing anybody.

Let the locals punish her for stealing. She had nothing better to do, and the law had turned a blind eye to the whole situation, allowing her to fend for herself regardless of whether or not she could speak English or pay taxes. They just kind of left her for dead. They thought if she didn't want to be here that she could always go back out into the mountains and join what little Native Americans were left out there in the wild. By now, most of them had been domesticated, but she might get lucky. Besides, isn't that what they learned the whole time that they were growing up? I mean, come on! They were supposed to be so much better than the white man at living off of the land. That's why nobody felt sorry for them about what happened between them, their land, and the United States government.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

A TIMELESS UNDERTAKING

Cameron had been swamped all day, working down at the horse racing stalls. She was the manager of all the horse corrals and feeding stalls. It was her job to make sure these animals were taken care of in the right way so they wouldn't get sick during a race. Before every race that a horse would be in she had to do a thorough veterinary examination and blood work. On each and every horse before they could race. There were close to six races a day starting from ten o'clock in the morning until six o'clock at night. She had help of course, but she liked to be as hands-on as possible. It was a fine line between trusts and "lead me not into temptation. Who knows what Hunting Sticks did all day? He was usually down in the maintenance shop hanging out with his "recruit."

"As he liked to call them. He was also still in charge of the local classic rock and prize-winning radio station KDNA 108.6 on the FM dial. He would often coach his underling, which was the nickname he had given Dusty Leaves after the sex tape incident a year ago, so that he could do the prize show giveaway with Little Jeophries and The Money Suit. Hunting Sticks would help out with the script, but it was mostly ad lib. You either had it, or you didn't. That's all!"

So, with Dusty Leaves at the helm, the radio station as still pumping out the hits for all those lonely travelers out on route 6, or way back out on state highway 23. "The Last Highway on Earth." That fateful day that Jeremiah called, Hunting Sticks and Cameron were getting ready to leave for home. Twenty miles down the highway in Plain View, Utah, is where they went when it was time to go home. They lived on The Appalachian Pony, a horse ranch that featured their main house, several metal buildings, a three-bedroom guest house, two barns, a stable that could fit twenty-five horses, several

bronco-busting corrals, hay fields, and irrigation for their crops. It was conveniently located only a few miles west of Jeremiah's humble property. It wasn't much, but it was his, and nobody could tell him what to do when he was on it. It was only two-and-a-half acres but that was big enough for a wood-working shed, two two-car garages, and a two-bedroom travel trailer next to his four-bedroom home.

The house was relatively small, even with four bedrooms in it, and was decorated in the style of the 1970's with shag rug carpets, wooden paneling, lava lamps, and an old-fashioned swamp cooler with the washer and dryer out back. He had an above-ground swimming pool about four-and-a-half feet deep, and a separate Jacuzzi that was assembled with a hardwood cherry-stained deck with stairs leading up into the sauna. He even had a steam room made of cedar so that the walls wouldn't warp, dry up, or split after he used it. Usually he would hang out in the back with his dogs, listening to his classic rock-and-roll music that was pumped outside by several port-tuned boxed subwoofers, that also held two six by-nine-inch midrange speakers each, and some small tweeter speakers that stood in the back, mounted against the house for a totally surround-sound effect.

He didn't have to worry about neighbors because it was cattle ranches and hayfields as far as the eye could see. Jeremiah was no farmer, but he did know how to grow a little green. The kind that you put in your pocket. He had gold stashed that would make your head spin! Huge golden nuggets and jars clear full of gold dust! Lots and lots of jewelry made of solid 18-karat gold, with large diamonds and his favorite—green emeralds. Lots of green emeralds uncut. These stones were considered, for the most part, to be huge, and the diamonds were the size of your pinky finger! He even knew the location of the mine and where to get more gold! So why not get rich selling it?

But it had to be under the radar. Because the land was no longer for sale. The claim had already been claimed by the BLM, or Bureau of Land Management, another name for the United States government, or the State of Nevada. Either way, the claim was staked, and it wasn't by Jeremiah! If he suddenly turned up rich, he would bring way too much attention down on himself. Not a good thing if you happen to be immortal.

You had to stay under the radar in order to fade from one generation to another seamlessly, without being noticed. If somebody

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

knew you in an area, you had to make sure that after about ten years or so, you never saw that person again. Even if it meant killing them. One must never be discovered, and his riches? Not good to anyone if he goes out and spends it. He'd even tried to fake his own death. That hadn't worked. So, after losing his bar to Walter and Kal about ten years after the Vietnam War, Jeremiah had to do something. Instead of being employed at some dead-end job all his life, he convinced his doctors—by telling them the absolute truth about who and what he was in life—to deem him eligible to collect social security disability.

He'd spent two years in Vietnam in the jungle. He was supposed to be in the Navy, but he somehow wound up in country flying a Huey UH-1 Helicopter, trying to transport not American Ground Troops, but the South Vietnamese soldiers who wanted a chance to get into the action and fight alongside the Americans. Problem was, nobody could tell them apart. The whole this was a big mistake, no matter how you look at it. He couldn't fake his death over there because he wouldn't be allowed to come back home again without an ID. So he kept his ID. When he got home, the Veterans Health Administration hospitals diagnosed Jeremiah with bipolar disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder. He would never work again, and his suicide attempt only bolstered his disability case with the government. So, in a way, he got what he was after. But what he really wanted was to be able to use the wealth that he'd accumulated over the years.

The only way to do that was to steal someone's identity or create a new one. The former is easier if you don't mind getting your hands dirty, and the second one is next to impossible without getting caught. At least if you don't want to spend your life on the run, constantly relocating so as not to be recognized as not having aged a day in over twenty years! Killing someone and taking their identity isn't at all easy to do either. You would have to have the perfect mark—someone with a similar age and appearance. Someone who wouldn't be missed by his family, or wanted by the law. This person would have to have everything going for him in an indiscriminate way. Jeremiah decided the best would be a college student away at school for the very first time. One who was in a position to attend the classes that Jeremiah wanted to attend. He wanted to be an engineer.

Have the ability to solve man's deepest anthologies. Hell, maybe even gain the power of the well. Once I have that, he thought, there will be no running from it! He could be anybody he wanted to

and rich beyond his wildest dreams, because where there's magical water, there's magical wealth! This combination of life versus wealth, and death versus poverty game was going to be over with one day. Now that he had part of the scrolls, and knew how to get another one, his chances at success were getting better by the minute.

So he'd texted Cameron and Hunting Sticks—two common people of an average age and intelligence. Family or not, they were expendable. That was one thing Jeremiah had learned over the years. Family is only family for so long. No relationship will last forever. It's just the nature of the beast. With that in mind, he set out to gain the trust of his daughter and his son-in-law.

It wasn't that he was planning on hurting them, but having a detached attitude would allow him to meet his goal of finding the well without compromising it for somebody else. He must be the one in control. If they cooperated and stayed out of his way when the time came, then they would be alright. But if they tried to undermine his authority, he would have them balled up. Every one of them. Once he had the power of the well.

He especially wanted the ability to beat death at his own game and become all-powerful in the eyes of the Lord, and in those of mankind itself! He understood that he would need a real Indian medicine man to assist him on his journey. Only one of them could lead him past the spirits of the past. Those of Hunting Sticks' ancestors. The ones who guarded the wealth and secrets of the well. In order to do this, Jeremiah had to talk to Hunting Sticks' ancestors, and attempt to contact his father, Delaney Dixon—the man who found the fountain of youth, but was filled in the process. The man who had let some of the water escape. Escape back to his family. But what of his knowledge of the scrolls, and how to find all four corners? Only he would know that. Only he would know who were to find each section of the scrolls. Once Jeremiah knew that, he would have the complete scrolls. The one that pinpoints the well's location and the incantations that would be needed in order to break down the defenses of the well. Only the purest of hearts would survive.

So, what he really needed was a mighty companion. One that could lead them through the hands of death and out into the light. That of true immortality. And his father, finder of the well, was going to be that companion. He would see to it that he found his father and his spirit. Not only to give him a proper burial with a headstone

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

in a proper cemetery, but also to collect on his family inheritance. Including that of a magic water well. It was late, and Cameron and Hunting Sticks were tired from working at Holiday Park River Bend all day long. They stopped over at their little broken down RV that still sat on a piece of land that had belonged to Hunting Sticks for many, many years now. After taking a nap and having a bite to eat they decided at ten minutes to midnight, that they would head on over to The Lonely River Pass, talk to Jeremiah to find out what he wanted, and have a few drinks. When Jeremiah saw the lights of a brand new Chevy Tahoe pull into the parking lot out back he knew they had arrived and that the time to do this had finally come.

He unlocked the back door and let them in.

“Hi, everybody!”

Jeremiah said, because they had brought his grandson Red Hawk with them as a surprise! Jeremiah was happy to see him.

“Have a seat at the bar!”

He said to Hunting Sticks in his native language. Feeling a little uneasy about the whole thing Cameron glanced at Henry as she pulled her jacket up under her chin and sat down at the bar.

“Go play, Eugene! Go play!”

She said in her sweet-as-could-be mother’s tone of voice.

“So, what’s up?”

She asked Jeremiah,

“Well I think it best if we start out with a few drink.”

Jeremiah said while mounting his arms straight out in front of him on the inside of the bar, one leg bent and the other one standing straight up in the air. He just stood there smiling, waiting for their order.

“Come and have a drink! It’s on the house!”

“It’s always on the house Dad.”

Cameron said. As she ordered a copper camel.

“Make it a boiler-maker with Budweiser and Southern Comfort for me, please!”

Hunting sticks said as Jeremiah started to pour more whisky. He tipped one bottle after the other, finishing the shot, and tipping it back again, giving them two shots in one glass each. Plus, a twelve-ounce beer for Hunting Sticks.

“Well, if I didn’t know better, I’d think you were trying to get us drunk!”

Hunting Sticks said. Tipping his cold-as-ice beer mug up to his face and downing the whole thing in one tilt of the glass.

"Ahhh"

He said.

"That was on the spot!"

"You mean that, 'hit' the spot, don't you? Moron!"

Cameron laughed at Henry and that silly beer-mug smile that Hunting Sticks was now wiping off his chin with a paper napkin.

"I think I'll have another one."

The man said, handing his eight-sided frosty beer mug back over the bar to Jeremiah who was waiting to fill it up again. This time with a new mug so that it would still be ice-cold. Henry downed it again, downing the whole thing in one giant swallow.

"Ah."

He said again. Adding jokingly,

"Now that's on the spot!"

Which made Cameron, who was trying to drink down her copper camel at the time partially spit it out and some even came out of her nose! "Owe!"

She said, pinching her nose as tears started to form in the corners of her eyes. Still laughing she added,

"Nice job, asshole!"

And they all started to bust out laughing at one another. The love they had for each other was quite a sight to see for Jeremiah. He hadn't experienced love like that for many decades now, and didn't think that he ever would again. Seeing it in their eyes kind of touched his heart for a second. But just for a second. After that, the real Jeremiah set back in again.

"I'll have one on the house!"

Hunting Sticks said as he gestured to one of the bottles behind the bar underneath the cash register.

"That one, that one!"

He kept saying, snapping his fingers at a bottle of Crown Royal.

"What?"

"One more and this time,"

Jeremiah said smiling back at Hunting Sticks.

"You want this one."

"Yeah, yeah, that one."

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

Hunting Sticks gestured over the bar. So Jeremiah reached down and handed him the bottle of Crown Royal. Then, after that he grabbed another one of Cameron's empty copper camel rock glasses and Henry poured Jeremiah half a glass of Crown Royal. Then, grabbing the drink gun that was hooked into a little bracket on top of and behind the customer's side of the bar, he squirted some soda into the rock glass. Then, without hesitation, Jeremiah tipped it back and it was immediately down the hatch. He slammed the rock glass down on the bar, laughing right along with Cameron and Hunting Sticks.

"Ahhh that hit the spot really bad!"

He said,

"There, that's better now."

"Henry said. And with that, the mood began to get a little mellow. Eugene was standing next to Cameron's barstool, pulling on the leg of her pants and talking baby talk. Cameron talked back to him in plain English telling him to go play with his toys. The ones that Jeremiah had put out for him. The same ones that he surprisingly kept in the back room. At least it was a surprise to anybody else who happened to walk back there. But Jeremiah didn't care one little bit about any of that. What he was concerned about would frighten even the most seasoned spiritualist. The dead who guard the well of eternal souls wouldn't go without a fight. And that was where Henry fit into the plan. Cameron, on the other hand, had to be the purest of heart that he had ever met. God was obviously in on this one. All the pieces were there. Somebody just needed to connect the dots, and that's exactly what he was going to do.

He started off looking very calm, but serious at the same time. Once Hunting Sticks and Cameron had finished their drinks, and the laughter was just about over with, they both could feel Jeremiah's cold stare, as if waiting for children to start to behave before he continued on. Like an elementary school teacher, he stood there amongst their spiritual eyes—flashing from the bar into the inner worlds that only come from within. They saw a flash! A flash of a vision—Jeremiah on the inner planes of existence. Jeremiah's spirit body looked just like the one he was in now, but just a transparent blue hue encapsulated in a lifeless and dark background. No color except for blue and black. This got Hunting Sticks' attention right away. Cameron too! In the vision, which flashed from the here-and-now to something of a timeless illusion like a dream, this apparition said to them,

“Stop, look, and listen. Stop what you’re doing, look up at me, and listen.”

Cameron and Hunting Sticks both sat next to each other, but now there wasn’t any laughter. Just Jeremiah standing there in front of them behind the bar. Still smiling, but not saying a word. As if there hadn’t been a joke of any kind. In fact, it was like he hadn’t said anything at all, and they got the feeling that he was going to deny any interaction with them on the path of the eternal or that of the spirit. The undying soul. Suddenly it was like somebody shut off most of the lights in the bar, or there was an electric surge making the lights flicker, and dim. Then they both suddenly felt like they were in a tunnel that focused on this skinny black man and on nothing else. Then, in a flash of light, the bar room was back to normal. The lights were on, and Red Hawk was playing on his blanket in the middle of the dance floor. Jeremiah was just standing there behind the bar as if nothing had happened. He was looking at them like nothing had even happened at all!

“Did you want a napkin to go along with that?”

Jeremiah said.

“What?”

Cameron stammered, looking around in a confused fashion for whatever it was that he was looking for or talking about.

“Huh?”

She grunted. With her head still spinning she looked over at Hunting Sticks, who was just sitting there holding Eugene with a puzzled look upon his face, and right away she was back at the bar. She was in a dream, but this was real. It was still The Lonely River Pass, but the lights were dim and flickering. You could hear the ceiling fans as they slowly rotated above.

Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh. Henry was there, and Jeremiah was also.

“Welcome, Time Walkers!”

Jeremiah said.

“The time had come to fulfill your true calling in life. To serve the Lord of Lords, and occupy the spirit of the well.”

Just then Cameron felt Hunting Sticks next to her, with his hand resting on the bar.

“What? What water well?”

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

She suddenly realized the two men were staring at her, so she pulled her hand back toward herself, and just sat there sweating. She didn't know what to say. Had she had another psychotic episode?

"What's going on?"

"Jeremiah here has something to tell us."

"Like what? What's wrong with me?"

She wanted to know.

"You're fine. You're just having a dream"

Click! It was the sound of someone snapping their fingers in front of your face, and then Jeremiah was standing over her with his hand still poised in the air.

"You're awake now, Cameron. Come sit down, and you'll be fine."

She could hear Jeremiah saying,

"Where's Red Hawk?"

She wanted to know.

"He's right over there. Look, he's with Charles."

"Charles?"

She looked. Sure enough, there they were. The two of them. Charles, with a peach-faced bird flapping around the room, and Red Hawk focused on learning to crawl with his chew toy in one hand and an Indian rattle in the other. Reaching out to him, she found herself once again sitting at the bar. Only this time there was a quart glass jar like the ones that people would use to store canned goods in. It was full of gold nuggets, gold dust, diamonds, rubies, and emeralds. Jeremiah turned the jar on its side, spilling its contents out onto the bar top and moving it down the length of the bar until there was a long mound of precious metals and unbelievably large precious stones that sparkled and had a certain aura that lit up the bar from one end to the other. When he was through, he brought up another jar from under the bar. Then another, and another, until there were five or six jars sitting on top of the bar.

Then he reached down, brought up a manila envelope and removed its contents, which looked like a piece of raw hide. Upon closer examination by Hunting Sticks it was apparent this was something to behold. When he first looked at it, all the color ran out of his face, and Indian or not, he looked white as a ghost! "

"Where's the rest?"

Hunting Sticks demanded to know, as serious as you can get!

"What? That isn't enough for you?"

Jeremiah asked,

"I mean the scrolls."

"I know what you mean, sir. It's not for sale."

"Then why did you show it to me then?"

Smiling back, Jeremiah looked at him cockeyed and let out a little chuckle.

"We need to talk to the Mighty Companion."

"Who?"

"You heard me, Hunting Sticks."

Jeremiah said, still grinning.

"We need to talk to the ancestors about this and decide what to do. What I'm trying to say is, I only have one corner of the scrolls. We need to call up our ancestors to find the rest."

"Whose ancestors?"

"Well, Hunting Sticks? Yours and mine of course! Who's this Mighty

Companion?"

Hunting Sticks had to ask?"

"A man that went by the name of Delaney Sanford Dixon. Your grandfather to be exact. Didn't I might mention that my dear."

Gesturing to Cameron.

"And my father?"

"The man who discovered. . ."

"Discovered this!"

Hunting Sticks repeated.

"Yes, this. But that's not all."

At this point Hunting Sticks began to snap!

"No more riddles, old man! Where are the scrolls!?"

Hunting Sticks just about tackled Jeremiah from in front of the bar. All the while, Cameron was pulling him back down onto his barstool by the back of his belt. So there he sat with steam coming out of his ears and a pouty face as he began to become solemn in what he was about to say,

"I'm sorry, honey, but I want to kill him. Can I? Honey, can I kill him."

"When you're ready to proceed, just give me a call and let me know. This place isn't going anywhere, and you can bet, I'll still be here."

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

“Okay? Okay. Goodbye now. In other words, get out.”

“Okay, Jeremiah, where did you get that piece of the scrolls?”

Hunting Sticks wanted to know. So, without so much as a blink of an eye Jeremiah thought to himself, “What difference does it make where I got it from? The point is that I have it!” All of which Hunting Sticks could hear loud and clear inside his own head. That, alongside a high-pitched ringing sound that filled his inner ears at an almost mind-blowing pitch.

“Stop it, Dad. Stop it! You’re hurting him!”

Cameron was saying as she pleaded with her father to let him go!

“Let him go!”

She demanded. This was something that Hunting Sticks knew nothing about. Sure he had been told stories of a mystical water well that was part of his Native American heritage, but like with everything else, one doesn’t believe until one happens upon something like that. Generally, in his case, people like his ancestors would hand down the knowledge of their heritage one generation to the next, but nothing had ever been proven to Hunting Sticks. There was just the old story that his mother had told him. Of half black, and half-Indian lineage. She was called Carol “Four Sites” Reynolds, or Carol Madison after she’d married his father Dale “White Wing” Madison. Dale’s father was a black man who was also a member of the Matheson Brothers Gang. He had married a full-blooded Indian woman, Julie “Little Cloud” Madison (Rightfully named because she was a first-generation Indian with a last name.)

She had to marry into having a last name and when she did, it was to

Henry’s grandfather, who was known throughout those parts as Alfred “The Bull Whip” Madison. A third generation African-American whose family was originally from Uganda. A hard man to negotiate with, and a tough man to follow. At least according to just about everybody who knew him, including Henry’s father Dale. On the other side, there was Hunting Sticks’ mother, a full-blooded Shoshone Indian woman who just happened to be the one who’d taught Hunting Sticks the ways of a shaman. Which brought him back to the bar and Jeremiah Dixon. Never before had Hunting Sticks ever experienced anything like this outside of a sweat lodge before, and he

was instantly made aware that there was more to Jeremiah than meets the eye,

“Okay. Great! Then you’ll stay, right.”

“Yeah, we’ll stay Jeremiah. What’s on the menu? I’m starving!”

“How about some old crow that I got from out back? Nice and crispy just like it tastes after being left overnight on top of some mighty hot coals left over from your sweat lodge.”

Not thinking that everything was so funny anymore.

“Do you think I could have another whisky and beer Jeremiah? I’ve a mind-splitting headache.”

“Have all you want, my furry little friend.”

Which is what Jeremiah called the Indians around these parts. His furry little friends. It made little sense to the red man and would instantly set one of them off—except not tonight. Tonight was going to be all about listening. Not talking. Cameron looked over at Hunting Sticks and rubbed his back, then turned to Jeremiah and said,

“What did you do to him?”

“Nothing a little liquor won’t fix. Here, Henry, take another shot.”

“I don’t think he really needs that right now, don’t you?”

“He’ll be fine Jeremiah insisted.”

“Look. If you’re not going to take your medicine man, then you’re not going to start to feel any better. You got that? Now, take your medicine, Henry. So, Henry grabbed the whole bottle of Southern Comfort from Jeremiah and just started drinking it all straight down! “

“Not in front of Red Hawk, Henry!”

Cameron yelled, but it was too late. Once he started, he didn’t stop until about halfway through the bottle. When he was done, he dropped the bottle onto the floor and fell to his knees. Collapsing right there in front of everybody,

“Mommy?”

The baby started to cry!

“Where’s Dad.”

Jeremiah took Red Hawk back into the stock room, put him in a playpen and turned on a mobile. He changed his diaper, made him a bottle, and put him to sleep with a night light in case he got scared in the middle of the night. He closed the door all except

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

for a crack. Jeremiah left his grandson to rest. The boy's father had been through a hard day and it was starting to show.

"Damn it, Jeremiah, he has to work in the morning."

Cameron snapped.

"Have him call in sick."

"I have to work in the morning too!"

"No, my love. You'll be with me from now on."

Jeremiah said in a, "Matter-of-fact." Tone of voice.

"Never again will he whimper before me. From this day on he will have to earn his relationship with you and my grandson Red Hawk, and you, my dear, will never have to work again. When I'm through, none of us will. And Henry? Well, unless he decides to cooperate, his life expectancy will be close to none and next to none."

"But I love him, Father."

She stated pleading with him to be merciful.

"I believe you. I know it to be true. I've seen it with my own eyes."

"You could be the devil himself, Jeremiah! And if you don't cure him of this spell I'll see to it that you both rot in hell."

"And just how do you expect to do that?"

Jeremiah asked as he walked around the bar and poured another drink.

"It's getting close to Nevada Day, Cameron. You've just had your twenty-seventh birthday. Congratulations on another year, my dear. I, myself, was born on November the third in the fall of the year 1906, right here in the back room of this very bar. In that same exact place where Red Hawk sleeps now. All those years ago, and in that time do you think I haven't learned how not to be bitter? How not to be afraid? How not to try and understand the world around me? After all these years, and believe it or not, I still haven't found a way to not be haunted by the dead."

He picked up his double shot of Crown Royal and drank it down, gently tapping it back down onto the bar. That's when Jeremiah finished his rant;

"The same men who found a way to start fresh and have a good life here in Sure Hill Valley, but only because we took pity on them, allowing them to go on living in the same world as us. But only as pets, mind you. Your aunt, my sister Tabitha, is also a member of the scrolls. So am I, and so was your grandfather. The man you never

knew. The one who died at the hands of the greedy. Those who'd slain him out of spite! Well, I tell you this family will have the last laugh! This family will rise again from the ashes of the phoenix and crush all those who stand in our way, for we are the members of the scrolls. Square scrolls yes, but with only three sides. The last corner is written on the walls in the Cave of the Companion. The home of the true Time Walkers. Those of the immortal. One day the ancient hieroglyphs will surround all three of the scrolls that pertain to your father, your sister, and your grandmother, all of whom are members of the order of The Time Walkers! All three of the scrolls of the Eternal are all made from the flesh of The Immortals. All the while Cameron sat on the floor next to Henry, holding his head in her lap while crying,

"Where are the corners of the scrolls?"

She asked?

"Hidden away in some safe, or in a mine or a cave."

Jeremiah said.

"Finding the other parts to the scrolls is the only way to find our way to the Cave of the Companion, your grandfather's cave. When assembled together, they're an exact copy of the incantations that are written on the wall of the cavern in the Cave of the Well. The same scrolls that are needed to obtain the power of the well by contacting our ancestors, or your grandfather, Delaney Dixon. The Mighty Companion himself! "

The same cavern as the original Order of the Eternal, originally formed by the red man thousands of years ago. Displayed on the walls of the cave in hieroglyphs in red clay pigment that could only be ground from the flattest and most unforgiving canyon rock found only in the caverns and mine shafts that lie below the foothills of the Sure Hill Valley! Which is where we must go to find another piece of the scrolls Jeremiah knew this, of course, because he was the one who placed it there. The only reason he didn't know the exact location was because he wasn't even sure how he'd made it out of those caverns once again! The fact was, when he was washed out of the Cavern of the Well, he'd had to find his own way to the surface! So before he got lost, he hid one section of the scrolls in the stone walls of the mine shafts. And unbeknownst to Jeremiah, Cameron had been there before.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

Charles had lead Cameron through the caverns to its location when she was only nine years old, by having her follow her little dog Memphis, who had, by now, passed away from natural causes. The little dog had run into the mines and Cameron had followed. And that's where she first met Charles. It wasn't as far from the surface as one might think! Yet, there it was. Just an old rawhide flap that was barely protruding from the cavern wall. Something that Memphis seemed to be interested in. That's where she met her friend Charles. He had just been standing there. Distracted by his presence, she'd left the rawhide there. And after collecting her dog, she returned to the surface. Charles had been with her ever since. But neither Jeremiah nor Cameron were aware of that yet. It would take a little longer to jog her memory.

“First things first, though.”

Jeremiah said.

“We have to bust your sister out of that prison she's in. She's the one who holds the key to the other corner of the scrolls. Those two had no right in taking the life of your grandmother. It's a long story, Cameron, but by the time we're through you'll have guessed it all!”

OPEN-ENDED AUTONOMY

“Only the purest of heart may enter the Cave of the Companion.”

Jeremiah said.

“The Mighty Companion. The same as your grandfather, this person must be pure of heart. Like you, my dear. You are the one who is pure of heart. Only you can enter, and only you can escape and get back out again. This is something you must do or he will die here.”

He gestured to Hunting Sticks.

“In order to pass through the Everlasting Gates of the Eternal and save him you must first find the other corner of the scrolls, an exact copy of the fourth piece, hidden somewhere down below, which is written on the walls of the Cave of the Mighty Companion. You will know you have the right cavern because they will match up together. Jeremiah had hidden it somewhere in the caves and mines that lie below the forest in an all-too-familiar canyon in the foothills of the Sure Hill Valley. Jeremiah continued.

“In order to do that, you must have purity of heart and the innocent breath of a newborn baby. And for that, you must know that Tabitha is pregnant.

He paused.

“Pregnant with Hunting Sticks’ child.”

Cameron only starred off into the distance.

“She’s due to give birth two months from now. That child must be delivered in the Cave of the Mighty Companion by the father! In other words, Hunting Sticks. It’s been written in the scrolls of The Well of the Eternal.”

“You mean back on The Ann Belle?”

Cameron said softly.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

“Yeah.”

Jeremiah had to say to his poor, broken hearted little girl.

“Don’t be too upset, my dear. Life is full of surprises. Most of them just lend to the fact that nothing lasts forever. Not fathers, not mothers, not children, and especially not husbands and wives. Time is the greatest ambition known to man, yet it is the one thing that will bring him down on his knees begging for forgiveness against the sins of one’s fathers just like little old Hunting Sticks over there. Not so old and wise after all, you see? Just another native, and all natives have the land itself as an Achilles’ heel. They prosper from it when it is bare and lifeless.

Nothing but wide-open space, but when the land becomes occupied by the white man, they segregate their own population against that of the rest of the world, never understanding the likes of progress. Still trapped in the past, they refuse to grow. And when their roots start to wilt in the small pot that they’ve been planted in the rebel against themselves with mind-altering drugs, alcohol, tobacco, and gambling. All these things the red man does not understand and sees their effects as reality. Handed over to them by the white man, these things they wield as weapons against them thinking that the white man will eventually choke on his own uncut food. When he doesn’t, they begin to doubt their own conscience, and afterwards they revert back to their ancestors for survival when in fact it is them who should be carrying their ancestors into the other worlds. Not the other way around.

Tears fell down Cameron’s face, but she listened to her father,

“As you can see they wilt and suffocate like potted plants in a rock garden, choking on their own carbon monoxide. But never fear, my love, you are special. You will be saved from this, I assure you. Just realize what it is that you are dealing with and take control of it before he takes control of you. Show up for work, but don’t over complicate things by worrying about your little hubby here. Let him deal with his, and you just take care of what you have to do for yours, and leave the rest to me. I’m sure Mr. Chin will see things my way. He always has. A loyal friend is a fine asset to have and they seem to last the longest. After all, one only needs to serve the needs of one’s own self and in doing so, like my father always said, ‘One hand washes the other.’ Cameron, trust me, when it comes to this guy, watch your back. I’ll take care of Tabitha after we free her and acquire the upper

right-hand corner of the scrolls. Check with Mr. Chin in the morning. He got the memo, trust me!

Cameron tried to believe her father's words, but she was numb. "This will all be over soon." Jeremiah assured her.

"You can sleep upstairs in the guest bedroom with me tonight. Leave him down here to figure things out on his own. Cameron nodded. She and Red Hawk would stay the night at Lefty's house.

"After we're finished with all that, we'll take care of Walter and Kal, but not in the way you might think! After we acquire the power to the well we'll destroy their family dynamic from the inside out, leaving them in a never-ending purgatory similar to the one your grandmother is in now.

Forced into such an unspeakable thing by Walter and Kal, she must now be rescued by the power of the well from the lightning and thunder of the spirit realm that lies between this world and the next. She must drink from the water of the well in order to be freed of this life. That's where Hunting Sticks comes in. After he frees her soul, we'll be rid of him. But for now, we need him. He's the only one who can free her from his ancestors' grip. They have a spell on the well,

After finding out about the scrolls and Georgia's immortality from the mouth of greedy little Carrie Grandt, Walter and Kal took it upon themselves to take the power of the well from your grandfather—Delaney Dixon. That was in exchange for your Grandmother Georgia's life. Tabitha was the one in control of that murderous rampage all along. They just murdered Georgia and her children, our flesh-and-blood brother and sister, and my mother, in a bid to gain power over the family and overthrow your grandfather in the position of the Mighty Companion or the guardian of the well. They planned to do that by putting Tabitha into a position of command of spiritually protecting the inner power of the well itself so that she, Walter, and Kal could gain control before I had a chance to take it by honest means.

All to no avail. It was a feeble attempt to force Delaney Dixon's spiritual hand. In a bid to get him to submit to the assassination of his wife in exchange for the power of the well, they set their own souls on fire. Tabitha included. Blood isn't always thicker than water, if you know what I mean. Stick with me, and I guarantee you,

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

we will bring them all down in one fell swoop, saving your grandmother, your father, your grandfather, your aunt, and even your children from the curse that grasps all that drink from the well

“How does it work?”

Cameron asked,

“The well gives, and the well takes away!”

Jeremiah said. Then he just left it at that. Cameron walked over to where Hunting Sticks was still flat on the floor with one leg bent sideways at the knee, his left foot pulled up next to his waist, awkwardly positioned from the way he had collapsed, exposing his cheap snakeskin cowboy boots. The ones that he loved to wear. Cameron took off her wedding ring and tucked it nice and neat into his shirt pocket,

“There now. Isn’t that nice?”

She whispered. He was going to need it because Cameron had every intention of taking him to court and retrieving everything he had laid away in the bank, savings from his recent business successes. Not to mention the majority of his Native American Indian land subsidy that he still had stashed away in a safety deposit box because he didn’t want to keep it in a bank account for fear of being robbed of his bank card.

Cameron would head to a lawyer’s office first thing in the morning, which by now, was only six hours off. That would give her enough time to get herself together and gather her identification and marriage license. She’d also need Eugene’s birth certificate in order to gain custody of her son before Henry knew what hit him. After a short hour or two on the couch upstairs she got up and took care of Eugene’s needs, Hunting Sticks still laying there in the middle of the floor as if he were dead. He hadn’t moved a muscle. Only his loud snoring indicated any signs of life.

It wasn’t long before Cameron had the papers drawn up and a court date set. Along with a legal restraining order banning him from visiting her or the children before the divorce hearing. It was to take place three days after the proper paperwork had been served. Hunting Sticks woke up from the excruciating pain of his feet being transformed into the inner shape of an old snakeskin riding boot. He was on the floor of The Lonely River Pass Bar and Grill with no bedding of any kind and wearing his full work uniform. That included these heavy-duty, steel toed snakeskin working boots that had just about

ruined his feet. A stint like that and you could end up with flat fee. Luckily they were somewhat broken in, it would've been even worse.

He could hear muffled conversation as he came to. Opening his eyes, he noticed right away that he was extremely hung over, stiff, sore, and confused. It finally dawned on him that the chattering he was hearing were patrons over at the bar. Mostly all white people, it looked like the regular crowd of misfit ranch hands, weary travelers who decided to take a detour into a real-life town from the Old West, and of course, the local officials—including a few off-duty prison guards who work four ten-hour shifts in a row. Back-to-back shift rotations starting off with a day shift, then the next day, doubling back in for a graveyard shift and then completing the process with a swing shift before doubling back in for a day shift. And there were at least three of them drinking at the bar, carrying on in a boisterous fashion. There were also a few ladies playing pool together. They were probably there with the off-duty correctional officers who were given away by their silly conversation.

Besides, Hunting Sticks recognized them as regular customers. There was even someone playing that stupid reel to reel slot that set out in the middle of the bar room floor up against a pillar made of stone and mortar. Jeremiah even remembered when they added electricity to the bar while at the same time expanding the second floor to cover that end of the bar. Its original construction had an outdoor loft on the second floor at the front of the building where people could sit outside and enjoy the view. So when Jeremiah decided to change the upper level he reconstructed the entire level, expanding it out past the second story patio that now overhung the main entrance to the bar. Because of the weight of the remodeling on the second floor from turning it into an office and living quarters, the building contractor who had to be licensed by the town's council decided that a support pillar made of rock and mortar would be functional and elegant at the same time.

The thing was, nobody in the bar seemed to notice Hunting Sticks or what was happening to him. He slowly pulled himself up off the dance floor, walked directly over to the bar, and ordered a shot of Crown Royal in an icy eight sided beer mug fresh out of the freezer and filled with Budweiser. He sat down and began to drink. And Jeremiah continued to serve the man drinks over the next eight hours without so much as a word out of Hunting Sticks. Not even the other

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

patrons in the bar had noticed him. He just left a couple of dollars and quarters on the inside edge of the bar in silence, asking for another drink when he got a chance. He began to feel better than he had an hour ago or even a day ago. Now if he could just get the ringing out of his ears he would be fine. Jeremiah, or so it seemed to Hunting Sticks, hadn't required a whole lot of sleep in order to function the next day.

By now it was plenty bright outside meaning that it was mid or late afternoon. He knew he had missed work that morning. Jeremiah notified Mr. Chin who seemed to have smoothed out the whole not showing up for work incident. And so it was. This time of year, around the same time as Nevada Day, and after the changing of the clocks to fall back and gain an hour in the morning, it became dark outside pretty early—around five thirty or six o'clock at night. That's when Hunting Sticks finally got up and walked out of the bar without saying a word. He had no transportation, and hardly any cash left in his wallet. Not even a cell phone. So, he sat there on the front porch swing and waited. Jeremiah got the hint and called Cameron who stopped over and picked him up from the bar.

By the time she'd arrived, she had put in a full day's work for Mr. Chin, keeping the tracks stable up and running. She'd also managed the jockeys by making their schedule and placing them on a horse that was decided upon by a computer program designed to be filled with the latest horse racing statistics of both the jockeys and the horses. Something that was decided for them in accordance with the laws, bylaws, and rules of the racing track's events handed down by the city and mayor of White Horse. Cameron was just there to inspect and make sure that the gaming laws were being adhered to. A big responsibly, whereas Hunting Sticks was usually goofing off somewhere like the Sports Book Bar and Grill which was rolled into one on Mr. Chin's property, below the grandstands to the horse racing park. Mr. Chin had asked one of the men who usually worked down cleaning out the stalls for the horses to rest up and bring the feed bag on in. So, Cameron had to go when her father sent her a text asking her to come over to The Lonely River Pass and pick up Hunting Sticks who was out on the front porch probably getting robbed as he lay there on the swing and once again completely passed out.

Hunting Sticks had little time to react to the fact that his bank accounts had been frozen and his wife and children were off-limits,

allowing him no defense against Cameron's and her father's wrath. He attended the divorce hearing but ended up losing everything he had acquired over the last few years. His kids, the horse ranch, his job, his money, and even the automobile. Not to mention his wife. Without any prenuptial agreement Henry "Hunting Sticks" Madison had lost it all to his ex-wife, Cameron Dixon. She left him only his Cherry Creek property with the broken down RV whose camper shell was in relatively good shape considering its size. Then there was the Appalachian Pony. His prized horse ranch that he'd shared with his lovely young wife Cameron Pantalero and their year-old baby boy Red Hawk Madison.

Now with Hunting Sticks taken care of, it was time for Mr. Chin to do his part in arranging this little set up. It just so happened that the deputy warden from out at the prison that Carrie was locked up in, Loral Bette's, always showed up at the track. He'd even won his fair share of money over the last few months, but he always seemed to put it back in again, betting on the futures. Instead of buying stock in the company, which had a small margin of return on a capital investment, betting on the futures, though risky, had a much better payoff if he could win. It wasn't his losing that was going to get him into trouble. Mr. Chin had some doctored documents of his own pertaining to the Holiday Park River Bend Racetrack. The deputy warden was about to find himself with a windfall of over two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. A winning wager on a long-shot horse with twenty-five grand riding on her. Fact was, Mr. Chin had to wait until he had a winning ticket that would get him over to the counter. When he turned in his winning ticket he would, low and behold, somehow be the lucky winner of two hundred thousand dollars for a longshot bet on an underdog horse.

Finally, he came back to the ticket window where he had a smalltime winning ticket. The kind that he would usually put right back in again for the next race or for the first one starting the next morning when he would be back again. But this time the ticket agent just took the ticket and asked how he wanted to be paid. Next thing the deputy warden knew, one of the security guards was approaching him and informed him that his car had been vandalized in the parking lot. The security officer,

"We have the guy on film but nobody seems to have recognized him

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

as of yet.”

Then the supervisor behind the ticket window asked the warden if he would like to cash out. The deputy warden agreed that he should inspect the damage to his car and fill out a security report that the track could submit it as a statement to the cops,”

“Would you like cash, Mr. Bette’s, or would you prefer direct deposit?”

“I’ll just take it in cash.”

He said. So they paid off the small-winning ticket in cash. So all Mr. Chin had to do was doctor the paperwork that the deputy warden had unwittingly signed which stipulated that a two hundred and fifty-thousand-dollar payoff was to be direct-deposited into his secure bank account by way of crediting his debit card that was listed as his primary checking account. The same one that the deputy warden had used to get the automatic teller machine to place his bet with. This happened all because of the laws that state one can’t place a wager with anything but cash for the card holder’s protection. They had to visit the automatic teller machine in order to get cash to bet with.

And, since a supposed buy-in of twenty-five thousand dollars was in order, the deputy warden supposedly had to have taken the cash out of his personal checking account using his debit card, and that’s how the high stakes gambling proceeds ended up in his personal account. Money that he had no idea he had. By signing for that winning ticket at the cashier cage, he had also unwittingly not filled in and initialed the box for the taxes to be automatically withdrawn from his winnings. And according to his next transaction, that money was immediately wagered on another race, seemingly parlaying his winnings into the second round of horse racing. The money was all wagered on a long shot. It wasn’t necessarily a sure thing.

Nonetheless, Mr. Chin’s little plan worked.

The man lost the final race when his horse didn’t cover the time allotted for him to cross the finish line. It was a fifteen-to-one payoff if the horse had covered that much ground. Something that it had done before, just not this day. Maybe because it just so happened that the dirt inside the starting line gate where this horse, Morning Glory, was had been watered down just a tad too much. Generally, they would put a small amount of water on the track before grooming it to keep the dust down. In this case, the stall was actually downright muddy. Hunting Sticks was nowhere to be found that day, so nobody

was there to catch the mistake but Cameron. Even the crowd wouldn't know a thing about it. With a little luck, their plan worked. None of these transactions would even be noticeable on the warden's account unless the deputy warden himself decided to go over his bank statement. But that wasn't due to come to him in the mail until the 15th.

Even then, with no extra money on the books, this little transaction would be easily overlooked. Besides, he never opened his bank statement unless he had a good reason to. Most of the time he would just put the unopened envelope in a filing drawer and that was the end of that! It wasn't long before he started to receive letters from the Internal Revenue Service about the unpaid taxes on a quarter-of-a-million-dollar jackpot.

They all wanted fifteen percent or thirty-seven thousand dollars in tax money within the next fifteen days or they would take him to court, levy his bank accounts, and garnish eighteen percent of his net earnings. That means eighteen percent taken off after he had paid his usual taxes! When he found out about it he got in his little gold colored Chrysler 300-model sedan and raced over to the track, demanding to speak with the manager,

"Send him in. Mr. Jeophries!"

Chin said. He called everybody "Mr. Jeophries". in honor of the character on the radio show that paid the fourth caller or the prize winner a half of whatever was in the prize vault that week—usually between two and three hundred dollars in cash. Mr. Chin was just making a joke with the nickname; it wasn't very funny but you just had to laugh. "Come into my office." Mr. Chin said.

"Please sit down."

The Deputy Warden sat comfortably in front of Rosenthal's oak-paneled desk.

"I know why you're here..."

He was very rudely interrupted by this man stating his status in the community, and how this establishment was going to become a ghost town when he was through with the place, and on and on about how he was going to get to the bottom of it even if it killed him trying! Mr. Chin calmly asked him to lower his voice, reminding the warden that people were listening and that the man should hear what he had to say before he said anything else that might incriminate himself even further!

"Go ahead, Mr. Chin. I'm all ears! Please, explain this to me!"

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

The warden said, dropping a file onto Mr. Chin's desk.

"Open it."

Mr. Chin just sat there, leaning back in his leather office chair with his fingers interlaced, twiddling his thumbs over his chest.

"I know what's in the file, deputy warden."

"Then you had better explain to me what the heck is going on around here!"

"You've won and lost over a quarter of a million dollars betting on races at this track. You waived your option of having them taken out of your winnings at the time of the transaction."

The deputy warden started to say... But—" just as Mr. Chin cut him off by raising his hand in the air Rosenthal said,

"Please don't make a scene, deputy warden, or I'll have you dragged kicking and screaming right out the door the same way you came in! You got that? Now control yourself. I'll be willing to correct this mistake with the Internal Revenue Service..."

"That's great, Mr. Chin. I want this taken care of on paper right here, right now."

Placing his hand in the air one more time, Mr. Chin stopped the man and said,

"But I'll file an amendment with the IRS and pay the taxes on your wager, and even recant on your losing ticket that you filed for two hundred and fifty thousand dollars on a fifteen-to-one long-shot, giving you two hundred and fifty thousand legitimate tax-free dollars to be wired into your personal checking account within the hour. Does that sound acceptable to you?"

Two Asian men dressed in all black walked into the room with side arms visible under their folded arms. They stood on either side of Mr. Chin behind the hardwood desk, a show of force.

"Or, shall we feed you to the horses?"

"Very funny?"

The deputy warden said. This time no one was laughing.

"What is it that you want, Mr. Chin?"

"A guard's uniform and an electronic pass with the name of your choosing that will match up with personnel files out at the prison?"

"You're crazy if you think—"

He was cut off mid-sentence with a rubber ball in his mouth and a piece of cloth tied around his face holding it in. The man began

to struggle with his hands but was quickly subdued and tied to the arms of the chair.

Soon he was in leg irons too.

“So, unless, of course, you feel comfortable swimming in that outfit I’ll say good-bye for now. If I untie you, will you cooperate with me? I’m offering you two hundred and fifty thousand dollars the man nodded his head yes, yes he would cooperate!”

They untied the cloth from around his head and took out the little rubber ball.

“So, what do you have to say for yourself?”

Mr. Chin asked?

“I think that I might still have a few jumpsuits out in the garage, but no boots. I have a pass badge out in the trunk of my car that’s generally only handed out to hospital staff out at the prison.”

“You mean I could get a pass code card that would allow me to enter the prison and access the psych ward?”

Mr. Chin asked?

“Yes.”

“Okay then Mr. Jeophries. Maybe we can come to an agreement? What do you say?”

Mr. Chin said, sounding very pleased with himself. He stood and pulled his buttoned-up suit jacket back down around his waist while tucking his tie back down into his vest. He extended his hand out to the deputy warden for a handshake, which the warden reluctantly took with somewhat of a baby’s grip.

“Just send the uniform to this address overnight through FedEx, or Brown. Not the post office. And make sure you collect the credentials before he leaves for work in the morning. It’s been a pleasure doing business with you, deputy warden.”

“Please, call me Loral, and thank you again.”

He said, shaking Mr. Chin’s hand once again.

“Don’t worry about the money, Mr. Jeophries! It will be wired into your account within the hour. Please include a pass key all of your own. One that I will return to you when the job is finished.”

“What job?”

He was trying to say as the boys dropped him down to one knee in front of Mr. Chin.

“Just provide your identification badge with your pass key on it and our business here will be through.”

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

“But, how do I know you’re not going to get me into any trouble, not to mention the quarter of a million dollars! I mean, how I can trust...”

Mr. Chin interrupted once again,

“I don’t like loose ends, Mr. Jeophries. Once our business is concluded at your facility everything will be returned to you. You can come by the track and pick up your credentials. Just bring a ticket to the cashier and ask for a supervisor. When that person arrives your belongings will be returned. Don’t worry. Everything will be just fine if you do what I say. We don’t plan on using your pass key unless you double-cross us. Got that? Then we’ll burn the uniform and you can continue on in life.”

The man nodded.

“As for that scene you caused at the ticket counter a minute ago. I think we have plenty of evidence of your child-like behavior, you’re being escorted into the back room by security and being investigated in potential fraud and money-laundering charges. Think about your little pigeon roost out there, the men you’ve been serving a regimen of going through the exact same ritual in the exact same place every day. Day in, day out. Do you really want to be a part of that or shall I continue?”

“You’ll have the uniform by morning or maybe midafternoon after I drop the box off at the Going Postal Store.”

“Have your wife deliver the package.”

Mr. Chin just got done saying,

“I really don’t...”

And once again the hand came up, but this time all the way to the deputy warden’s lips.

“Just do it, Mr. Jeophries. And don’t ever come around here asking for any favors either. You’re not one of us. You got that Jeophries? Good. Now then. These kind gentlemen will escort you to your car. Do you have any final questions for me before you go?”

Which turned out to be a rhetorical question because the two bodyguards—and all-around enforcers—had grabbed onto each side of the warden and were moving him out the door by the back of his collar.

“See you again real soon, Mr. Bette’s. Have fun spending all that cash. Just don’t do it in one place! You got that Mr.? Then get out!”

Right away, Mr. Chin called up Jeremiah to give him the news. That same red phone that had always been in the bar rang. It still sported its pushbutton design and a horizontal cradle for the receiver with little white buttons in between the brackets that you would have to tap down into position just as if you were going to hang up on someone, only letting up before the line went dead. It even had its little see-through placer that displayed its phone number hand-written into the slot: 775-692-1434. The same number the bar had had since the inception of the phone line into town back in the forties. Jeremiah had come a long way from where he was a year ago. He didn't even have his old Chevy muscle car anymore—and he'd had that since the late sixties. A late model Chevy Nova with four-on-the-floor manual overdrive transmission, a suicide shifter, and a competition clutch. A fuel-injected carburetor, an eight-cylinder boss, and four-and-a-quarter-inch cylinders with a heavy-duty air intake manifold on top of thirty-two-inch tires and eighteen-inch stainless steel rims that were as wide as they were tall. But he couldn't keep it because of the bad memories Cameron had after it scared her half to death. Besides that, the interior was stained in the blood of the filthy redneck perverts they'd had to kill back in Indiana.

Covered in blood, they had driven it all the way back from Martinsville, Tennessee, where Jeremiah and Cameron had disembarked from the *Anna Belle*. Since the interior was the remains of a crime scene they had it scrapped for parts and sent to the crusher somewhere down in Arizona where it would never be found. On their way back they decided to ditch the rental they were driving. A new Toyota Centra for a 2012 Chevrolet black Impala SS. Limited edition for just under twenty-two grand. Money that he couldn't show because of his disability claim that allowed him to remain in society with an identification. It wasn't the best identity and he really hadn't planned on having it turn out the way it had, but since this was it, then this was it.

Until he could find another identity without having to kill someone, he'd leave the car in Cameron's name. Something else she was going to receive in the divorce considering that *Hunting Sticks* knew nothing about a new Chevy Impala SS with fifteen thousand miles on it. Cameron had never told him about it. Neither one of them had. They didn't see the point after Jeremiah had just reached up and touched the end of Cameron's nose when they bought it, and

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

that was that. She was turning out to be daddy's little girl after all. And after finding out that Tabitha was only her aunt and not her sister, she felt even better. She was not looking forward to the next family reunion, which really wasn't going to be that far off.

Mr. Chin had called and told Jeremiah that everything was in order as far as the prison break was concerned. The uniform would be delivered overnight to Jeremiah's doorstep in Plain View, Utah, by way of the UPS Company, better known in those parts simply as "Brow. They could stop by the track and pick up the pass key cards whenever they were ready. All they had to do was purchase a new pair of boots from the sporting goods store, probably in Salt Lake City so as not to draw attention from someone in the area of the prison. They were set to go into the prison in the morning posing as a psychiatrist and a prison guard sent to speak with Carrie, give her a medical examination, and administer her medications before being given a transfer to another facility. The plan was to escape in a prison vehicle that was all tagged with locator beckons. The transfer was real. It really was happening today. That's why they needed to get in as soon as possible, posing as Carrie's doctor. In doing so, Cameron would be allowed to sit with Carrie in a private room and talk to her without being closely monitored. She would get in using the deputy warden's medical badge and pass key given to Mr. Chin. Jeremiah, on the other hand, was going to come in from the main gate and funnel himself through the labyrinth of fences and brick walls directly into the heart of the prison disguised as a prison guard. He would also have a legitimate pass key to get in with.

Inside the housing unit it is where he was going to be located. It was going to be his job to escort Carrie to the private room where she would meet with Cameron disguised as a doctor. During the private session Carrie would change into Cameron's doctor outfit. Then Jeremiah would escort Cameron back to Carrie's cell, where the real prison staff would locate Cameron dressed in Carrie's prison uniform. Tabitha and Jeremiah would both leave out the front gate. Once Jeremiah and Tabitha had signed out at the desk and left with the real-deal medical staff pass key and official prison-guard pass key, then and only then, would Cameron make a fuss until she was noticed and identified in her cell as being Dr. Rebecca Robertson. After the escape had happened Cameron could be found with no credentials or identification.

The only evidence would be the prison's cameras and the copy of her doctor's identification that was left at the front desk. She would tell them she was held at knife-point, forced to put on the prison outfit, and escorted back here where she was bound, gagged, and locked into the solitary confinement cell. That was one thing she knew a little something about anyway. She would then be taken to the hospital wing and examined by the medical staff for injuries. After that she would fill out a detailed police report in her own words speaking only of what had transpired.

After she was cleared by security and released from the facility by the deputy warden of the institution, she would only give the identification of the inmate who had escaped to the local news for broadcasting. All the other names of the prison staff, doctors, and people that worked for the facility would go undisclosed to the public due to an ongoing investigation being conducted through the prison officials, the local police department, and members of the sheriff's office. All other information involved in the case would be handled through the United States Marshal's Office in Washington, D.C. So that's how it went. According to plan.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

OPEN-ENDED EVALUATION

Delaney and the little Indian woman he called Georgia finally arrived in White Horse at one fifteen in the afternoon, on April 14 in the springtime of the year 1905. After disembarking the train, Delaney brought Georgia to The White Horse Inn, better known as “The Grand Stockade Hotel and Casino It was actually quite large—the tallest building in Nevada. They’d broken ground on it in the year 1901 and had finished in the spring of 1903. Soon after, it opened its doors to the public featuring live gaming and luxury accommodations with flushing toilets and running water. It even had ventilation from the coal-burning furnace in the basement that provided heat to all five stories of its grand construction! No radiator heaters were to be found anywhere throughout the entire building, and there was even a telephone in the lobby and a telegraph operator behind the front desk. Everything was grand!”

Regretfully, this wasn’t the hotel Delaney was going to be visiting. His hotel was in Cherry Creek about thirty miles to the north of White Horse. It was called the Esmeralda after the Matheson Brothers’ mother. They had actually built the hotel in the center of town and given it to her as her very own. Its doors had opened shortly after the fall of 1904 and was a shining new example of the wonderful accommodations that the townspeople and tourists of White Horse and Cherry Creek had in common. When Delaney arrived at the front desk he produced the card that Willie Pantalero had given him back in Portland Oregon. The young man behind the desk didn’t look a day over twenty-five but seemed to have a handle on things. As soon as he saw the card he turned and pulled an envelope from one of the cubbyholes that adorned the back wall behind the front desk.

"Mr. Pantalero asks that you go around back to the saloon and talk to the foreman."

He then handed him wooden box with a hard hat in it.

"Don't lose this and just so you know, you can usually find the foreman at the bar or playing at the poker tables. You can't miss him. He's a big black fellow like yourself, Mr. Dixon. I assure you he won't take offense if you don't call him Alfred, but instead you should address him as 'Bull Whip Madison.'"

When Delaney came through that front entrance for the very first time, he noticed a sign above the door that read "Salomon's Saloon Alfred "Bull Whip" Madison was just sitting there at the end of the bar working on another round of warm beer. Ice wasn't cheap, and unless it was winter, there was none! Apparently he had noticed someone come in the front door and without turning him,

"Don't bother going in the back room looking for me I'm sitting right here."

The only reason Delaney knew the man was referring to him was because nobody else in the place seemed to be responding. So Delaney walked over to the bar and was asked to,

"Sit down."

Then Madison asked

"So what brings you to Nevada?"

"I've come here for work?"

Delaney replied,

"What kind of work do you do the man asked without ever turning to face Delaney? "

I'm a well-digger by trade.

Then, Madison said,

"Well, are you a good well-digger?"

"As good as any, you might say."

And Delaney left it at that.

"I'll pay you twenty-five dollars a well for twenty wells, but they have to be completed by fall of this year before the ground hardens. I'll give you two workers and an account over at the tool store feed and tack over in downtown White Horse."

He paused but didn't wait for Delaney to speak.

"After you open your account."

He went on.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

“Take the money in that envelope”—he gestured to Delaney’s hands— “and buy yourself a horse at the stables. Then head over to the mine—the boys at the stables should be able to point you in the right direction—and pick out your two workers. Talk to the foreman over there. He goes by the name of Montgomery Grandt. The rest of the money in that envelope is yours. You can take it, but if you can’t finish the job on time, you’ll owe the Matheson brothers the same amount of money that you’re going to find inside that envelope, the workers’ wages, and the balance of the account over at the feed and tack. You’re not allowed to own a gun no matter what the Constitution says. You got that, mister? Good. Now get out of here. The saloon that you’re going to drink in is down the street at the end of town. Oh, and a, one more thing!”

Delaney hesitated,

“Our kind isn’t all that welcome over at The Grand Stockade.”

The man explained.

“So steer clear of that joint. Okay. You can go now. Oh, and by the way, don’t mention anything about what happened to you up north. Nobody cares about that down here unless you decide to make an issue out of it. Stay away from the white women whether they work in the saloon or not. Stick to the colored ladies and the Indian women that you’ll find throughout the territory. Once you decide on somebody to be with you’re not allowed to be with anyone else. You have to get married. You hear.”

“Yes.”

“Delaney said, and walked out. He looked inside the envelope and thought that there must be some kind of mistake because there was over \$550 inside the envelope. Eleven fifty-dollar bills, which Delaney had never seen before, and two more twenties, a five, and two ones. He immediately stopped off at the bank and opened up a business account. The banker was more than happy to accommodate Delaney even though he had no identification and was a colored man. He was told to stop by the courthouse and fill out the paperwork to receive a proper identification card that the bank could use to pay the taxes due on the cash or any precious metals that he brought into the bank. It was then that he was informed that only cash withdrawals were available through this bank because the gold reserve was in San Francisco, California, which was the only United

States government coin-striking and paper-money-printing mint this side of the Mississippi River.

Delaney walked right over to the stables just outside town off the main street. He bought three horses and one mule. He then rented two stalls. One for his horse and the other for his donkey. The boys that he was going to hire could pay for their own stalls by themselves. He headed up toward the mine but not before he stopped off at the feed and tack store to purchase clothes, riding equipment, several blankets and sleeping bags, and two full-sized canvas tents which only came to \$23.18. After having the county clerk fill out the paperwork for him to get an identification card to use at the bank he could just write a check to pay the man at the store. The man at the register filled out the check. Delaney just approved of the amount signed it with an X at the bottom. Nobody was going to cheat him out of his money. They all knew better. The Matheson Brothers ran this neck of the woods and nobody in their right mind would double cross them. People had it too good in this part of the country.

It was like heaven for Delaney who loved the rugged beauty of the mountains and canyons that occupied all sides of the Sure Hill Valley. Places Delaney had yet to explore. The wells he was going to dig were all marked on a piece of paper that was also in the envelope. The sites were scattered all over the valley in no particular order. That was for him to figure out. Right now he was going to talk to the foreman up at the Ore Lander Mine, which had claims all over the countryside but was mostly centrally located on the side of one mountain in particular, just south of Cherry Creek.

It was a fifteen-mile ride from White Horse, but it was a beautiful warm spring day, and the trek up the mountain proved to be a short one. It was easy going on horseback. Maybe a little rougher by way of automobile but he managed to make it up to the mine in one piece. It was a fairly large operation with several big buildings and train tracks with ore carts mounted on them, coming and going in every direction, in and out of mine shafts that were wide enough for a freight train to fit through and tall enough for the same. These tunnels were huge! Right now all Delaney wanted to do was find the foreman, Montgomery Grandt, so when he was stopped at the gate by a man in a guard shack, he just explained his business and asked to speak with the foreman.

The man replied,

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

“Just wait over by the main gate, and put this on He handed Delaney a mining helmet. Delaney put it on and pulled himself off to one side to wait for the person he was here to see.”

Suddenly there was a huge rumble from inside the mountain which shook the ground and spooked his new horse, Patsy, he called it, because he had been castrated at a young age. That must’ve been one of the explosive charges that was set off somewhere inside the mountain. The guard came over and said to him,

“Sorry about that. I forgot to tell you they were blasting to.”

“That’s okay.”

Delaney said out loud as he could, since everybody was now deaf in the ears from the sound of the blast. Delaney wondered, If it’s that strong up here, imagine what it must be like down in the shafts!

“Everyone is very busy right now but if you wait until shift change the foreman will be glad to see you. He’s expecting you and already picked out two men for you. He said he’d send them to you if you would just tell me where they should go.”

Well, Delaney figured, by looking at his scrolls, he would start to dig the first well at a spot located about ten miles outside of Cherry Creek which would be centrally located. If he could find the water table there, it would give him a good idea of where to go next. So, Delaney pointed out the position on the scrolls for the men to follow.

“As the guard, I’ll relay the information to Mr. Grandt.”

The old boy said. So Delaney began to ride over to the place where the well was to be dug. He wanted to wait to buy his dynamite until it was time to blast because TNT had a tendency to “sweat” in the heat, meaning it would basically melt away and not give the same impact or explosive charge that it would if the dynamite was fresh. After setting up camp Delaney decided to take it easy and wait. Some time had passed and he began to bed down for the night. Living in a tent wasn’t exactly what he’d had in mind, but a job was a job and this one was going to make him a wealthy man if he could complete it on time. The workers up at the mine were making a dollar and a half a day. At that rate he could afford to pay his helpers for one hundred and twenty-five days. The rest of the money that was left over at the end of the season—after buying tools to dig with—was all going to be his as well. He’d need pick axes, shovels, and boxes of dynamite which would do most of the heavy lifting. All they’d have

to do then was muck out the rocks and dirt until they reached the water table at the bottom of the well.

There were plenty of mountain streams in the area but that water was only used by farmers for irrigation of the valley's crops. People needed a water well because it wouldn't freeze during the winter. In order to keep their raw sewage and gray water out of the water well they had to dig the well deeper than the depth of the outhouse. There was no washing that away so the outhouse had to be placed over a holding tank made by blasting a hole in the bedrock, so there were bedrock walls on all five sides of the holding tank. The water well had to go deeper, past the bedrock, and into the fresh water table that exists below the bedrock outhouses. Delaney had to dig out these ditches that usually went down anywhere between twelve and fifteen feet deep. And the water wells would usually be dug twice that deep, topping out around thirty to thirty-five feet deep. Sometimes more, depending on the amount of snow and rain that had Alvin that year.

After a day or two, Delaney's workers finally showed up on the work site. They rode up on fresh horses purchased at the stable after they had been added on to Delaney's charge account with The Western American Bank back in Cherry Creek. The bank was federally insured and guarded by the local sheriff's office led by none other than Sheriff Reginald Pantalero, or Willie "The Woodman's Chief" Pantalero. Named so for his uncanny ability to effectively operate the wooden hangman's gallows that could kill a man with the apparent know-how of "an Indian chief it was a bar-room joke that circulated after an apparent "perfect hanging" at the hands of Pantalero, during which he operated the hangman's noose "with efficiency. The man who had perished in under ninety seconds. Quite a feat for an individual hanging. Usually, they took much longer.

"So, if you are going to hang, it had better be with Willie Pantalero at the noose or so the saying went. This was the same man who'd brought Delaney to Cherry Creek and the one who was going to take him out if he didn't complete the job on time. These boys didn't play around when it came to doing business and getting the job done, and all of the responsibility of digging all twenty wells in four months was on Delaney's shoulders. A big bill to fulfill, but Delaney was determined to complete the project and build himself another home. Preferably on his own land. That was something uncommon

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

for a black man to have, but he seemed to fit right in down here in White Horse.

Delaney completed the job come fall and settled in after buying a plot of land from the local assayer's office. He staked a claim in a far-off corner of the government's land that just happened to look out over the top of a ridge. It wasn't going to be easy to build a house on a ridge, but he had enough money to pay the people to help him build it. It had to be built in just under a month due to the fact that winter was going to set in, the ground was going to freeze, snow was going to fall, and the temperatures were going to drop!" Never before had he been allowed enough time off to really enjoy the fruits of his labor. This winter he would hunt, fish, and keep warm. All without the help of any of the townspeople. He had even been able to purchase a rifle with the blessing of the sheriff's office. Just no six guns. A single-shot hunting rifle was all he needed, and the powers that be saw fit to let him have one. It wasn't long before he started to notice the local wild life.

Namely the Indian Nation that occupied the land that surrounded the Sure Hill Valley, and were actually quite well known by most of the mountain men that lived in the area. They never ventured down into the valley or close to town unless they had council with the white man. Once a year, in the dead of winter, the leaders of the Shoshone Indian Tribe would form a council that would go down into the valley and sign a written agreement with the white man, namely the Matheson Brothers, about how the land was going to be distributed. This year, however, Delaney was going to keep mostly to himself.

That proved to be a little bit impossible, often spotting a single Indian warrior watching him from the back of a white steed. The feather-wearing, long-haired, red man carried a long staff with deer-hide and Indian-bead decoration and he seemed to take it with him wherever he went. The man even had a hunting hawk that would sit atop his arm.

One day in the heart of winter Delaney was out looking for a kill. He would venture out just about every day in search of a good kill. He didn't always come across an animal that was close enough for him to be able to kill with the old-fashioned rifle that he had been given. Even the Indians had better rifles than he did, but on this particular day the Indian's hawk swept down and took his wool-skin hat

from his head. Frightened, Delaney fired a shot at the bird in a futile attempt at hitting it before it got away. Instead, he found he'd fired his weapon in the wrong direction. In the direction of this Indian bird's master. The same warrior Indian who rode a white horse. The same one that Delaney had seen just about every day.

The bird returned to the arm of his master and the Indian warrior hooded the bird, retrieved the hat, and began to walk his horse toward Delaney at an even pace. Surprisingly enough, he had a woman on the horse, scooted up against him from the rear. The Indian woman he called Georgia, who had traveled all the way from Portland to Nevada with him, was no longer welcome to live with the Indian tribe. It seemed that she was a Hopi Indian, and didn't speak the tribe's language. She refused to work for the tribe. This Indian warrior was here to return the lady back to her original owner. Or so Delaney was thought to be.

The man slowly rode his horse within a thousand yards of Delaney, dismounted her from the back of his horse, and rode his horse as hard as he could in the opposite direction. Georgia, or so he called her, slowly walked up to Delaney. She had little to wear as far as winter clothes were concerned. She had not been accepted into anyone's family back on the reservation and had literally been left out in the cold. She walked all the way up to Delaney, wrapped her arms around him, and started to shiver. There was nothing else to do. Delaney brought her home, warmed her up, fed her, and gave her a safe place to stay.

Since Delaney was an American citizen of the United States he could marry an Indian woman, or one from another country for that matter, which would allow that woman to become an American citizen herself. All they had to do was fill out the paperwork at the local courthouse for a detailed marriage license. The details were a bit complicated so they paid the man at the bank to draw up the paperwork in a proper manner so that they could submit it to the county's judicial staff—Judge Harry Gustason, in this case—for approval.

After a short hearing and a visit with the preacher, Georgia and Delaney Dixon were legally married on the fifth of February in the year 1906.

Their first-born son, Jeremiah, was born in the back room of The Clear Water Saloon at the edge of Cherry Creek on the third of November that same year. This is where they would go to celebrate,

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

anyway. And as far as the doctor was concerned, he was actually a real professionally trained doctor who just so happened to be a Shoshone medicine man.

He spoke perfect English, having grown up with an English-speaking couple, and had been put through medical school at the University Of Utah Medical School. The man had refused to trek all the way up the canyon in search of a patient. It didn't work that way, and his medical offices were still under construction at the time. He was a young doctor, and after being denied lodging at the Esmeralda, the only other option was to deliver the baby in a broom-closet-sized bedroom just left of the rear entrance to The Clear Water Saloon. It was either there or in the stables and Delaney didn't want Georgia to have to lay in a pile of hay when giving birth to their firstborn child.

Once the baby boy had successfully been delivered by the good doctor, they paid the man fifteen dollars. Georgia began to get up but Delaney insisted she wait and to rest for a while before it was time to leave. One of the ladies from downtown had been brought over to take care of the cleaning, dressing, and eventual delivery of the baby back to his mother to nurse for the very first time. No longer pink and purple now, but full of color. Delaney and Georgia looked down at their brand-new, beautiful, olives-skinned baby boy who had been delivered unto them by the good Lord himself. Eight pounds and eleven ounces. They decided to name the baby boy Jeremiah Gustason Dixon.

This baby boy was currently a hundred and ten years old. His sister, Tabitha, born a few years later in 1908, was one hundred and eight years old. She had a new identity as a Grandt, an unfortunate identification, but it was the only option available at the time. She'd been eleven years old when she'd first drank from the Well of Immortality, and at this point she was desperate for a new identity. According to the old birth certificates that Jeremiah had Big Jim Dailey draw up in Tabitha's behalf back in the 1980's, her current age was somewhere around twenty-two, or twenty-three years. Which was just about perfect in this case. As far as the certificate drawn up on Cameron's behalf, that one was also a toss up to throw Big Jim daily off the track.

If he had smelled a rat, the jig would be up, and the family would be forced into exile. And since Jeremiah's fake death incident

went totally awry, he had to distance himself from Brenda and Cameron so as to not expose himself any further as the one breaking the family lineage with a birth certificate making Cameron out to be the daughter of someone else. In this case, Kal Pantalero. Jeremiah had lost track of his family lineage, and at the time, it was the right thing to do. Brenda would watch over Cameron, and as far as being the husband of Kal Pantalero, it had also secured her identity with the records on file at the county courthouse. Being married to Jeremiah, whose identity had expired, was not an acceptable situation. He'd done it for his own good, but also for the good of his family.

It wasn't an easy decision, but right now everything was back in order. Once they found the scrolls and located the Well of the Eternal, this entire situation would be rectified and the curse of the well would finally be broken. He just needed to decipher what the writing on the scrolls truly meant. To do that he would have to contact the man who had originally made the scrolls. Delaney Dixon. And because the man was dead and had been dead for just under a century, he, and everybody else in his family, were going to have to hold a session at Henry's sweat lodge and see what their ancestors had to say about all this. Maybe they could provide a clue to the next step. Especially if they could come into contact with the Mighty Companion himself!" Jeremiah had, after all of these years, been able to identify the meaning of the prophecy written on the scrolls. The seven heads of the guardian of the Well were all members of the decedents of both the Madison and Dixon family lineage.

He could hold the session himself, but with little time to construct a proper Indian sweat lodge, he needed to use Hunting Sticks'. Besides, Jeremiah wasn't exactly through with Henry just yet, and with everyone drawn together, it was finally time to approach the situation head-on. Now was the time. It was either now or never!" When the day finally came, they gathered the proper amount of wood and fresh rocks to put in the fire pit. Hunting Sticks reluctantly followed Jeremiah's orders, but only because Cameron had asked him to. Besides, his cover was blown. He just knew it! How could a one-night stand turn into a three ring circus? Right about now.

The sun was setting in the West and the rocks had been in the fire all day from sunrise to sunset. The ground that the sweat lodge was built on had been properly smudged down with sage along

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

with a few Native American powders, and they sang some old-fashioned Native American songs that were handed down to them by the inner spirits. The spirits were the ones that actually ran the sweat lodge. The humans were only visitors to this place.

The spirits that lie within are the real takers of this holy ground. They're the ones who operate the doorway that stretches from this world into the inner.

All the blessings and all the incantations had been performed. It was time to enter the sweat lodge and hopefully come into contact with the spirits of the Well.

“Jeremiah? It's time.”

And they put the hot rocks in the pit, and then all crawled into the sweat lodge on their hands and knees. One right after the other in a single file. Boy, girl, boy girl. That way they could be properly seated next to each other once they were in the lodge. Tabitha had arrived just a few minutes before they were set to begin. She was busy collecting her portion of the scrolls. The upper right-hand corner. She had it stashed inside a false-bottom cubbyhole that was in the old Wegman piano bench that was still hanging around over at The Horseman's Ranch. It was like taking candy from a baby.

Kal, of course, was down at the bar, and she and Brenda had a key to the guesthouse. They just walked in, retrieved that section of the scrolls, and were on their way. Those scrolls had been sealed in the false bottom of that piano stool for over two generations! Nobody had ever found it! It was hidden exactly where she was told to hide it by the person who had delivered her the water from the Well and the corner of the scrolls.

Just before they were ready to seal the animal-skin door that faced east with another incantation, Tabitha had made it, carrying her section of the scrolls along with her. Jeremiah also had his section of the scrolls. They were both aware of the fact that Hunting Sticks would probably try to retrieve their sections of the scrolls after they had all been located and fitted together. To do that, he might try to kill them both. So the two of them had put a curse on Hunting Sticks. One that would bind, a curse they'd been taught by their father before he died. Georgia was aware of what you would need if you wanted to inflict undue spiritual harm onto someone. They had used the venom of a rattlesnake to soften the tobacco in the peace pipe that they were

going to pass around inside the sweat lodge. Always in a counterclockwise motion because they wanted to contact the spirits of the past. Nobody else received the tobacco pipe after Hunting Sticks, and he seemed to become encapsulated inside his own body, for no apparent reason taking on a catatonic state of consciousness. They did this to disallow him the knowledge of what was to come.

“That of the story of the scrolls!”

It wasn't long after that they started to sing and play small buckskin drums that were just deer hide stretched over a piece of wood that had been hollowed out in the middle. They even had little buckskin hammers for the drum. They sang and they prayed, and after a several minutes of that, they began to apply the steam to the sweat lodge. Soon, the room had become a very dark, very hot, and very hard-to-breath-in little cave. Each one of them took a small amount of peyote, hashish, and wild mushrooms that had been ground together and made into a powder used to coat pieces of deer-meat smoked jerky. This would allow them to keep their way down without being sick in the process. They had stopped putting water onto the coals and had returned to their drums and their songs when, all of the sudden, a blue mist started to appear. It was apparent to everyone that everyone else was seeing it too. Jeremiah began adding water to the coals, raising the temperature inside the little hut up to around one hundred and sixty to one hundred and eighty degrees.

Soon no one could sing even though they were supposed to try. Then the sound of the spirits entering the sweat lodge became audible, sounding like a thunderous wind that swept past them followed by a rumbling sound that filled the air and shook the ground. The first spirit to arrive was the beggar, just like it was prophesied on Jeremiah's corner of the scrolls. The trapped spirit of Georgia Lannie Dixon. The spirit that had not been allowed to continue on in this world with a living body and was forced to roam its barren land that occupied the space between spaces. Not of this world but not into the next. She displayed very little interest in what was going on. She paused briefly at the fire pit. Then she suddenly sacrificed the spirit of Henry “Hunting Sticks” Madison by sucking the soul of his existence out of his body.

The spiritual hand of Georgia Dixon went down Hunting Sticks' wide-open mouth, ripped his soul from its seat at the waistline chakra, and tore it loose up and out of his face. He began to scream

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

in pain and light began to show in his eye sockets, but it wasn't long before the soul of the man had been removed from his body. Spiritually sacrificed to the ancestors of the Well. Jeremiah had sinned against it by betraying his Native American ancestors, planning and conducting a conspiracy against his own family in an attempt to receive a corner of the scrolls to the Well of Eternity for himself. He'd forgotten the warning of the scrolls where it stated right below the riddle of a prophecy: "This Seven Headed Guardian was made in the likeness of the beholders who can never ever tell a lie it was the embodiment of the entire family as a unit. And then it,

"This has been handed down through the true reality of the inner worlds of man to those who you can never ever truly buy."

He'd tried to confiscate the scrolls so that he could sell half of the

Well's power to Big Jim Dailey, assuring him an eternal life of money, power, and riches. Then he'd use the power of the well to seduce half the riches that belonged to Big Jim Dailey. His new business partner in crime. Which is exactly how Carrie's attorney knowing about the scrolls. He had been assigned to Tabitha on behalf of Big Jim Dailey, because nothing happened in White Horse unless it was through Big Jim. After Jeremiah had filled him in on the existence of the scrolls, Hunting Sticks immediately went to Big Jim Dailey for revenge against Jeremiah for splitting up his family when, in fact, it was Hunting Sticks himself who had done that. Cameron propped up Hunting Sticks' lifeless body against the inside wall of the sweat lodge. Then the room went dark once again, but it wasn't long before the keeper of the scrolls and like the prophecy told—tragedy of the seven headed guardian had,

The first head of the prophecy was, 'like lightning in stormy darkness of Midnight Summer's Sky,' pertaining to Delaney Sanford Dixon himself. The second head was, 'the sheer ferocity of power that only the thunder and lightning worlds could provide' in relation to Georgia Dixon. Then there was the one who survived a life not of the living and 'the one who didn't want to bury the hatchet' which meant that of Jeremiah Dixon. The fourth head stated, 'the one who is of no consequence to anyone' in reference to Hunting Sticks himself, and the fifth had read, 'Told is it with forked tongued knowledge of truth or that of a beggar's lie' which meant Tabitha Dixon. The sixth was Charles Dixon, 'the son needed to guide them, what reason I don't

know why!' That brings us to the seventh and very last head of the Prophecy of the Well of Eternity, and the most important one which says,

"Save those who have trained themselves to see using only the mind's eye!"

The last head. The most important one of the Well. Cameron Dixon. The very last one herself. All because Cameron was present she carried his spirit with her wherever she went and he was here now with a section of the scrolls. One that could be delivered or understood by anybody except her and Charles. When she was just a young girl of nine years Charles had led her to the location of the scrolls. Now it was all becoming clear to her. The place she had become lost in down in the mines and underground tunnels. Charles had led her in and safely back out again. The same child spirit that nobody born of this generation would ever remember, and one that Cameron could never forget. She knew where the scrolls were hidden, and Charles could now move on. For him the curse had been lifted and his life had finally come full circle after nearly one hundred and ten years on this planet. After Charles moved on, Hunting Sticks also passed away. His spirit would now be tied to the spirit of the Well, occupied by the presence of the Mighty Companion. The one who commands and protects the power of the Well.

The search for the Well is not an easy one per se. Nor is it difficult. One must remember that the shape you are in at the time of partaking isn't necessarily the same one you will have after you have partaken. Usually, the person would continue to age to the appearance of a middle-aged individual. To that of person who in the prime of their life. Not right away, though. The process may take several days to accomplish. The results aren't immediate except for the improvement of one's own good health. This Well could cure anything that could possibly be wrong with someone. But that person is then given the burden of carrying the same body and face for many more generations than one would naturally be allowed to live.

A Time Walker is not indestructible. They would need to heal after an injury, same as everybody else. They could starve, drown, be shot, stabbed, perish in a car accident, or get run over by a bus just like anyone else. The only difference was—they couldn't die of natural causes such as old age or disease. If they were inflicted with an injury the Well would not replace it. After the second drink from the

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

Well a person receives his mortality, but in return, they must replace a Time Walker to the Well. Meaning somebody must take their place. For the Well exists only vicariously through those who have partaken of its magical waters. From then on, that person can hear the spirits of the Well.

Just like all those that the Well has taken under its spell. In order to move on one must become the Guardian of the Well. Better known to the Time Walkers as the Mighty Companion, because the possessor of the spirit of the Well occupies the thoughts and actions of the Time Walkers. They are constantly aware of the presence of the Mighty Companion, because he is always present with them at their side. Sharing in their existence. Pushing them to return unto the Well of the Eternal and free his soul by taking his place. This can only be accomplished with a newborn infant.

That of the Mighty Companion was the position Jeremiah wished to occupy for himself. Living many different lives at once and experiencing everything that the Time Walkers would experience. All the while trying to draw that individual back to the Well in an attempt to fill the world with Time Walkers. This would allow him dominion over the earth, the conduit of all life. He would occupy the position of controlling the powerhouse of energy that flows down from the heavens and onto the earthly plane. After having been lost in the annals of time itself over many generations, the location of the Well was fraught with the fallacy of mankind in attempting to spread the truth by word of mouth. When this information is not received at the fountainhead, of the truth of its whereabouts for one's own self, prophesy and warning that every individual who attempts to harness the power of the well for themselves must be aware of. For if only found through one's own experience, then the lessons of that person as he continues on through time one day at a time, then it is too late for that individual, because the time for his lack of knowledge about the Well has already gone unheeded and so the curse of the Well spreads through ignorance to all Time Walkers.

There can be only one Mighty Companion, and only that person is capable of releasing a Time Walker's soul back into the worlds that exist above this one. This is something that he will not do unless he is given another person's soul in return for moving that person on. After all, he cannot live vicariously through one who does not possess a human form. He can only carry on in this world by occupation of a

true physical form. This will mark the return of the Time Walker's to having a physical form. The person that previously occupied that body will now remain trapped in the purgatory that is the essence or makeup of the Thunder, and Lightning Worlds that are present between the physical and that of the higher worlds above. It acts as a buffer for the veil of truth that is given to all of mankind forcing him to find his own way out. Only the spirits of man who are trapped in this type of existence can communicate with both the higher and lower, never being allowed to actually have an effect on that plane—only by acting through an individual or group of individuals can that individual still occupy a physical form whether it be on the plane above or the one that is below or the one that he or she is trying to affect.

Now in possession of a human form, the Time Walker known to the people below as Georgia Dixon would continue on to exist in the physical form of Hunting Sticks Madison. Madison himself would be delivered unto the spirit of the Well to hold in purgatory while living vicariously through that same form that is Georgia Dixon's latest incarnation into the physical world. Trying to explain this to Cameron came as a challenge, but the realization that he wasn't the same person he was in the past was all the knowledge she needed. Truly accepting that as truth was the hard part of Cameron's life, which has been anything but ordinary.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

THE MIGHTY COMPANION

It was Delaney's first season in his new home—a small, three-room cabin in the woods. It was made of pine and quaking aspen trees with a rock and-mortar fireplace and a real, iron wood-burning stove. He had decided that after his first successful year digging wells throughout the region, starting in the spring after the ground had thawed, he would stake a claim with the assayer's office in White Horse and start to dig his own mine shaft. It was something that he'd always wanted to do. As far as knowing where to dig, well his guess was as good as anybody's—or so he thought. Georgia was happy and they were both learning a lot about each other, including a way to communicate that they could both understand. Jeremiah had just been born and Delaney was looking forward to raising his new family. The mountain streams satisfied their need for fresh water, and there were several streams in their general vicinity. So Delaney decided to spend his resources building a mine shaft just behind and above the property he'd purchased to build the log home.

Starting a mine shaft isn't that hard compared to how hard it is to dig a water well. His cabin was built on the side of a ravine, and Delaney planned on blasting straight back into the shale and granite rock outcrop that only rose about two thousand feet off the valley floor. It was plenty steep and solid to support a rock mine shaft that you could mulch out, pushing the debris out the front of the shaft and over the edge to form a soil and stone ramp. The shaft itself would be dug at an angle to assist in removing the excess stone and debris from the back. Delaney would work on his mine at a leisurely pace, spending most of his time working on wells that he was still digging for people during the months that the ground wasn't frozen or covered in snow. During the winter, he spent most of his time

hunting and raising his boy, and it wasn't long before another winter season had come and gone.

The thing that made this spring different than all the rest was the birth of his baby girl. Tabitha Lorraine Dixon was born on the twenty-fifth day of May in the year 1908. That same year Delaney completed nearly twenty-seven wells in one season and was the boss of several different men, some who only worked part-time and a few more who spent their entire day working for him. With all the money he made during those three years, Delaney had enough to take the next season off. This came as a surprise to the Matheson Gang who expected him to continue on making money for them. The idea that he was going to stop working for them and take on a mine of his own wasn't sitting very well with the powers that be. And when Delaney actually started finding a small amount of gold—not as much money as he was making digging wells for the Matheson Brothers, but it had potential—he was on the outs with the likes of the Matheson Gang.

Things worked a certain way in this part of the country. Everybody had to honor the wants and needs of the Mining Business Organization that had taken over as a de facto government. According to Delaney. It overstepped its bounds but the majority of the people in the area didn't feel that way because they didn't have a mine of their own. They relied on the fact that the Matheson Brothers' Ore Lander Mining Company was still going to pay their wages. Most of the people around these parts spent their free time—when they weren't working in the mine—drinking, gambling, and horsing around with the women who worked in the saloons downtown. This is what people were expected to do. Delaney was expected to provide a sixty/forty cut of the profits from his prosperous mine to be shared with the powers that be.

Delaney would turn his gold over to the banker at the Western American Bank. The bank itself wasn't owned by the Matheson Brothers per se, but they did own the railways that escorted all of the precious metals out of town and over to the Federal Gold Reserve in San Francisco, which was almost six hundred miles from Cherry Creek. Having his own gold mine wasn't quite as beneficial as owning the train that delivered the gold. That was something that Delaney had counted on. Because after finding the vein of gold inside the mountain, he began to dig a secret mine shaft just to the right of the first one. If he was able to complete the project before it was time to

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

deliver his next shipment of gold, he could just keep it locked up in the secret mine shaft until he could find a way to transport the gold to an honest reserve himself!”

This would take several years to come to pass. In the meantime, Delaney spent most of his time with his family, but he also became acquainted with the Native Americans.

He even traded animal pelts with them after bagging a kill in the forest when he was out hunting on the land that surrounded his property, the majority of which belonged to the Shoshone Indian tribe who had their reservation just over the hill next to White Horse. They also seemed to have a certain say as to what transpires out here in the wilderness. In fact, they expected Delaney to share some of his animal meat and skins with them on a regular basis in order to keep the peace. Delaney understood little about the language of this mighty nation, but was wise enough to stay in its good graces. Who knows what could happen out in the forest late at night? Winter set in again over the Sure Hill Valley and up in its high country Delaney was once again without a well. He knew that digging one on this property was going to require a lot of effort given its elevation to the surrounding valley.

He was constantly thinking of new ways to improve his gold mining operations and smuggle the gold out of the area where he could get the profit that he deserved—not forty percent of whatever the Matheson Brothers decided was his! As the winter went on Delaney got to thinking about the hawk that the Indian Warrior had carried as a hunting partner. Delaney thought that if the Indian could train a bird to do that then maybe he could train one of those birds to carry a message out of the valley. He thought of the mail route that sometimes would be used during the winter that led farther south towards the Arizona state line and on down into Mexico. Maybe through the Grand Canyon that he had read so much about. If he could get a letter out of the valley by training a bird to follow the mail route, then he might have something.

This, of course, was going to require some doing. He would first have to continue on digging his decoy mining shaft, and wait until spring to follow one of these majestic birds until he found its nest. If he was lucky, he might be able to raise one after it had been hatched in the nest by its mother. Meanwhile, he would continue on with his work and raising his new family. It took Delaney several years

of trying before he successfully captured a fledgling hawk from its mother's nest. This took a well-planned effort after studying the birds and their nesting habits over a period of years. He actually ended up with two of them because once the nest had been disturbed, the mother could smell the human and left the nest. Jeremiah had just turned six when his father finally decided to dig his own well. The mining shaft had been disguised in a way that was designed to throw any would-be claim jumpers off the track and hide the entrance to where the true vein of gold was located.

He had accomplished this by creating a mine shaft at about a sixpercent grade, allowing for the rock and debris to be easily swept from the back of the mine. Then, at the back of the mine, he had created another shaft that slanted downward at a much steeper angle, following the direction of the gold vein. After he'd dug downwards for about twenty feet or so he began to once again mine the shaft in an upward direction. This allowed for a shaft to be created below the one that was visible on the side of the mountain. Once he had created this second shaft below the one with the main entrance, he blasted the opening to it closed, leaving only the original shaft to continue on upward with the real gold-producing shaft disguised directly below. He would keep the mine active, continuing on in the direction of the original shaft—in a steady, shallow, upward angle directly into the heart of the mountain.

This was still producing a small amount of gold just enough to keep the mine active, but not enough to draw attention to where the gold really was. Meanwhile, Delaney continued to attempt raising a fledgling hawk into early adulthood while training the bird to carry a message. Delaney also went into town and had a legal will draw up on his behalf. He knew he would never get this gold out of the valley without giving up his claim to the Ore Lander Mining Company. They had successfully taken over the claim of many a successful individual miner who had found a vein of gold. Delaney hadn't planned on having the gold for himself but he wanted his children to have access to the vein in hopes that after a few more decades, or when his children were adults themselves, he could turn the fruits of his labors over to them. If he couldn't enjoy it himself then he wanted his children and grandchildren to have a chance at getting rich. All he needed to do was keep the location of the real mine shaft a secret.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

Once he was able to train the hawk he would have the Indian dog sled that delivered mail south into Arizona retrieve the legal claim that he filed with the county assayer's office in White Horse. Once he got that legal document along with his legal will the letter would be delivered to the Nevada State Bureau of Land Management. This would solidify his claim and allow his children the legal rights to the property—and to the mine. This was going to be the only way he could get his mining claim legitimized in his name and successfully handed over to his children. Since he'd saved Georgia from the freezing cold, the natives agreed to do Delaney a favor. He explained that his hawk would deliver an envelope to the dog sled driver along with a fair sum of American money that had two bank checks inside the envelope with the will and his mining claim.

Once the dog sled driver had deposited one of the checks into Delaney's bank account, there were funds available for the driver to cash the second check included as payment for delivering the letter on Delaney's behalf. Once it was confirmed that the paperwork had been received by the Carson City office of the Bureau of Land Management and that the last will and testament had been received by the Lyon County courthouse via the United States Post Office, then Delaney would give another fairly large sum of money over to the Indian nation. Dealing with them would be a lot cheaper because they believed in spirituality and that you must give if you want to partake. In that way they were more trustworthy than the greedy white man. As for the hawks, keeping the birds alive turned out to be quite simple and training them was just as easy.

Delaney would trap field mice, their favorite food, place them on the outside of a burlap bag in his cabin, and turn the birds loose. It wasn't long before the birds spotted a burlap bag with food on it. Then, Delaney began placing the mouse on the inside of the bag. The birds caught on to that, too, and started to tear a hole in the side of the bag to retrieve their dinner. It wasn't hard to train them because hunting was second nature to them. But these birds wouldn't stay loyal to an owner forever. After a certain amount of time out in the wild they would revert back to nature. The local United States Post Office in downtown White Horse generally had no problem with its incoming mail. It was the outgoing mail that the Matheson Brothers were concerned about. Especially when it came to precious metals! Delaney planned on making his attempt at the first snowfall. He

would climb up on the highest ridge overlooking his precious mine and when the mail driver was visible from the rocky ridge above the steep cliffs he would take the hood off of his hawk and let it do its job—delivering the envelope and securing the ownership of the mine for his family.

All summer long Delaney continued to work with his bird, training it to hunt in the wild and return to its nest. He would keep the bird tied up to its perch during the day, and during the night he kept a hood on the animal. Every day of their lives he taught both of those birds to eat out of the burlap bag. In the winter of 1918 one of the birds delivered the letter with the paperwork inside. Now that Delaney had found a way to get his claim out of the valley along with his last will and testament there was just one problem: he still didn't have a train to deliver his precious metals out of the Valley.

But it would have to wait. Maybe for another generation even. Because he and his family were well taken care of where they were. Delaney never had any intention of moving to the city and living the life of a gentleman. He was a well digger by trade and for richer or poorer, at the end of the day, he was still a well-digger. He had grown to accept—even embrace—that as being a reality. And he had finally finished disguising the real mine shaft that lies below the empty, abandoned-looking gold mine that still, to this day, rests above his cabin on the land that he legally purchased from the United States government.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

CAVERNS OF THE WELL

Springtime had finally come in the year of 1921. This year, Delaney was going to attempt digging that well that he'd been putting off for over twelve years now. It was the last project he had left to accomplish on his property. He had a garden and a mountain stream close by, and he'd even managed a four-foot-high stone wall around his property with the rocks that he'd mucked out of his mine. He even cleared the forest around his property to guard against a forest fire. He enjoyed this, and Jeremiah and Tabitha were both old enough to help out. This was the best time of their lives, and this year Jeremiah's dad had invited his son to help him dig the family well. They dug holes with a hand-held auger and placed TNT and blasting caps securely into them, which would create holes in the rock surface anywhere from two to four feet depending on the strength of the charge used.

Hammering it into the solid bedrock was back-breaking work, but it was also kind of fun when you hit the auger just right with a five-pound sledge hammer! Jeremiah was taught how to properly drill, cap, and fire TNT mining charges. Delaney explained the art of placing the charges with the right amount of explosives and drilling into the rock in the proper configuration, and finally the timing of the blast. All these things had to be taken into account. And since he was blasting next to his house, the charges that he set had to be just the right size and depth to allow him to complete the job without damaging the foundation on his log house, which they'd added onto over the years: two more bedrooms, a car garage, and a wooden porch that surrounded the house on all sides!"

Jeremiah discovered that removing the shards of rock that came up out of the ground was time-consuming and dangerous. After

removing the top layer more charges had to be set, and the deeper the hole became, the farther down you had to go to clear the debris. After a while you were having to haul the rocks up in buckets—if you were doing things the old-fashioned way. Delaney had a small conveyor belt that he had used on his other mining and well-digging projects, but this one was different because he wanted to teach his boy the old way of doing things before showing him the new—and much easier—method of removing the rock. Once the well had been dug, if the walls were unstable, then the rocks that were being mucked out had to be built up in a circular fashion to give the well the ability to survive without eventually having its walls cave down in around it.

Just as Delaney had expected, hard work was something that was best enjoyed in moderation, meaning that they were taking their time with the project. They had all year to complete the job, and Delaney had gotten used to taking it easy during the spring and summer months, spending his time stocking up on fruits and vegetables that he had grown in the fertile soil of the rich mountain canyon that made up his garden and backyard. He had a peach tree and baked pine nuts, and the small trout that swam in the streams and lakes of the region were favorites of the family. They even managed to catch a few crawfish every now and then. The soil was also rich with earthworms that were perfect for fishing in the lakes and streams that had sprouted up around the area over thousands of years of carving, designing the rugged landscape that surrounded Delaney and his family of four.

Just before supper on a cool spring afternoon, Jeremiah had been working in the well out back at a leisurely pace. He didn't want to overdo it, but he did want the well to be finished on time, and right now his father was occupied with other things besides blasting and mucking pulverized bedrock. Delaney noticed that it was awful quiet in the back where Jeremiah was working, and decided that since he was taking a break anyway, he would invite him in to share dinner, a wild hare he had found earlier in the day eating at his vegetables.

After calling Jeremiah a few times and getting no response, he decided to go out back and get him. He was probably half deaf by now setting off all those TNT and blasting cap charges all afternoon, but the boy was nowhere to be found. Thinking of Charles, he immediately ran around the side of the house, jumped off the back porch, and ran over to see if he was down in that well. It was getting to be dusk and the light wasn't all that bright down inside the well. Delaney

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

grabbed the top of the ladder that they were using to reach the bottom of the well and started down the rungs, not knowing for sure what he was going to find. He reached the bottom, but it was dark. Then he spotted it. A cavern had formed underground and Jeremiah must have Alvin in. Delaney went inside this cavern made of sparkling, naturally accruing geodes and crystal gardens! There was no light except for a faint glow from the half-moon that was becoming visible above the hole in the ground.

“Jeremiah?”

Delaney kept calling down into the cavern below. He could just hear the roar of an underground stream that was camouflaging a voice. Delaney could hear him calling up from below!

“I’m fine!” He said.

“Just a little shaken, that’s all! I moved a rock and the next thing I knew the ground gave way and well, here I am. Get the ladder and come down here!! You’re not going to believe what’s down her. “

Then the entire cavern seemed to light up all on its own with what resembled the northern lights sending light beams in every direction, single threads of light shimmering off the wall, ceiling, and the river that ran directly through this amazing cavern. Upon closer examination, it appeared that the walls were covered in jewels, gold, silver, and crystals of all shapes and sizes. Diamonds, rubies, and emeralds adorned the space around them. There were what appeared to be ancient hieroglyphs—nothing like those you’d find that were created by the Native American nations. These hieroglyphs were made of shapes that looked more like Egyptian. It was like nothing neither Delaney nor Jeremiah had ever seen before!”

Suddenly the shapes lit up with golden shards of light coming off the wall in the shape of the writings. Delaney reached out to touched his hand into that of the one embedded in the wall in the middle of the four section triangle that pointed downward. Three on each corner, and one in the middle with a hand in it and he was stricken down. That’s when they saw it. Just past this was another room to the cavern. But in this one, the light body of an old Indian chief—from the looks of his headdress—stood, covered from head to toe in the garb of a tribal leader, his wrinkled skin shining in the darkness like a thousand fireflies lighting up the night!

Mesmerized, Delaney and Jeremiah felt compelled to reach out and take the hand of this man as the spirit of a long forgotten

soul reached out and touched them. As soon as it did, this apparition of just about every color of the rainbow faded into the chamber just beyond. He sat in the middle of the room, a perfectly formed arch marking the entrance. This round room had writings of all kinds forming a beautiful mural of the heavens themselves, sparkling down from a golden ceiling reflecting the wavy light of a golden well in the center of the floor. The well itself only stood off the floor of the room about two feet, but the water came up all the way to the top. It seemingly created its own illumination, mesmerizing them with the depth of the deepest ocean. Their mere fabric of being seemed to be visible within these waters!" Jeremiah fell to his knees, bowing to the spirit of the well, and began to drink from its pure, sweet nectar that felt like a pure golden-colored joy. As he drank, he felt the warmth of a thousand souls occupying his body all at once! That of the Lord of the Well himself seemed to wash over him causing a wonderful sense of peace, light, happiness, and wellbeing. Never before had he encountered such a wonderful experience, nor would he ever again. At least not on this planet.

This was the epitome of all there is, was, or ever has been on the physical plane touching every nerve in his body all at once. He felt forgiven, loved, and full of life everlasting! Just then his father fell to one knee and began to partake of this heavenly creation that could only be made by the true Lord of Lords. The Creator of Life Everlasting!

This was something that could never be shared with anyone. Its life-giving power was intoxicating, and Jeremiah began to long to keep this joyous ecstasy all to himself. So he slowly walked over behind his father as he drank from the well. There just happened to be a perfectly round stone nearby that was made of solid granite. It was about six inches round and must have weighed twenty pounds. As soon as he spotted it, he knew what he had to do. So he picked up the stone and without hesitation struck his father directly in the back of the head, forcing him down and into the well. Jeremiah held his father there for several minutes until he was sure that he had passed.

Looking up from the well, he tossed his father's limp body to one side and lay there giggling at what he had accomplished. And at what he had found. After all, he was the one who had discovered this well, and it was going to remain a secret. Nobody was going to have any of it! It was going to be all for him. No one else! The brave-

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

looking Indian chief suddenly left the room, and the protection of the Well of the Eternal was turned over to the spirit body of Delaney Dixon, now known as the Keeper of the Well, or to all the Time Walkers who existed in this world, the Mighty Companion. At least that's what the writing on the wall had said, which Jeremiah could somehow make out now.

He took the scrolls that were stored in a jar in the corner of the room. This room's secret was written on these scrolls of ancient deerskin leather. This would explain the secrets of the Well, and how to unlock them, so he had to keep them for himself. They could never be destroyed or be allowed to fall into the hands of the weak, those feeble mortals the likes of which polluted the entire world with their disgusting dead husks. Living only long enough to realize their own mortality, they could never be allowed to discover the one and only truth in this world that had been handed down to him by God himself. His father would serve as the Guardian of the Well from now on, and he would continue to live the life of a rich man from now into eternity. No one would be able to unlock the secret of the Well without the location and incantations and rituals that were, to his knowledge, only written on these ancient animal-hide scrolls. There were three of them, and a fourth piece, the centerpiece, had been scribed a hand print in the rock in a place where it was printed into the wall of this cave and nowhere else!"

Then, as Jeremiah turned to leave, he saw the foot of Tabitha exiting the cavern, up the ladder, and out of the well. She couldn't believe what she had seen! She just so happened to walk in on her brother killing her father and leaving him by the side of a golden well that was located in a cave made completely of the riches of a thousand kings! As she climbed she could hear Jeremiah coming up behind her. She began grasping at the sides of the unfinished well, trying to bring down debris in an attempt to stop Jeremiah from killing her too! He almost had her when one of the ladder's wooden steps suddenly gave way, effectively snapping the homemade ladder into two pieces and sending Jeremiah back down to the bottom of the cavern, where he hit his head for the second time that night. Tabitha noticed that he was no longer coming after her and started to worry about what she had done! She was only eleven years old and had never harmed anybody, let alone her own brother. She called out,

"Jeremiah?"

But to no avail. Her mother appeared at the top of the well, and it wasn't long before the two of them had discovered the wonders of this amazing cavern. After that, they decided that if Jeremiah was allowed to live, he would come after them in an attempt to keep the power of the Well for himself. So they took his lifeless hundred-and-twenty-pound body into the surging torrent of the very large, powerful underground stream that had been formed at the same time as the Earth itself by the one true God of the Hebrews. That which makes up all life on Earth washed Jeremiah's lifeless form down into the depths of the planet. Hopefully, never to be seen again. After Tabitha and Georgia became caught up in the greed of every Time Walker who walks the Earth in an attempt to have the Well's power all to one's self, they sealed it up with a blasting cap and filled in the rest of the well with the conveyor. But only after retrieving one of the three scrolls from the cavern's container, leaving it like that. Jeremiah now realized that the only way to have the power of the Well would be to fulfill the prophecy. Because that was the only way to truly become all-powerful and wield the full extent of the power of the Well—occupying the entire world by having the ability to live and having the power of all life everlasting, experiencing that which only the well can do.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

TASK UNDERTAKEN

Now that all of the pieces of the puzzle had come together, the entire family of the seven-headed guardian of the Eternal Well of Everlasting Life, it was time for Cameron to experience the Well for herself for the first time. Having her own true youth and the ability to provide the proper identification to have a bank account and live a normal life, she was invaluable to Jeremiah, Tabitha, and the rest of the family. Georgia would now go by Delaney's middle name, Sanford. With a new identity, she would be allowed to live a life all her own, and after drinking from the Well, this body would also become a holy temple for the Divine. Those of the Time Walkers.

What Jeremiah wanted was to replace his father as the Mighty Companion, living the life of all Time Walkers, and then Cameron could finally collect on Delaney Dixon's mining claim. The one that was hidden behind the false gold-mining shaft. Because Jeremiah still had her original birth certificate from when she was born to Jeremiah Dixon and Brenda Beverly Leone back in the eighties. Since Jeremiah's body would be available it would allow her to collect a death certificate on behalf of the County Coroner's Office. Then she could locate the claim and the last will and testament that was still on file at the Lyon County courthouse in Carson City. She could claim the mine as her own with this death certificate. In return for her newborn baby, Tabitha would be guaranteed a ticket out of the country. Scotland, she had thought. She and Cameron both. No sense in holding a grudge.

Besides, the mine was just as much hers as it was Cameron's, or at least she thought anyway. Now all they had to do was locate the dig site and secure an escalator of some kind. They found a rental made available from a local contractor. It didn't take long for them

to acquire the right equipment, and finding the location was easily done considering that Jeremiah, Tabitha, and Sanford all spent their youth growing up in the area. Problem was, it turned out, and this land was now owned by the Shoshone nation, secured as part of their reservation back in the seventies for some of the city's water rights back in White Horse. This came as a shock to them after finding out that the claim had been listed in the newspapers back in the seventies. Nobody responded so the Bureau of Land Management reclaimed the land and sold it to the Shoshone Indian nation as a new addition to their now threeand-a-half century-old Indian reservation.

Now the only way to get to it would be to work without being discovered by anybody, and as far as being able to live a life of luxury, that all went out the window along with everything else they had been cheated out of over the years. They deserved that land and now it turned out that it wasn't meant to be. The Dixon family was destined to go on making a living the old-fashioned way. The Well would have to wait. They checked with the tribe as to the status of the land to see if they could acquire it from the Indian nation to claim as their own. It was a long shot but as it turned out, that part of the reservation had been zoned as hallowed ground. The Indian Nation had begun burying their dead close to, if not on, that plot of land, and it was no longer accessible unless they wanted to risk jail time—which everybody in the family knew could never happen for any length of time. But if they went digging up a Native American burial ground they would be facing some serious time behind bars!"

They all had to get out of town before they were recognized by the locals as the ones who broke Carrie Grandt out of prison. If that happened, they would all be in for a ride, instead of being a healthy band of rich immortals with the ability to do whatever it was they pleased. So, Cameron couldn't go back to the track or Jeremiah back to the bar, or even anywhere close to the Sure Hill Valley. They would have to pack up, leave town, and never come back. They still had their houses and horse ranch back in Plain View, Utah, which they all decided to sell outright and move on. Maybe to someplace in Scotland. If they could ever find a job.

Then Jeremiah got to thinking: the other side of that mountain ridge still belonged to the Bureau of Land Management and wasn't available for sale, but nobody cared if somebody wanted to stake a mining claim way out in the middle of nowhere, even if it was

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

in the year 2014. They were even laughed at by the local assayer's office that had kept the records of mining claims throughout the valley since the time that the Matheson Brothers had been around. Who had finally picked up and moved on after the gold, silver, and copper mines began to stop producing enough precious minerals or even iron ore to be financially beneficial to them. They left the small Nevada towns of Cherry Creek and White Horse in the Sure

Hill Valley over to the tourists, casinos, and state prisons back in the forties. They had died somewhere back East and had been buried on a very large funeral plot in the center of the White Horse Cemetery, their graves now on display for anyone who happened to want to visit with them. As for the Dixon family mining claim, they had nothing but time, and nobody would be looking for them on the other side of a mountain next to some Indian burial ground out in the middle of nowhere.

Surprisingly enough, when they found their way to the dig site it was obvious that there was an underground body of water. In fact, Jeremiah had eventually been washed out into a small body of water that at the time was just a pool that existed with a huge underwater sinkhole visible from the surface. This small pool now formed a lake of about seventy-five yards across and bubbled over into a small stream that people used for inner tubing and getting wet. During the sixties, that water had been used as a fresh-water reservoir that had been dammed off to create a water reserve for the hay farmers and cattle ranchers that populated the land after the miners had all staked their claims and moved on.

After arriving on the site, it wasn't long before they knew where to dig because they could actually hear the ground groaning and shifting directly under their feet! This could be the back-door entrance into the magical cavern that they had discovered so many years ago. Way back when their father was still alive. They were all well over a hundred years old now. Georgia had lived on this planet now for almost a century and a half, never leaving the area, except for a brief stint in Oregon when she was a child, the place where she had grown up. That and a short stay in Reno just recently—but that was it.

“Let's get to work!”

It wasn't but an hour or two later that the sun started to set on the horizon. They planned on bedding down for the night and

staying out there on their new mining claim. They didn't want to be seen in town so they decided this would be the best place to rest. Shortly after the sun had gone down and the fire had gone out Jeremiah fell asleep, only to wake up in the cavern where the Well was still located. This was no dream, he thought to himself. It was too real. He had finally made it back into the cavern! But how? He thought. Before he had time to think about it, the cavern began to light up with the shimmering of the well shining on all the walls and across the rounded ceiling made of gold. Everything was sparkling, with thin shards of light shooting off in every direction just the way he remembered it. That same feeling of being on top of the world swept over him once again. The Mighty Companion rose from the shimmering waters of the purest creation.

Just then Jeremiah was woken up by the sound of thunder. A storm had rolled in and the wind had picked up. The weather started to take a turn for the worse in a big way, and the thunder of the Gods started pounding the sky, echoing off the canyon walls and sending lightning bolts streaking across the sky and striking the ground in a fantastic display of sheer power.

The moon was soon covered but the light produced by the ferocity of this storm started to pour with rain the likes of which Jeremiah had never seen. It wasn't long before the empty mountain-side gullets formed over the years by previous flash floods overwhelmed the entire structure, coming off the mountain in a huge torrent and tearing up the ground below. Rocking the skies above was the monstrous billowing of a thick black thunder-and-lightning storm diving down out of the sky and rolling along the ground!"

Never before had such a storm been witnessed by any of them. Never before, and never since, had they seen such a massive display of sheer terror and power rolling over the sky and tearing up the ground. This torrent was a full-blown energy storm made possible only by the keeper of the Well. The spirit of Delaney Dixon himself. As the storm raged on, his face was seen by them. The storm swept down around them. Suddenly the ground gave way and Jeremiah found himself once again caught up in an underground sinkhole. After being washed out into the bottom of the canyon he was lost in the darkness that suddenly fell down around him. The clouds parted and the moon came out, vanishing again just as soon as it had come. All that was left of the mining claim's dig site was a solid wall of stone granite fifty feet

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

high. This is where Jeremiah would stake his claim, and this was where he was going to dig.

He would use the old-fashioned methods of drilling a core section out of the solid rock and packing it tight with blasting caps and TNT that he had purchased from a licensed contractor who had happily accepted a few chunks of gold and few rubies to go along with them. Jeremiah drilled the holes deep, and packed them in a star pattern reminiscent of the way his father had taught him to do. He yelled out to the rest of the family to,

“Duck and cover and then he set off the first shot!”

The ground once again shook, this time from the power of his blast, nailing it on his first attempt. When the dust and rock had been cleared out from in front of him he discovered that this was the original entrance, placed on the cavern by the Gods that had built it when the earth was still young and the fire and water of the young planet were still at odds with each other. The beauty of a spiral staircase seemed to wind down into the darkness of a grand abyss, a light had showing up from around the first corner. The staircase angled down into the darkness, a circular counterclockwise spiral carved into the rock at a very steep angle. Cameron looked over at Jeremiah, and, “You go first.

Followed by Sanford and Tabitha the five of them descended into the depths once again with the excitement of not knowing what was really going to happen down here after all these years—whether or not they were going to make it out of there. Tabitha held a flashlight that suddenly went out. It wouldn’t come back on even after continuous shaking of the batteries that lay within its thin, flimsy, red plastic shell,

“Damn it!”

Tabitha said out loud, and suddenly the light from below circled up around the members of the well hunting party. Red and blue orbs of light circled them, lighting up the staircase below. It didn’t take long for them to come to the underground river that was now clear full after the storm’s water sinking down into the crevices and underground waterways that seemed to drain into this area from every direction. Tabitha suddenly doubled over.

“I think my water just broke.”

Jeremiah started to get overly excited and had to be calmed down by Sanford. Cameron let him know that she wasn’t going to be

able to scale the side of the cave wall without getting washed away! He agreed, and then he apologized for his previous actions. All of them, from the sound of it. Then, after a few minutes of rest, the water abated to the point that the stone pathway was once again visible in front of them. The light that shown off the underground river was coming from just ahead and seemed to shimmer on every corner of the pathway which soon gave way to a crystal cavern. One that was all too familiar to Jeremiah.

And the rest of the family who had been here over ninety-three years ago recognized it as if it were yesterday. They all filed in single-file. Cameron, for the first time, was in awe of the majesty of this place. The air was cool and calm and seemed to smell just like the clear night air as it had blown off the small stream late at night up at the Clear Water Reservoir back in the foothills of the Sure Hill Valley. A twenty-five-minute ride on horseback from the Horseman's Ranch back in Cherry Creek. All of that seemed so long ago and unimportant to her now. Here she was with her family of Time Walkers inside the Cavern of the Well of the Eternal!

"What shall we do now?"

She asked to the group in general?"

Well, we must drink of the Well, and summon the spirit of your grandfather, Delaney Dixon. The Mighty Companion and Keeper of the Well! Come now, Cameron. It's your time to drink. She slowly thought to herself in a dreamy sort of way, what was she doing and why was she here? All of this was just so magnificent. It was all so surreal! Almost as if she were going to wake up at any moment back home in her bed next to Hunting Sticks and Eugene, who was still back in Cherry Creek over at the Horseman's Ranch with Brenda,

"We must summon the Keeper of the Well."

"How are we supposed to do that?"

Tabitha asked."

"What did you do before?"

Jeremiah went over it one more time in his mind. As if he hadn't gone over it a million times already in the past day, dreaming about this very night of his greatest accomplishment. That of becoming the Keeper of the Well! But first he would have to free the soul of his father in order to take his spot. Placing his hand over the outline

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

in the center of the hieroglyphs Jeremiah was surprised when nothing happened! “We must wait for the baby.” Cameron said.

“That’s right Jeremiah said in a feverish pitch.”

“Let’s get you comfortable! Here, sit down here next to the Well and partake of its bounty!”

Just then, without Tabitha taking a sip, the baby began to come. After several hours of labor, the baby was finally ready to be born. The new born baby was born right there in the middle of this incredibly beautiful cavern of never-ending life. After several tries, Cameron knelt down and with a sudden twist, the baby came falling out! She immediately covered his mouth. The baby opened his eyes, and Cameron kept her hand over the baby’s mouth and nose.

“Cameron.”

Jeremiah said in a calm voice. Then, a little louder he said it again,

“Cameron! Let him go!”

She wouldn’t let up and nobody could comprehend what was happening and as soon as Jeremiah started to reach to free the child he was knocked back on his rear end by a sudden rush that came shooting up out of the Well. Finally, the spirit of the Well had come out of its inner sanctum deep within the waters of the wellhead to everlasting life. The spirit of the newborn baby descended down into the water after the initial surge of energy that came from all angles of the cylindrical room, the rounded ceiling reflecting the inner beauty of the living water as it shimmered and danced on the gold. At that exact moment Cameron let go of the baby’s face, and he began to cry out loud. He was quickly retrieved from her grasp by Jeremiah who studied the newborn baby, asking Cameron what she had done! With no response, she turned toward the Well, got down on one knee, and began to partake of the Well. It was time and it finally felt right. This was going to be her beginning, and it would also, at the same time, be her ending. The beginning of a long, healthy life and the ending of her mortal self. Never before had she been so alive!

“From now on, the magical scrolls of the Well will be once again sealed in the Magical Cavern of the Well of the Eternal for the next band of

Time Walkers to discover.” Cameron said.

“Our job here is done. Meet your father, Jeremiah. Delaney Sanford

Dixon.”

And she reached over and touched the boy on the end of his nose. He’s all yours. Whether you decide to drink from the Well is your decision but as far as becoming the Mighty Companion, the Well has been set free. No longer will the Well produce everlasting life. Its power is gone, and the spirit of this baby boy who was never allowed to take a breath has now allowed the spirit of the Well itself to finally move on. The time of the Time Walkers has moved on and the power of the Well that had given them everlasting life had moved on and would no longer trap anyone in its spell, allowing the souls of all of mankind to live in peace, and die with the same. Jeremiah once again located the hill that his father’s mine had been hidden in all those years ago.

With their new, modern-day mining claim they could finally make good on the family secret. And since the tunnel was dug from the backside of the hilltop, locating the center shaft their father Delaney had found so many years ago, the Indian Nation would hold no claim to the gold that was being mined out of the back side of that very same rock formation as their burial ground. Georgia’s spiritual form that was now encapsulated in Hunting Sticks’ forty-year-old body was the only person left in the family who wasn’t wanted by the law. So with new paperwork drawn up in his name the family would be able to move someplace where they wouldn’t be recognized. Probably somewhere in the Southwestern states of New Mexico, Arizona, or maybe even Southern California.

Cameron still had her own identity but kept her maiden name just in case somebody started asking questions. Due to Tabitha’s identity crisis the family decided that they would cross the border into Mexico, sell the gold there, and move to Canada. Which is where they stayed, and would hopefully live out the remainder of their mortal lives, finally with enough financial security to enjoy the rest of their time on this planet, loving one another. With this newly found prosperity, they all started new families, putting an end to their immortality, but continuing their legacy by willing everything to their newly found families. The generations of ancestors had slowly grown into something that was plenty big enough to keep the Dixon family name alive and kicking well into the foreseeable future...

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

LOVER'S QUARRY

It was just a flash in the night!"

His truck's headlights hit the body of a desperate man. A man left bloody and crippled from a nasty accident after seriously underestimating the validity of the snow and ice. Not to mention the mountain traffic which frequented this eight-thousand-foot elevation and six-percent grade of a notorious snow-covered mountain pass during the winter months. Here it was, January, but the sun was out. It must have been somewhere around four thirty in the afternoon at the time, and during the daytime these mountain pass highways glistened with a mixture of snow that was covering melting ice. That mixed with the slush of snowfall on the side of the roads and the wetness that ran in the grooves where the tires met the asphalt just after a fresh layer of snow fell. All the while the sun bounced off the highway and glimmered like wildfire across the center of the lanes, magnified by the traffic that had passed over it every day since its construction. The light of the midafternoon sun was bouncing right back off the road at such an angle that it went straight into the eyes of the driver of an eighteen-wheeler semi-truck full of groceries bound for White Horse from Hayes, Kansas.

Just off the road there was what appeared to be fire-like reflections of ghostly apparitions coming off of this four-lane highway in the middle of the night! But it wasn't an apparition. It was an old man. He was actually only about fifty or so, with a silver beard that also shined like wildfire as the lights of Alvin Richardson's big rig slammed directly into this old man so fast that Alvin couldn't have seen the old man coming at him over the ridge. The old man had just been in an accident. His car had spun off the road after attempting to

pass another vehicle of a late-model sedan. He ended up losing control of his vehicle when his tires entered the packed snow that had accumulated between the two lanes. As he began to lose control of his vehicle he hit the guardrail in the center of the road first, spinning him out over the outside guardrail and down into a ditch. After noticing that he was actually alright, except for some contusions and a split lip, he undid his seatbelt and crawled out of the wreckage of what used to be a Honda.

The car was totaled. He knew that. He even doubted that anyone had seen him go over the railing, down the embankment, and into a ravine, so it was a good thing he wasn't seriously injured. After slowly crawling out of his massive wreck he began to scale the side of the deep embankment, back up onto the notorious Bermuda Triangle-like Last Highway on Earth, as it was known. Alvin never saw the old man coming, and he probably wouldn't have known that he'd hit him at all if it weren't for the sound of the man being struck down by the front of the rig. Alvin pulled over to the side of the road at the top of the grade and walked back down the hill for maybe a quarter of a mile until he could see where the man had left the road. Quite strikingly, the man's wallet, light brown, leather billfold embroidered with a label that, "Stitches." Was just lying there next to the highway, close the place where the vehicle had struck the guardrail.

"Huh!"

Alvin said out loud, as he slowly knelt down and retrieved the wallet from the ground where it had been laid. Probably by an angel. Alvin thought. The man's body wasn't anywhere to be found. Alvin walked up and down the shoulder of the road in search of the man's torn body, but found none. He had to have been dead after that big of a hit. Besides, the man's car was at the bottom of the canyon. Probably barely noticeable. And if the body appeared to have been moved, then wild animals could be to blame, Alvin said one more time, and began to walk back up the hill to his rig. It was just about dark by now, and it was time to get back on the road. He didn't need any of this bull crap so he decided to put the whole incident behind him. What was the point in bothering to report such an event? It could only lead to trouble. So when he pulled into White Horse at about six thirty that night, he immediately parked his trailer, pulled the pin, and ran his black and green Peterbuilt through the automatic truck wash.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

That should be plenty sufficient, Alvin thought. Considering that nobody knew what they were looking for in the first place. It was just a tragic accident and was best left behind. He put the whole incident to bed and continued on into the local Pilot truck stop and picked up a roast beef sandwich with melted cheese, some curly fries, and a drink for under twelve dollars. A bargain compared to most places. He would follow up dinner with a nice hot shower, and then turn in for the night. Little did he know, he wasn't going to be alone tonight? Just about two thirty in the morning, Alvin was awakened by knocking on the side of his sleeper cab. He couldn't tell if it was a tire thumper of one of the other drivers, or perhaps the boy at the desk, but it sounded like it could be a nightstick also. It was quite loud, followed shortly after by,

"It's the police! Open up!"

"Holy crap!"

Alvin thought. It's the cops! He rolled out of bed, whipped the sleep from his eyes, focused, ran his hands over his mustache and goatee, and told the man outside the rig that he would be right outside. As he looked through the window an all-too-familiar shimmer came off the chrome police badge the man outside was wearing. Shining off of his badge was the light of the streetlamps that lit up the parking lot early in the morning. It was cold so Alvin started to get dressed. Just then the door to the rig flew open. Guns drawn they began to search the vehicle.

"That door was locked!"

Alvin said, but the cop was not impressed,

"Get your skinny little butt out of that truck and into this parking lot right now!"

The man said. Reaching for his piece.

"Let me see your hands! Let me see your hands!"

The man drew his pistol.

"Step down out of there! Right now..."

Alvin moved slowly with his hands up in the air toward the driver side door of the truck. But the man spun him around.

"Turn around! Up against the truck! Hands where I can see them!"

The man was shouting as the floodlight of his patrol car focused on his presence. He started kicking Alan's feet apart and began to aggressively pat him down too!

“Any weapons, or anything I should know about this vehicle?”

The man began to ask.

“Any needles, drugs, or sharp paraphilia I should know about? No?”

The White Horse City Police Sergeant cuffed Alvin from behind.

“Good. Now slowly turn around.”

“What seems to be the problem officer?”

Alvin said with the straightest face he could come up with?

“I want to see your driver’s license, proof of insurance, and log books right now. Is there anything in there that I should know about?”

He asked again.

“If there is and you’re not telling me, this could get ugly for you! Now, is there anything in there I should know about?”

Alvin quietly said,

“Good. Then you won’t mind if we search the place then, do you? Put your hands behind your back!”

“But, you haven’t...”

Alvin started, but was quickly quieted when the officer—who it was plain to see wasn’t going to be following any rules—slammed him into the side of the cab. He applied one side of his handcuffs to Alan’s left wrist where it now rested up against the truck. It wasn’t long before Alvin found himself on the ground and the man’s partner came over to put him in the back of his Chevy Impala patrol car. Not too carefully, either. He bumped his head on the roll bars that were surrounded by a solid steel mesh separating the front seat from the back. Not to mention there’s absolutely no legroom in the back of these police cars due to the fact that the officers in the front seat need their legroom!”

It could never come to light what had happened that day just before sunset back on State Highway 23 as Alvin came up over the top of the eight thousand-foot elevation of White Horse Pass. The guy was just standing there! I mean, what else could he have done? He couldn’t have seen the guy through all that road glare was reflecting the setting sun from above his rig and also the glare from the windshields of the vehicles in front of him! How was he supposed to see the man, let alone be responsible for his death? In fact, Alvin wasn’t

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

even sure he had hit somebody. It could've been a chunk of ice coming off another big rig. Maybe it was a rabbit, or even a stray dog for all he knew! He hadn't seen a body, so what was the big deal? It was right about then that he realized what it was the officers had, and were looking through. It was that stupid wallet with the black embroidery on the side of the tan leather. It even had part of the chain that was supposed to be clipped onto your belt, but most of it was missing about halfway down the length of the chain.

They knew they'd probably have found the other half of that chain on a body back thirty miles or so down on the side of the road. But that was the problem. There was an old car that looked like it was from the nineties, maybe a Chevy Cavalier, or a Honda Civic without the hatchback or something like that, so mangled up that you couldn't really tell what it was. But no body. That's what had the police so stunned. The fact that there was no sign of any fatalities. There wasn't even a sign of anyone coming out of that car, and from the way it looked, nobody could've crawled out alive. The next logical step was to try and find the driver of the car. Maybe that person had been ejected out the front of the car, over the top of the red, mangled-up hood of what turned out to be a '93 Honda Accord with individualized license plates that ironically read "LTL-NUSNS."

You see, Evan "Stitches" Maryland loved to travel the countryside. He was Stitches for short due to the fact that not everybody was as well put together as he was. He had several limb-replacement surgeries after coming home from the war in Iraq back in '91 where he was one of the very few American soldiers actually wounded in combat during Operation Desert Storm, a battle that had swept through the Middle East like a tornado made of big guns and tons of laser-guided hellfire munitions for the tanks and bunkers. They also had patriot missiles that were fired from American-made offshore Navy vessels aimed at strategic targets. They would strike with surgical precision against anything the enemy could throw at us, and stinger rockets were designed to destroy the six-hundred mile-range scud missile that the Elite Iraqi Republican Guard threw, which was, at that time, still state-of-the-art!"

Things still seemed to be moving at a fast pace straight into the future with all the cool gadgets that you could put your mind to. Technology seemed to be making everything possible, well surpassing any science fiction thriller that was made in the early to mid-part of

the twentieth century. Now well into the twenty-first century, Stitches had finally been able to fake his own death. With no body, the local sheriff's office had to rule the death of one Evan Maryland an accident. The fact that they never found a body was only backed up by the dead body of a coyote that was found at the scene of the accident. The wild dogs must have hauled off the man's body. God knows where the rest of him was going to turn up, but until they could find the body, there could be no arrests in this case. But Alvin wasn't out of the fire just yet. He was going to be charged with felony manslaughter and leaving the scene of an accident before the police had arrived. But without a body, no one could attest to the fact that anything had been killed or hit with his black and green Peterbuilt eighteen-wheeler that was owned and operated by the food distribution company that he worked for.

With no sign on the truck attesting to its cargo, he could've been hauling anything. It was just another white sheet-metal trailer with wheels underneath it. In fact, the police wouldn't have even known that there was a black and green Peterbuilt anywhere near the scene of the accident had it not been for the Nevada State Highway patrol officer who just happened to be perched atop the mountain pass looking for anything out of the ordinary. He sat beside a large, three-acre rest stop that adorned the top of the hill and had spotted the driver of one of these trucks walking back up from what looked like the same direction on the side of the mountain pass as the accident. He couldn't really prove anything, but the man didn't have a dog with him, and he didn't seem to have any reason for coming up from that direction. Besides, Alvin thought. That's all it was. Nothing too fancy that might draw attention to the fact that he just so happened to be carrying a few extra things that you usually don't find at the grocery store like automatic rifles, hand guns, explosives, and plenty of ammunition. The most important thing to do at this time was to be as calm as possible and try not to lead these guys too far down the garden path. He knew a guy was going to be coming over to meet him here to finalize the deal between Big Jim Dailey and the Chicago Mafia, bringing guns and ammunition into White Horse through an untraceable source. Sure there were plenty of automatic rifles you could legally buy in any gun shop or sporting goods store in the state, but these guns were "stripped clean." Another way to say "Supposedly untraceable."

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

The Chicago Mafia attained these weapons from overseas and had somehow smuggled the guns in to the United States in small pieces. These weapons were made for the armies of several nations who didn't care about serial numbers. Just cash. Everything else could be bought legally within the United States, such as the wooden stock and the butt of the gun, and even the banana gun magazines that belonged to the AK-47 automatic assault rifle, and the flip back removable stock. That was the preferred automatic weapon of most of the enemies of the United States—foreign and domestic. All because of its reputation of being easy to shoot, easy to maintain, and a knack for getting the job done right.

These clips could hold up to fifty rounds of 7.62X39 mm long-range cartridges that were for sale in bulk anywhere that you'd find up to five thousand rounds of ammunition at any given time from any of the local vendors in the state, but the Chicago Mafia had much more than that! They had enough to supply a small army with automatic weapons and equip them with live ammunition. The barrel, even the shoulder strap, could be found in practically any army surplus store anywhere in the United States. Just not the inner workings of the weapon like the trigger mechanism and its breach. Even the bolt action firing pin mechanism could be attained, but only on the black market and if you knew your way around a few unbroken donut holes in the importation laws of such devices as they passed through the United States Homeland Security checkpoints at all international airports and border highways.

Say, for instance, that the parts were all smuggled into the country in pieces that would come through customs in large, ocean-going containers that were x-rayed at the dock upon entering the country from overseas. These small parts would be almost unnoticeable when spread out through a ship's cargo. Maybe even disguised in bends of raw iron ore used on an industrial scale, which come across the Great Lakes into Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, or any one of the other states that receives raw iron ore shipments from Canada. That's exactly where these weapons had come from. Smuggled into the country through the capital city ports of Chicago, into the hands of the Chicago Mafia. And, in this case, a few of them were being smuggled across the country with their final destination in White Horse, Nevada, with a fellow by the name of Big Jim Dailey, who must have paid a fortune for this one giant shipment. Alvin had no idea who this

person was that he was supposed to meet here. Tonight. At the Pilot truck stop in White Horse, Nevada.

Alvin was from Hayes, Kansas. Why these weapons were being delivered out West from the heartland of America and not from the Great Lake states was because that was the train route that followed the iron ore down farther into the heart of the country into the steel mills of Jefferson City, Missouri. They had to travel that far south just to make sure that the goods were able to be recovered and repurposed into what they were originally designed to do, which was supply an army with automatic weapons. Cheap and easy to operate was right up Big Jim's alley, but these cops seemed to be taking quite a while out there just doodling. Finally, after about an hour of studying the contents of his big rig, the police sergeant came back over to the vehicle and swung open the back door of his police cruiser. He then calmly asked Alvin to,

"Kindly step outside of the vehicle."

Then, they blindfolded him and put a duffle bag around his neck.

Then they had spun Alvin around about three times in a clockwise direction. By now, Alvin knew that these guys were his contacts. It was either that, or he was going to die tonight. Maybe both. After a few spins, the little guy came over and whispered calmly in his ear.

"Now, just keep slowly walking straight forward and after a minute or two just stop, turn around, and take off your blindfold the handcuffs were coming off too. Then, pretend that you never want to see us again, because if you do, things might not be the same between us anymore! You got that?"

Alvin could hear the two men getting into vehicles. One of them took the police cruiser, and the other drove off in Alvin's eighteen-wheeler. Turns out, the boys had turned him in the direction of a field covered in sage brush. Once he had shuffled over and reached the curb, which he nearly tripped over, since his truck was no longer in earshot, Alvin thought it was the right time to take off his skimpy little blindfold and figure out what to do with the rest of the night? The first thing he wanted to do was see what in the hell was in that duffle they'd strung over his neck! Quickly setting it down on the ground, he unzipped it. The overhead lights of the truck stop parking lot gave off plenty of light even out here in the field. It appeared as

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

though there was just a couple of old red bricks larking around in that bag. Along with a handwritten note on the back of a picture that,

“It appears you’re a few bricks short of a load! Find this man if you want to get paid on the front of the photo was a picture of an over-aged cowboy from Hicksville whose ten-gallon hat seemed to fit him like a sombrero. He was white-eyed, with gray hair, and wore a full beard that wasn’t too long but did look like it needed a trimming. Alvin thought, have I come all this way just to be left hung out to dry in search of some stupid Old-West wannabe cowboy who looks like he’s a few bricks short of a load himself? This is just great!”

For now, all he had to do was find a place to sleep for the night. He couldn’t go back into the truck stop because he hadn’t been in there yet and he didn’t want to go in there either. It would look bad enough having his picture taken by some security camera out in the parking lot, but going inside where they could get a good look at his face was another story! Not only that, but he just didn’t feel right about the whole thing. He had to get out of there and find a place to lay low. Besides, it was freezing out here in the darkness of the eight-thousand-foot elevation that surrounded the Sure Hill Valley. Most of this part of town was new construction so the neighborhoods that were close still had many open lots with sections of brand new houses that one day would line all the back ways and cul-de-sacs that would in the future adorn these backwoods neighborhoods into the twenty-first century.

They were mainly built for the influx of mine workers who had moved to White Horse to work in the open-pit copper mine buried deep into the side of the mountain, but there was also a large influx of people who were going to be working in the newest state prison in the country. Being that this place was way out in the middle of nowhere, a four-hour drive in any direction to reach the closest metropolitan area, it was definitely secluded. There were no flights, trains, or bus lines to visit there. Even in these modern days the only way to get there was to drive there yourself! Alvin could see that these neighborhoods lead away from the highway, but being in a strange neighborhood this late at night would definitely throw up a red flag if anyone were to see him. They might even call the cops again. God knows what could happen then! So he decided to slow down and look around for a minute. Get his bearings on the situation.

It was just then that a car pulled up next to him on the street. Just out of nowhere. There wasn't traffic in sight yet here there was a shiny new 2014 gold-colored Ford Mustang drop-top with the top down and a blue racing stripe across the hood and all the way down the backside to the trunk,

"Okay, Stitches. Get your butt in the car. I've got place to go, and I don't need you holding up the show."

The lady said, smiling back at Al. She was wearing tight jeans and a T-shirt cut low in the front with those petite little shoulder cuffs that you only find on a lady's shirt. Blond as could be, she wore her hair the same as the rest of her. Gorgeously-lined, the car that she was driving, the smell of her hair, and the scent of her perfume screamed early twenties along with the diamond earrings that Alvin could see sparkling even in this light. So, without another thought, Alvin jumped right in!

"Where we taking off to?"

He wanted to know as she calmly yet suddenly left the curb of this backstreet neighborhood that was still under construction. "Looks like we may've fouled up the pick-up." She said without even turning to look at Alvin.

"It's my job to get them back!"

"Why are you calling me Stitches? I mean, how you knew me by that name?"

"Listen, mister, all I care about is resolving this issue as quickly and painlessly as possible. You do know what pain is, don't you, mister?"

She said as she turned to look at Alvin.

"What do you want from me?"

Alvin asked in his calmest yet shaky little voice. The young lady just turned and looked at Alvin for a brief second and then back onto the road ahead as the sound of the brand new Ford Mustang's four-hundred-horsepower V-8 engine was pushed to the floor. The faster the car sped up, the more serious this woman appeared.

"Listen."

She finally said.

"We don't have much time. If you want to sit here and argue, it's not going to work. I need you to trust me or else I can just pull over right now and drop you on the curb. I know that your name is Alvin Richardson. I know that you work for the Chicago Mob. I

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

also know that you have three pets and a daughter that you haven't heard from in fifteen years. Twenty-two years now, isn't it? I mean, twenty-two years since her birth back in '92. Isn't that right?"

Without giving him a chance to respond, she started in again.

"Am I right?"

Then she repeated it again in a sterner tone of voice this time.

"Am I right?"

She demanded to know. The streetlights that lit up this lonely backstreet neighborhood, passing empty lot after empty lot, caused an array of shadows to sweep over the car and down into the black interior of her sporty little convertible ride. Without even looking at her Alvin asked.

"Can we put up the top please? It's freezing cold over here! Besides, between the wind and the engine, I can't hear a word you're saying!"

She suddenly pulled over and brought the car to a dead stop. Alvin didn't know if she was going to kick him to the curb or what! He became very nervous as this little peach from out here in the West reached down to the left side of the steering wheel and flipped a toggle switch on the front of the dash. The top began to rise up and over them. After securing the latch on each side of the car—something Alvin had never had to do—she started driving again. In about five seconds they made a turn and were back up to speed, traveling down what appeared to be a two-lane state highway leading from the outskirts of town down into the main part where the two highways running through the area came to an intersection. Of course there was no one at the traffic light so it didn't take long to turn green.

BAR ROOM BANTER

At first appeared that they were the only ones out this late at night, but as they got further downtown Alvin started to make out what was probably one of the local casinos in town. In fact, Alvin had heard of the place. The Intrepid Star Casino. Hotel, casino, resort destination, with all the flavor from the Old West. If you were into the cliché themes that most casinos seemed to gravitate towards. But this place, from the looks of it, was a genuine relic of the past. Alvin could tell from the first time he entered the front door. Reaching into his pants pocket, he was genuinely surprised to find his wallet, which contained his ID, and a half empty, half-smashed pack of cigarettes in gold- and tin-colored foil embellished with the words "Winston Lights Searching around he couldn't find a lighter, but located a small coin bucket full of books of matches that all had the logo of a palomino racehorse colored in bronze with a black background and the name and phone number of the club.

Quickly reaching in and grabbing one, he struck the sulfur match head across the graphite strip and lit up one of his favorite cigarettes. After taking in a few long draws he realized what he had done. He had smoked his lucky cigarette. The one that he always turned upside-down just after opening the pack for the first time. After peeling off the cellophane wrapper and removing the tin foil wrapping of the twenty count pack of smokes he would reinsert one of the cigarettes face-down. This would always be the last cigarette he would smoke in the pack. He did this for luck. God knows why. It was just something that he was taught to do, because all of his friends did it.

He still continued the ritual up to this very day, just a reminder of the good old days that once occupied his young yet frivolous life. Much older now, Alvin had little patience for games, but

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

there was really nothing he could do at this point. He was in unknown territory with little in the way of friends to back him up. On the bright side though, he had retained his wallet, which was where he carried his ID and bank card.

This is great! He thought, and immediately decided to check in. This was an old building, but it was still a hotel by all accounts, and by the looks of it, a cheap one at that. Alvin knew that most of the casinos out West (or anyplace else for that matter!) practically gave away rooms and food in the restaurants and buffets that accompanied just about every one of them. Some were outrageously expensive to rent, because those types of rooms were kept in reserve by casino management to give as complimentary perks for VIP's and the incredibly rich.

This hotel had a few suites in it but they were nowhere close to the ones inside the modern day casinos that lined the Las Vegas Strip. Maybe only a couple hundred dollars for the entire affair. Alvin knew that his stay at the Intrepid Star would be a short one. Either he would meet his contact and finalize the deal, or if he ended up having to stay in town for a while, he would have to find a place that rented rooms on a weekly basis with little questions asked. Most of the time these motels would rent by the week and came with a small kitchenette with a small refrigerator, a microwave, and a coffeemaker of some sort or another. Sometimes, if you were lucky, they might even have an electric stove.

Without further ado, Alvin decided that he wasn't going to ride the old-looking elevator to the right of the registration desk on the second floor because he wanted to feel the place out a little bit. Maybe stop off at the bar. Have a few drinks, play the quarter poker slots, and maybe try his luck a little bit at one of the twenty-one tables that sported a very low betting limit, a six-deck shoe, and a thorough shuffle that had to be done by hand halfway through the shoe. In other words, it was a constant grind as far as making any amount of money because the house was only offering low-limit wagers so that they couldn't lose an extravagant amount of money in any one single shift.

Of course they were open twenty-four hours a day but the all three of the six-deck shoe low-limit blackjack tables would close from three a.m. to eleven a.m. except for certain times of the year when there was a big event in town like a car race or New Year's Eve or

something like that. They would even stop the games at midnight on New Year's Eve and all the employees would have a small glass of champagne. Besides, that's all the tables were good for. With free cocktails every half hour, it was a great place to play a measly two-to-five-dollar bet on an endless basis while drinking free beer and any other type of alcohol available from the fully stocked bar just across the room.

Tipping the bellhop to bring him extra towels and to somehow find him a change of clothes, he headed over to the bar and sat down.

"What'll it be?"

Said the guy from around the bar. Alvin knew this guy wasn't the usual bartender because he was all alone at the bar. He didn't have any help, and when the cocktail waitress stopped at the bar's station where the drinks for the slot and table games customers were served, he asked the waitress how to mix a drink. Besides of few stragglers, Alvin had the place to himself. Along with a key man for the slot machines, a security guard, and several other bored restaurant employees who all acted like customers, drinking coffee and smoking their cigarettes late at night. Alvin didn't mind. He knew that most casino employees were second to none when it came to gambling in the casino, so it was pretty obvious something was up. The pretend bartender was making a few mixed drinks poured from the bottle with a red funnel cap that would only disburse a single shot of alcohol each time you tipped the bottle.

Then he turned to the cash register and printed out a ticket for the cocktail waitress to sign. Alvin saw that she split the tip with the bartender, and as he looked around at the joint it was clear to see. That, along with the smell. That all-too-familiar moldy, musk-like odor that was mixed with the smell of mostly empty beer bottles seeping up from the rubber mats that lined the floor behind the bar. There was only an opening at the industrial-size sewer drain neatly tucked under the ice cooler, which was a constant flow of melting ice. Below the ice bin the cold beer was kept for that ice-cold, frosty flavor you couldn't taste if it were on tap. It cost a little more for a drink but having a nice, new, freshly opened bottle of Bud was just what Alvin wanted. Once the man made his way down the bar, flipping a hand towel over his shoulder, he walked over to Alvin in what appeared to

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

be a wobbly gate. You could hear his labored breathing due to many years of smoking cigarette.

“What can I get for you?”

He laid out napkin and set a clean ashtray down in front him. A bottle of Bud with a glass and six rolls of quarters. Can you do that Alvin asked with a cockeyed look on his face. He couldn't believe they still had coin-operated slot machines in this joint. Every time somebody opened a lid on any one of these machines they had to date stamp it, write down the time that it was opened, and it also had to have your initials written on it. Everywhere else in the world, these machines had gone the way of the dinosaur's years back when everything was updated with slips of paper that you redeemed at the casino's cashier cage if you wanted to cash out or had a winning ticket. It was the same place they kept the casino's little banking system where you would cash in your chips, redeem gambling coupons, and a free margarita drink ticket that everyone would receive upon registration at the front desk.

But the payoffs for these dinosaur machines still had to be hand-delivered and signed for by two employees. One to key off the jackpot, another who was usually a change person, and the cashier. And, sometimes, with jackpots over five hundred dollars, they had to have a supervisor's signature as well. There was a cone on the top of the slot machine that had red and white flashing lights on top, the white to summon an employee for change and the red if there was a jackpot. The employee would have to notice the lights and write up a jackpot slip for the amount of money that needed to be delivered.

Then it had to be signed for by several other employees who would actually bring the money from the casino's bank back out to the customer who would then sign for the ticket themselves. Then, and only then, would the key person turn the key on the machine and clear the winning hand. This would allow the customer to continue on gambling and the slot machine to continue operating and accepting people's money!" The flat-top progressive quarter machines that were built into the top of the bar still had coin bins that rang out as the coins from the hopper flew out of the shoot at about two coins a second. They could cash out a relatively small amount of money that could be retrieved and put into change cups, maybe a few hundred dollars or so. That meant they had to refill the coin hopper, so you would see people carrying bags of quarters, nickels, and dimes to fill

the slot machine back up with a reasonable amount of money. This required a lot of coinage.

Turns out Alvin was an old hand working in these clubs back in Cripple Creek, Colorado, but that was a long time ago. He used to commute from Denver up the canyon, even in severe winter driving conditions. He worked there for many years as a security guard who could fill in for a key person if need be. Because of that he knew as long as he sat at the bar and played the slot machine, he could get the drinks for free. So, here he was. Out in the middle of nowhere, with nobody around. Dropped off or “delivered” to this club, he could hardly believe it. In fact, it seemed kind of surreal. What a day, he thought. Coming from what started as a felony charge that probably would’ve landed him in prison all the way to pretty girls, fast cars, and casino bars. He knew what he was carrying. Sort of, anyway. What had happened to his rig he didn’t know, but the Peterbuilt tractor was his. He owned it.

Who knows? Maybe they have it down at the impound yard. If he was going to find out what was going on, he would have to be patient and inconspicuous and look like an everyday customer. But this bartender had him worried. It was the same guy in the photo that came with the bag full of two red clay bricks.

What the hell that was supposed to mean, Alvin had no idea, but the inscription on the back of the picture was pretty clear. So, instead of ordering a drink, Alvin slowly leaned forward over the top of the bar and came out with

“The cops have taken my truck. You know anything about that, mister?”

The man said with a gleam in his eye.

“I don’t know who you are or what you’re talking about, so just sit there quietly and drink your drink. Okay? Just a friendly word of advice.”

Now the real Alvin was starting to come out. The tough guy. The enforcer for the Mafia.

“Wait a minute.”

He said in almost a whisper. Slamming the picture down on the bar seemed to startle the old man. Alvin said,

“Here’s a picture of you, old man and I sure as hell hope that you know what this is all about! Because if you do and you’re not telling me, I guarantee you won’t like the consequences!”

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

"I'm that man? The man that you're looking for? Well, if that's the case, you sure don't have to be coy about it anymore! Do you mister?"

The bartender said with a smile.

"What's your name friend?"

"Alvin."

"Stitches."

"Stitches?"

"Yeah, Stitches."

The old guy felt around under his chin like he was starting to remember something he should've known about.

"Oh, I see. Well, let me introduce myself, sir. My name is Jim Dailey. Most people around this side of town call me Big Jim. Big Jim, that's me. You got that?"

"Yeah, sir, I think I do Alvin said, sipping his ice-cold bottle of Bud".

His next move was to turn and start filling the quarter machine with roll after roll of ten-dollar quarters even though there was a bill acceptor on top of the machine that would take any denomination of currency out there. The machine still had to be able to accept coins because people would cash out using the coin hopper, and it was easy and convenient to just feed them back into the machine if they wanted to. In fact, you'd want to buy your quarters from the bartender because that way he'd know you were gambling right up front. That way he would know to bring you a cocktail for free with the roll of quarters right away and at the same time. Which also made it a lot of fun and convenient to mess with the slot machine a little. In any way possible. You could cash out, tip the bartender, and put the money back in again, or only bet a few credits at a time. The only problem was that a progressive jackpot was only awarded to a customer when the machine's maximum number of coins was bet. It was the same for any denomination that would've been wagered on that particular hand.

It depended on the slot machine you were playing, which generally turned out to be five credits for every video poker hand, or at least on every progressive slot machine poker hand that was played at this particular bar. If anything less than the maximum number of credits was bet on a particular progressive jackpot or on any winning hand,

then that particular hand didn't win the progressive jackpot. So nobody played any less than the full amount. At least not at these machines. You could go through a roll of quarters in five minutes. You might even play for half an hour or more. If you wanted to spend less money you could select nickels, and so on. A free six-pack of cheap beer or a bottle of rotgut whiskey, whichever you preferred, would be handed to customers each time they achieved a four-of-a-kind on any quarter poker machine.

Any four-of-a-kind would do, so people would get pretty drunk in their off hours. They couldn't drink their free six-pack or bottle of whiskey at the bar, but nobody really wanted to because the beer wasn't refrigerated. So if you wanted it cold, you would have to drink it at home or wherever else you could put it on ice or in the fridge. Just looking at this club with its old poker tables and old-school memorabilia that adorned the many corners and cubbyholes throughout the entire lobby was truly like stepping back into the past.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

PARADISE IN A BOX

With low-limit poker, blackjack tables, coin-fed reel to reel slot machines, and all the alcohol you could drink, this place was as close to being lawless as you could get. Everybody during the day and on the weekend was a little bit rowdy, to say the least! Alvin could tell just by looking around the place at the old Budweiser Clydesdales, neon lights, mirrors, and pictures of people whom had long passed by, such as a few well-known actors who visited the location back in its heyday. In fact, the hotel rooms were a lot like downtown Palm Springs in sunny California where the streets are named for famous individuals like Bob Hope Drive and Frank Sinatra Avenue. Only here, it was the rooms named after them instead. Big Jim turned to the gentleman slowly while emptying and wiping out the ashtray made of smoked glass with the palomino logo embedded in the side under the indentations for placing your cigarette in case you needed a free hand while enjoying your smoke. On the inside, it had little rings formed by small ridges on the bottom that started out small in the middle and grew in circumference all the way to its smooth glass edge.

These were nice ashtrays and you could keep them if you wanted to, as far as reason goes. Along with matches and unused coin cups that also displayed the logo, these were great souvenirs for people who were just passing through and wanted something to bring home with them. T-shirts were also available along with a few personal care items that you could buy in the glass case at the hotel's front desk where the bellhop, desk clerk, and floor supervisors all hung out. That's where the money was, as well as a small, silent alarm, which was all that was needed to persuade people otherwise when they were thinking about robbing the joint. It was four hours to civilization in any direction, leaving very little chance whatsoever of escaping alive.

After finishing up with the rock glass, Big Jim draped his hand towel over his shoulder once again and approached the man. He leaned in, and said very softly,

“That’s right, Stitches. I know who you are!”

Stepping back for a while. Alvin continued playing his slot machine as if nothing had happened at all!

“You see that Big Jim?”

Alvin had to ask. Then he went on,

“I never know when it comes to jacks-or-better poker if you should go for the flush or straight flush, by throwing away a single pair of jacks or better, or even a three-of-a-kind. That’s what’s great about video poker, compared to the reel to reel slots, where it appears that there’s no skill involved whatsoever. Which gives you the most even odds, but the house makes it so very boring unless you’re choosing to bet all the lines. But in this game it’s possible that you could actually throw away a winning hand, or even turn a crummy hand into a jackpot! “

In some cases, you even know which way to turn, but in other situations you have to guess which way would give the best odds of winning the overall best hand or, in some cases, hitting the jackpot. So, you ask yourself, ‘Should I bet high or should I bet low?’ Sometimes it’s a question, like, ‘In order for me to win, should I throw away a possible flush or straight flush and try for a possible winning pair?’ Maybe holding jacks or better in hopes of getting a full house or even ending up with a measly three-, or just a four of-a-kind? When you think about it it’s enough to drive you to drink! Don’t you think, Mr. Jim?”

“It’s, “Big Jim” to you!”

He said without blinking an eye.

“Now that I’ve thought about it in fact, I feel so much excitement about the situation that I decided that I would love to have a job working here in this wonderful establishment. If you don’t need any credentials, I’ll be happy to assist you in keeping this business open to the public and even thriving compared to what it’s doing right now. How does that sound?”

Smiling once again, Big Jim said,

“What makes you think that I need your help, Stitches?”

“Because you need me.”

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

Alvin said, looking Big Jim right in the eye, smiling at him with surprisingly white teeth for a smoker. He looked just debonair, not like something the cat dragged in.

“I can tell you that I’m a truck driver who just had his rig filled with powdered good, and not the kind that you put up your nose either. I’m talking about the kind that goes boom! So, unless you want a whole load of guns, ammunition, and explosives floating around your neighborhood, then I suggest you allow me to assist you in getting that shipment back. There was a pretty young lady who was so kind as to pick me up and drop me off here, only to disappear somewhere in this establishment as I signed in at the registration desk where I used my personal bank card, mind you, which can be tracked back to this location at this exact point in time if I should turn up missing! Besides that, all I know is that everybody keeps calling me ‘Stitches’ when the only people who could’ve known about that name are two police officers who took a wallet off me that I found out on the highway where a terrible accident had occurred!”

Then he leaned in real close to Big Jim, and said,

“I don’t mind playing little small-town mafia mind games partner, but I’m from back east. The Chicago Italian Mafia, and you don’t want me to report back to them that their goods were misplaced and that you more than likely know where they’re being held. I mean, you do know! Isn’t that right, Big Jim? I would cut the bull if I were you Mister, because the long arm of the Chicago Mafia bosses far outreaches any law or solitary prison confinement you’ll find yourself in any state, or country. You got that? And quit calling me mister!”

Alvin finished by losing the top three buttons of his shirt which revealed patches of hair and a gold Rollo-link chain that he wore around his neck with a Mizpah pendant on it. That was the same pendant shared by none other than the order of the fraternal Time Walkers. It’s a medallion whose symbol is recognized by very few people anywhere in the world. It’s a scripture carved in a small triangular shape with a handprint stamped onto it with a coin press of some kind. This was no tiny, thin little Mizpah pendant but instead carried at least four ounces of gold. The Rollo solid titanium necklace was covered with fourteen-karat weight gold that is unbreakably strong but worth a small fortune,

“No one knows I have it, and I never take it out.”

Alvin said. Then things suddenly went from bad to worse for Big Jim as this young, strong guy stood up on the footrest of his barstool, reached across the counter, and snatched the old man up by the collar of the blue denim shirt he was wearing.

“You’ve been waiting for this day a long time old man?”

Struggling to free himself from the iron-clad grip of this supposed Time Walker wasn’t paying off!

“Don’t act coy with me. I know what you want, and I’m here to help you get it, but what I need from you is the location of Tabitha Dixon, and that bastard child of hers. You know the ins and outs of the people, and the whereabouts of that entire family, whoever they might be. I want that gold mine out there, Yes, I know about it! That, and the sacred scrolls of the Well that have turned up missing, that were stolen from me and my family back in the late twentieth century by that thieving Jeremiah Dixon and his little band of misfits. They’ve spoiled the Well and I can’t wait any longer to begin to repair the damage. If you help me find these guys and use your knowledge of the Local County Courthouse, then I’ll make you a rich man.”

“I’m already a rich man Alvin.”

Big Jim said, squinting his eyes and trying not to catch any breaks!

“What I really want from you is eternity along with the riches of the world! That’s what I’m offering you Big Jim!”

Alvin squeezed even harder on the collar around Big Jim’s neck,

“And this better not get back to the Chicago Mob either, Alvin!”

Big Jim said under his muffled collar. So Big Jim said back to him gritting his teeth and talking in a muffled sort of way,

“I know your type, and you’re not invincible. Just immortal. You just remember that things are going to happen one way or the other. I can tell you that between now and then you’ll be long gone and forgotten.”

“Once I’m finished with you, you’ll be able to decide your fate one way or the other. One way or the other, because once I find them you’ll be expendable to me, Big Jim.”

By now Big Jim was beet-red in the face and from the looks of it, he was going to throw up or pee his pants, so Alvin let him back down again where he started to take in his first real breath in the last

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

two minutes. He had to cough a few times to clear his restricted airway. Big Jim caught his breath just in time for Alvin to ask him one more time about how he knew about the wallet. That's when Big Jim started to laugh all over again and said,

"You really don't know who I am, do you? You think I'm a stupid redneck?"

Big Jim asked before he once again began to cough loudly and had to clear his throat several times. Smiling back again at Big Jim. He said,

"If you want that gold and the sacred scrolls that go along with it then you're going to have to go through me, because even a hundred, two hundred, or however many hundred years you've been alive doesn't make you any smarter than I am. It just makes you lucky, and when your luck runs out? I'll be there to capitalize on that little transaction too! But for now, we need each other. That pretty little lady who dropped you off here is my daughter Rhonda. She's supposed to be the one to pick up that load. With those supplies I promised the Chicago Mafia that they would be made rich, and I fully plan on executing that plan. There's nothing better than being rich but being rich and immortal. That would mean we could both get rich. Me with the scrolls, and you with the gold. This very small world would definitely be big enough for more than one billionaire Time Walker. Don't you think? So, are we going to make a deal, or are we going to make a deal?"

Big Jim asked, smiling with a little chuckle in his now raspy old voice.

"Partners then Big Jim?! You hold up your end of the bargain and I assure you that, in the end we will finish this whole thing out together. Just like real partners in crime would! Right, Big Daddy "

Alvin had said slurring his words and raising his glass to Big Jim for a toast!

Big Jim raised his glass and exclaimed;

"I can drink to that!"

"Now, how are we going to mine these mountains without any explosives, and what's with all the guns?"

Alvin was asking Big Jim.

"It's not the guns we want. It's the land that we're after. Don't you see? That land is owned by the Shoshone Indian tribe. Its reservation is right here on the back side of the Sure Hill Valley. With

that amount of weapons and ammunition mixed with extremely powerful and hard-to-come-by military-grade explosives and blasting caps, which work off of a remote detonation activation device, these tribesmen might just be swayed to look the other way when we want to ‘work on the land for, “deforestation”.

“Big Jim put his hands in the air, demonstrating quotations marks.

Then he began to say,

“In other words, they’ll let us cut down some trees in that area, and we pretended to turn them into lumber at no cost to us. Just by letting us have the lumber for free, we’ll turn over all these grade-A weapons to the tribe! That way we can do what we want on that land, and nobody is going to know about it. They’ll say they were just clearing the trees for a larger burial ground. There’s only one stipulation...”

“Oh, and what would that be?”

Alvin asked?

“Lay waste to those of whom we sell the lumber overseas, or to Mexico. Anywhere where not inside the United States because it’s part of the agreement between the Shoshone Indian tribe’s council and the United States government—that the Indians aren’t allowed to deforest the area unless they’re planning to build something on that land which they are, for a supposed larger cemetery, or burial ground as they call it. It’s also illegal to leave the tribesmen’s deceased bodies unburied, or above ground, like they did centuries ago. That’s why, if we get caught digging around over there in search of the prize, then we could stand to lose everything—maybe even our lives. So I, for one, will be trusting you to watch my back, and I suggest you do the same to me when the time comes. We can’t afford to be at odds with each other, and when it’s all over with, you can have the Well to watch over.” “You mean I should be the Mighty Companion?”

Alvin asked chuckling.

“No. That job belongs to that well-digger Delaney Dixon. We’re going to be rich and immortal together and after that we can go our separate ways!”

Then Big Jim said.

“After I take a sip or two off of this cocktail I’m drinking here, I’ll go ahead and take care of the labor and the business of staking a legal claim after we find the hidden mine—whether or not it’s

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

on Shoshone land. I have a certain lawyer friend, and by the time he's through that land will be ours, and that means the mining claim will stick. With him on our side I think we just might have the right ticket to get the job done. Then we'll split the money two ways! When we're through there will be as much gold and jewels as I can carry, and as much gold and jewels as you can carry. Then we'll both ride off into the sunset in different directions. But we need to remember: there's a catch."

"I see where you're coming from, Big Jim, but I thought you were saying something about a lawyer."

"Yep."

Big Jim said.

"A lawyer who, after doing some digging, found out that back in the year of 1921 there was an original mining claim filed with the Bureau of Land Management giving claim to said mine, its location, and to whom it was entitled. That person was—you guessed it! Delaney Sanford Dixon. The man who discovered the Well for himself back in the same year. Somehow, his family had no choice but to succumb to a land management treaty. It gave the water rights in a different area of the reservation over to the townspeople that lined the outskirts, using central irrigation ditches for crops with the promise of enough water to serve the entire population, and those who would settle in the valley anytime in the foreseeable future.

But it was only in return for that section of the valley's timber to be traded to the Indians, the only stipulation was that the deforestation of the area could only be used by the tribe for purposes domestic, or in other words, that which occupied or took place on their own land they could never sell the lumber to anyone else. Something that the Matheson Brothers had stipulated due to the fact that they also wanted control of the logging industry at the time, and that agreement still stands firm to this very day."

"Well, okay. That's just great, Jim. Thanks for letting me know..."

That's when Big Jim cut him off mid-sentence and told Little Alvin,

"That's Big Jim to you, Stitches. And don't you forget it!"

"If you call me Stitches one more time tonight I can still pull you over this bar and give you an ass-beating, old man Alvin said with a grin on his father. You got that, old-timer!?"

Then Alvin asked of his father quite seriously.

“My name is Alvin Richardson. Not Stitches, and don’t you forget it.”

“Have a few more drinks, Stitches. In a few hours you’ve got work to do.”

“And by the way, “Big Jim”! How did you guys know about the wallet the cops found in my truck if you’re not one of the cops?”

Alvin asked.

“Lucky guess I guess, Alvin. Everybody in these parts knows there’s an old Indian man who we call Stitches who was always at that particular rest stop along the highway looking for a ride down to Las Vegas and back. He would collect the small amount of money that he made from the tribe each week, and go down there to drink and gamble his money away.

Anyway, the actual driver of that red Honda sports car that hit him just as he was heading out to the highway to hitchhike reported the accident after you left. The call came in over the police scanner which was picked up by Rhonda who just happened to be listening. There’s a police scanner we sometimes listen to upstairs. When the driver of a black and green Peterbuilt semi-truck was reported leaving the scene of the accident after walking down the hill and picking up what appeared to be a man’s wallet, we were afraid it couldn’t have been just dumb luck.

Thing is, everybody knows he carried that same exact billfold with the leather security chain on it and his name embroidered across the front. So, I called the county sheriff’s office when we heard the call come in about what was happening over there at the truck stop. Just before you were brought to jail and booked on charges, I persuaded the boys down at the station to go easy on you considering the fact that you were carrying the load for me personally, and the real person who had been in the accident had already turned themselves in.”

“Who turned themselves in?”

Alvin wanted to know.

And what about the loud thump I heard coming up the hill!”

Alvin asked with a perplexed look on his face.

“Answer me that, old timer.”

“Absolutely.”

Big Jim said in a sure-fire tone of voice.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

“What you hit was definitely the driver of that red Honda passenger car. They were trying to locate Stitches’ body, because from the looks of it something must’ve come along and packed it off into the wild to try and eat it. Or at least that’s the way it was starting to look in the beginning. Until...” Big Jim smiled.”

“They found the body. But it hadn’t been packed off into the wild. It was located under the wreckage of the red car at the bottom of the canyon! The guy who hit Stitches dragged his body over the edge of the canyon’s guardrail as he over-corrected, sending the car down into the bottom of the roadway’s embankment after the impact. Then, as the driver of the red car managed to crawl back up the steep embankment of the roadway, trying to make it up and onto the highway, looking for some type of help, he stumbled over the edge of the broken-down guardrail and into oncoming traffic. Which is where you come in.”

“Oh my God, you’re kidding me! You expect me to believe that?”

“Yep.”

Big Jim stated in a calm yet profoundly obvious sort of way.

“So, why didn’t they just arrest me?”

“Because nobody could prove that you hit him. It was obvious to them judging by the position of the body down at the bottom of the canyon. You got lucky my friend. You got lucky, and they wrote it off in their reports that the driver of the red car wasn’t wearing a seatbelt during the accident, causing him to be ejected out the front windshield on impact with the guardrail. Can you believe that the old man couldn’t stop laughing as he was telling the story?”

“What about the truck?”

Alvin asked.

“I mean, they just got in and drove it? There’s no wrecker available this time of night unless you want to charge the city a small fortune to haul an eighteen-wheeler with a full load down to impound. So, they drove it themselves.”

“Big Jim said, grinning,

“Well, what about the blindfold?”

“Practical joke, I’m afraid, son. Where your sense of humor?”

Big Jim said laughing all the way to the bank on this one.

“That’s when I sent out Rhonda to give you a ride. I thought you might enjoy the company of a pretty lady on your first night in town!”

Big Jim continued on, barely able to breathe for laughing so hard. Now he was really red in the face.

“You should’ve seen the look on your face when you walked through those front doors. It was priceless!!!”

Big Jim carried on without stopping to take another breath,

“So can I stop by the impound lot and pick up my truck.”

Alvin asked with a, “Someone just kicked my puppy.” Look on his face!

“First thing in the morning when you sober up you can go over and settle up with the local law enforcement agency. That’s something you’re going to have to work out with them. It’s probably going to cost you some money, but I think that if you can come up with an acceptable number anything is possible.”

“Aren’t you going to help me?”

“No.”

Big Jim said.

“I got you this far, you can pay for the rest. Maybe next time that ageless wisdom will teach you that time is not always the solution. It’s money that talks. Always has and always will. The only way to keep it without getting killed is with what we call around here loyal friendship. Preferably with people in high places!”

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

RACE TRACK REPEAT

Once you grease the wheels a little bit it's surprising how far you can go. But you should know that we all stick together around here, and you're a very lucky man to be part of this operation. Remember that, too, because just like everybody else, you're not invincible, merely immortal. There's a big difference between the two, and without an identity and a steady cash flow, you don't stand a chance. The Dixon family is proof of that. And the only reason you're going to be allowed to live is because the only way to reactivate the Living Well of the Eternal Time Walker is through an immortal Time Walker like yourself! "

You see, Stitches? The Well lives on inside of you. You can never die so the Well must also still be alive. And some way or somehow I'm going to figure out what it takes to bring the Well itself back from the grave. But I need that baby that Tabitha Dixon was pregnant with. Only with that child can you live as the Mighty Companion, according to some of my Indian friends over at the reservation. At least according to ancient folklore, but who believes in that stuff anyway? I guess I do. With you being a Time Walker and all, you can once again occupy the throne, but you have to get there before Jeremiah Dixon does. He still hasn't taken his second drink from the well. It won't affect him either without the Spirit of the Well coming back to life once again, and only a true Time Walker can become one with the Well,

"We must retake the former position as the Mighty Companion for ourselves, but only temporarily before the Dixon family realizes what's going on. It won't be long before Jeremiah and the Dixon clan found a way to make good on their gold mine windfall. That's where I come in. If it wasn't for the deputy warden out at the state pen, we could've had them all arrested and brought up on charges for that prison break they made. Each and every one of them. Tabitha is already a fugitive and the other two are accomplices in her escape.

So they'll all eventually be wanted by the law, and I plan on having them arrested and convicted of their crimes, leaving the gold mine and the Well of the Eternal up for grabs. This lawyer friend of mine knows how to get his hands on the scrolls, which have the incantations we need to reactivate the Spirit of the Living Well. He knows because Tabitha Dixon's section of the scrolls was put into a prepaid safety deposit box that's supposed to keep the scrolls safe and sound until somebody comes over to collect them. I think that person should be me. Now, with Tabitha being wanted by the law, she can't pick them up herself. But with the right kind of persuasion I think we may be able to get our hands on that first piece of the Well ourselves!"

"What about the others?"

Alvin asked inquisitively.

"We? Big Jim and I."

"We'll just have to wait and see, won't we? Ambushing Jeremiah Dixon to retrieve the other pieces of the scrolls isn't going to be easy. He still works over there in Cherry Creek running his own business at The Lonely River Pass. As far as the rest of them are concerned, it could be a little difficult to track her and the baby down at this point. She has a good head start, but she's bound to surface somewhere. Am I right, or am I right?" "I knew contacting you was going to be the right thing to."

Alvin said.

"I've foreseen all of this in my dreams. My spiritual guides are strong and are willing to fight to bring the center of this physical dimension back into a living reality. The same way my kind has kept the well alive for thousands of generations. But we're going to need more than just the scrolls, and that newborn baby. The one that supposedly belongs to Jeremiah Dixon, and his so-called 'family.' We have to kill Jeremiah Dixon, as well. Sounds like we got a plan!"

They both happened to say at the exact same time.

"We've got to get the long-gone, unfortold legends that go hand in hand with the creation of the Well of the Eternal "

Just then Big Jim's daughter came skulking around the bend in a white coverall painting outfit. She wasn't wearing her respirator just yet but Alvin noticed her, and said, as if taken aback by her beauty.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

“Well, well, well. What do we have here, young lady? You look marvelous, my dear! All dressed up in white for us to see your stunning beauty? Where’s the wedding cake!”

Alvin laughed, turning his head to look straight into Big Jim’s hazel eyes? For a few seconds there, he looked surprisingly looked like Big Jim, who just happened to be smiling back at Alvin too. He was still standing back behind the bar, looking at Alvin’s face, appearing almost like he had some sort of mass-produced happy-face mask on or something. When Alvin had caught Big Jim’s eye, he could see Alvin’s teeth and they didn’t appear to be so white anymore. The aura around his presence seemed to change, becoming quite like a dark one, like a thousand-year-old dead person just sitting there drinking at the bar. Alvin said jokingly to Big Jim.

“So, what do you think? Is that what we’re supposed to do?”

But the only thing Big Jim Dailey could hear inside his head was a sharp ringing sound, which was compounded by the dark flickering of the neon lights mounted above and behind the bar! Then, as soon as the echo of Alvin’s deep-set skeleton eyes moved over him, all he could hear was Alvin in that spooky skeleton-like voice saying over and over, again and again,

“What should we do now? Should we do now? Should we do now?”

It became clear to Big Jim that the soft white glow and dimming of his forty-watt light bulbs mounted in the track lighting systems above this small casino’s main bar was bizarre. Like all of the lighting in the whole place had turned sour or something. And just after that everything suddenly appeared to have a dark shade of black, mixed in with a deep brown mahogany. As Big Jim began to turn around, one of the forty-watt light bulbs above the bar exploded and the screen on the video poker machine dimmed a little bit too. But other than that everything seemed to be back to normal again. As if nothing had ever happened, Big Jim asked,

“You were saying? That Time Walker trick might’ve worked on Hunting Sticks Madison! Big Jim thought, but it surely wasn’t going to work on him!”

Despite the incident of the whole world being in a time freeze Jim Dailey continued to laugh at this man’s jokes, even when Rhonda joined the conversation,

“What should we do now? Run off together and try to find some preacher at this time of the morning? And then what? Should we just rent a room?”

She asked, chuckling. Alvin had purposely asked that important question of Rhonda right off the bat, because he enjoyed flirting with her, and he wanted her to know it. Even though he was still chuckling a little bit about it at the same time. It wasn't too much longer before Rhonda once again tried to surprisingly sneak up on Alvin in her white equestrian's suit like husband and wife Big Jim blurted out, smiling as if life were just some kind of a funny joke. The two looked at each other once again, which came as no surprise, and both of them giggled about it. Afterwards Rhonda climbed up into the seat next to Alvin. Neither one of us is going to be in a position where we can testify against one another without incriminating ourselves in the process either.

“Just that there...”

Big Jim started to say, but then had to stop abruptly in to pause. Because his first thought on the subject was followed up by suddenly having to sneeze, and before he was through with it, he had sneezed two more times!” Afterwards, Big Jim began to sniffle a bit, and then sneezed twice more. Following that, he attempted to go back to what he was saying and finish his thought. Just as blood started to run out of his nose stuffed toilet paper up his nostrils to stop the bleeding.

“In and of itself it says that there is a lot right there.”

This was followed by both Rhonda and Alvin taking quick drinks of their cocktails together.

“A toast! To the Well Everlasting!”

Big Jim said.

“Here! Here!”

They all shouted. And then, from out of nowhere and without thinking about it, they all took one last pull on their nightcap for that evening. Of course, that was just before they all began to drink another round. And Rhonda and Alvin would end up having several more nightcaps to start the morning with. They did all of this just as Alvin was ordering another cold one. It wasn't until later in the day that Alvin told Big Jim goodbye for the day, and started on his way out the door, stating that,

“Rhonda and I have some type of riding to do.”

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

Big Jim wanted to know, But Rhonda just kissed the old man goodbye. And Alvin told Big Jim that they had a “job to do and that they would call him later on in the day. Big Jim was tired from being up all night at the bar, but there was something else on his mind. It appeared that the two of them might’ve known each other somehow before. But it was bedtime right now. He told himself that he would figure things out better in the morning. It wasn’t long before he was in bed, asleep while this new Time Walker and Rhonda supposedly had a job to do. When Alvin and Rhonda had finally found their way out of the bar and into the streets, the morning sunshine was beautiful and bright on this lovely springtime morning. It was beautiful all the way to the Holiday Park River Bend Horse Racetrack where it was just another terrific day, meaning that the weather was a perfect eighty-two degrees with a semi-cool breeze that had the smell of freshness to it. This day was bright, sunny, and the perfect conditions to run a horse race. Rhonda was a regular jockey at the track.

She was one of the crowd’s favorites. She was considered the same as, or comparable to, any of the male jockeys that raced at the track. She was paid by the track itself whereas most of them were partially paid by sponsors, in addition to the track. She was guaranteed with a contract to be not only sponsored by the Intrepid Star Casino that her father/son owned, but also paid a steady salary working for the track and sponsored as the official jockey of the River Bend Horse Racetrack. Most of the other riders were paid by how much they won.

It all averaged out since no one jockey could occupy the same horse for more than three races in any season. And the order of payment from top to bottom, statistically, after every rider had a designated handicap, coupled with the odds that were bet on any one horse at any one time. That way the winner was ultimately decided by the horse. Not the jockey. Rhonda and Alvin had known about this race for a very long time now. Or at least as far in advance a race could be placed, which was six months into the future. It was all handled by computers that were operated by the county and programmed by the state. This race was going to be special because they were being escorted up to the VIP area next to the commentators and press box to a five-star hangout positioned directly behind yet still above the race track. Namely, over the starting gate.

The floor was made of a glass that could support the weight of the people in the room with ease, which allowed the best possible bird's-eye view of the dirt racetrack. Cameron was in today, working down in the horse stalls, keeping track of everything going on in there. It wasn't very long after Rhonda and Alvin had arrived at the track that they were both comfortably seated for the race to start as the horses and riders all took their positions in the metal shoot. Once the horses had taken off running as absolutely fast as was possible, it was guaranteed that the odds placed were as even as could be. This had no special effect as far as the validity or the legitimacy of the races that were going to be won at the track on this very day. It wasn't a dead ringer or a fixed event. These races were all on the up and up,

"Who knows? This could be a good day at the track or it could be a great day at the track Alvin was ready to find out. He had wagered fifty thousand dollars on the first race of the day, which would be run the entire length of the three-quarter-mile racetrack. There were seven horses and seven jockeys riding in that day's first event. Without further ado, the gates flew open and the race was underway!"

One might think that Alvin would've bet on Rhonda way back then for good luck, but he hadn't. He had placed three different wagers on this race, and four more in the next. That left only one horse that hadn't been bet on which was the horse that carried the biggest amount of odds over a six-month period. All of this factored in today's race. There was a whole lot of money being wagered on today's races, which would start early and finish late. The payoffs for some of his bets would be huge under the right circumstances, all because he had bet on these events six months ago, paying close attention to those who had won what race during that time.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

AN AMAZING OUTCOME

After the first two rounds of betting Alvin was up about fifteen grand. It was time to drop it all on the winner of the next race, the horse he hadn't bet on before. Jersey Shore was the name of the stallion, a quarter-of-million-dollar, and six-year-old, purebred. When that horse crossed the finish line ahead of the pack, Alvin collected on the single most winning race in the history of the Holiday Park River Bend Horse Racetrack, coming in at just under a million-five. Which worked out to roughly one million forty-two thousand dollars and change.

With the odds reaching that high a payoff, at a hundred to one, there had to be a good reason why. It must have meant somebody wasn't doing his or her job. Regretfully, Mr. Chin had no choice but to get rid of Jeremiah's daughter and have her replaced with a more objective staff member. A more objective person like Rhonda. She was in the perfect position to take on this exact obligation along with her husband, Alvin Richardson, who came down with a huge amount of money overnight, putting the Dailey family back in control of the Sure Hill Valley. Especially the town of White Horse. It wouldn't be long before they achieved ownership of the Well which they planned on keeping to themselves right along with everything else that the Dixons had ever owned, leaving them cold, poor, and disheartened. But at least they would remain alive. That was the irony of the situation. The fact that they were immortal was just icing on the cake.

It was nothing personal against the Dixons. Just the fact that they'd tried to gain a stronghold on the businesses in Briggs County and take what wasn't theirs. They were going to have to pay the price for such uncivilized behavior. Besides that, who did they think they

were opening a racetrack? And taking over one of Big Jim's establishments that was making him good money all those years? Now they owed Big Jim and the entire Dailey/Richardson family. Before too long, they would all be down at the Intrepid Star begging for mercy which the family would fairly grant them, but it would come at a price. Now with the gold, and then with the scrolls of the ancient ones. The Richardson family had learned about them over the years, and it was high time those scrolls were made a part of the family collection. Once that lawyer found a way around that safety deposit box.

The problem was that the bank sold the box to Tabitha indefinitely for a healthy sum of money, which was well worth it. The box was sold outright so as long as there was a National Federation Station Bank in Carson City there would be that box and its contents. The Richardson's knew they would need the scrolls to the Well if they were to discover the secrets to the Well and restore it to its original glory. Even at that, they needed to discover what made that well tick. If they were to reinstate the power from within they first had to discover its maker. Obviously, the water was from the Earth, but the Well itself was made of human construction, and a good one at that!" The Well itself was first cast when the Earth was in its infancy as it rotated very fast around the center of the solar system. It just had the consistency of a gel of molten molecules that had been created and formed out in space when there was a large collision of trillions of pulverized chunks of hardened water molecules that accumulated and were formed together when the stars themselves were born at the beginning of time.

It was created out of a heated liquid plasma that, as it warmed with the almost eternal life of the stars, it turned into a gaseous space cloud that exhibited a billion different colors of light and made the universe glow. The energy that made this newly formed substance warm was made up of all the life that ever was or ever would be. But with the expansion of space and time in an outward motion, super massive black holes began to form, absorbing this life force and condensing it into the universes that occupy and make up space and time itself. As it cooled, things began to change and become solid in the extreme heat and cold where temperature was the only thing that seemed to exist. But as the vacuum grew things became very warm. The farther apart things became, the colder the void of space became, trapping solid matter into liquefied gasses that glowed with energy.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

As this energy cooled and formed the first forms of matter, these large comet-like ice chunks that were formed in the coldness of space would collide with solid matter created when the heat from the universes dissipated, creating meteorite belts. In this case, the meteorite belts hit the sun head-on. As it fed into the rotation of the start of what is our sun, a very large solar flare appeared on the backside of this collision, which affected the entire front half of the sun. The meteorites just kept coming. Some of this matter was able to stabilize itself outside of the furnace of the sun.

After being hit by two space comets, this mass was thrown out of its orbit around the sun and cooled. The bubbles of heat rose from the depths of the Earth's core, which is a power plant that creates gravity and keeps the earth from becoming a frozen lifeless rock floating in an endless rotation around the sun. This liquid that is life itself still seeps up from within the center of the earth in certain locations where the conditions are just right. Usually in these instances there is a very dense formation of precious jewels and precious metals, still soft to the touch.

Created by the sun itself, the minerals that make up the contents of this water is infused with a single carbon atom for each molecule of precious metal and enzymes which flourished in this highly nutrient-infused, golden, carbon water molecule. When consumed it binds with the DNA of the person who consumed it to maintain the right conditions inside the human body to keep these enzymes alive. These enzymes, in turn, create life everlasting within that person. Once the enzymes were infused with a positive energy once again, the Well would return to its former glory. Because when the energy of the Well has a negative charge, only the darkest of nights can bring daylight back to the forests of fears that occupy the spiritual affairs of the same life-giving substances. Substances that encompass all of life. Which, collectively, is soul itself.

So mankind had to learn once again see through the darkness of the trees making up the forests of fears that now preyed upon the human condition on this planet. The Aztecs knew of this from the visions bestowed upon them by the Well-keeper, that person who ultimately holds the key to returning the Well to the positive livelihood, its natural existence in this world. Loral Bette's, the deputy warden for the Nevada State Maximum Security Prison just outside of White Horse, was predominant in the "in's and out's" of what occurred in

the business deals and affairs of the community and the surrounding area of Sure Hill Valley. The Dixons' little jailbreak was somehow not caught on the prison's surveillance cameras. The angles of the cameras were, according to prison officials, too steep to catch a good look at the perpetrators' faces under the prison-guard ball caps they were wearing. So a new security measure was implemented that stipulated that for safety reasons no corrections authority worker of any kind was allowed to wear a ball cap in the prison from that moment forth. A lot of good that did Big Jim though. It would've been easier just to have them all locked up for what they did, but Big Jim knew there was more than one way to force a man's hand. And that's with money.

He was going to hit the Dixons in the wallet—where it would do the most harm. He just needed to find out how the Dixons were smuggling the gold out of the country. If he could find that out, he might be able to squash that little lucrative business from behind. Usually, once Big Jim got the upper hand in a situation he would just extort the guilty party. It was the easiest way to make a buck. One guy watches your back while Big Jim sneaks up from behind. Low-down and dirty? Yes. But it leaves no trace of evidence at the scene of the crime. Yes, one hand always washed the other when making a profitable business agreement, but it's always nice to have the upper hand in a situation.

An ace in the hole.” So to speak. In the type of situation, he was in right now, the best thing to do was just wear them down and when the time came, buy them out. Lock, stock, and barrel. A numbers game was all it was, and to Jeremiah it was a war of attrition. It wasn't like Big Jim hated Jeremiah Dixon. It just seemed as though he was always in the way of Big Jim running things around this town. And since Jeremiah wasn't playing ball with Big Jim anymore, it was starting to create a “forget about the money” situation. It was a matter of respect. And Big Jim had to have it. Not to mention the fact that he wanted that Well! And if he had to go through Jeremiah to get it then that was what he was determined to do!

In order to find a way to sell their gold for more money, the Dixons were having the iron ore smelted off of the gold, taking out all of the impurities. It was something that cost a fortune to have done in the United States if you didn't own your own facility. Not to mention the issue of trust! Then there was the Internal Revenue Service

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

to deal with. They thought all of the gold in the country belonged to them because just like one hundred and twenty years ago the only way to spend the money was to convert your findings into cash. Cash that could be taxed. Not to mention government safety inspections and permits to operate explosives!" The list went on and on. There was a whole lot more to gold mining than meets the eye! Like the question of ownership. The claim was originally staked in the name of the Shoshone Indian medicine man Henry "Hunting Sticks" Madison. And he was still alive—but only because the spirit of Georgia Dixon had occupied his physical form, sending the real him into a state of purgatory.

Hunting Sticks also had a clean slate: no outstanding warrants, a good line of credit, a job, part ownership in the fifteen-acre "Appalachian Pony" horse ranch just south across the Utah border in the city of Plain View. There was also the fact that Georgia had managed another sip of the Well during her last visit, making this physical form once again a new man. It was really too bad for Jeremiah, who was now right back where he always would be. Downtown Cherry Creek. Running the Lonely River Pass Bar and Grill. He had spruced the joint up a little bit, but not enough to draw too much attention. New pool tables, billiards, live music, lots of neon lights, a dance floor, that sort of thing.

He was doing as well as any. Not to mention the fact Cameron was still legally married to Hunting Sticks and was entitled to half of whatever came up out of that mine. And she loved her father dearly. In her eyes, he could do no wrong. Since Cameron didn't drink from the Well before the spirit left it, she was still not immortal. But she did start having strong premonitions after her first journey to the Well. And now the entrances to the Cavern of the Well of the Eternal were being heavily guarded by the spirits of the dead. Now that the Well no longer possessed a living entity, it was acting like a catalyst, an ominous situation rising. It appeared that there was some form of another curse that had been bestowed upon the Well. That whoever entered the extremely lovely, bejeweled interior of the Cavern of the Dead, as it was known, would reap the benefits that came with being haunted by spirits. For it was foretold:

"No man may enter the cavern and take from it that which is no longer his. Including the Water Well of the Eternal."

So Jeremiah said,

“I’m not going down there every time Cameron or Tabitha brought It up.”

Although Tabitha was still spending most of her time out of sight, she did show up every once in a while. She and her mother Georgia were oddly enough sticking by each other through thick and thin, which was allowing Tabitha an under-the-table source of income. A healthy one at that, because it was her job to see that the gold got across the border with Mexico, and that the cash was placed in the right bank accounts. This kept everybody who was involved happy, including the Mexican Mafia and the Mexican “federal.

Doing this wasn’t as hard as you might think. You would’ve never guessed they were able to take business this far. They pulverized the contents of the mine to a fine powder, mixed it with a soft clay base and a touch of paint thinner fresh from the local hardware store paint section, where you can choose any color that you like. This particular shade seemed to glisten in the light, which apparently was making it a very popular color down in Mexico. The Mexican Consulate had even worked out an international trade agreement with the United States as an international gesture of good faith. It was also much cheaper for Mexico to have it made in the United States and transported to Mexico, even with the United States minimum wage act higher than they would have to pay in Mexico. The Mexicans claimed the chemicals needed to make the paint were all much easier to attain and transport in a safe way if they were made in the United States. The agreement even stated that The Golden Termite Paint Company could export, just not import, which worked out perfectly. The drug cartels never thought they would be smuggling goods of this nature into Mexico.

Good thing there was enough gold in that mine to make everybody happy, and rich at the same time. What’s better than having a Well of the Eternal located in a cavern formed by God when he created the earth and finalized in its construction by the ancient Central American Indian tribe of the Aztecs? Nobody knew just quite how the cavern had come to be with its spiral staircase, the gold brick walls lining the troth of the well, the most beautiful circular dome and hand painted crystal and diamonds, and a gold riddled mural that shines as the wavy beams of light dance across the placid waters of the Living Well of the Eternal, which reflects upward at the beautiful mural depicting the position of the stars in the sky.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

Little did anybody know that when studied closely, it resembled a map of sorts? “But a map to what you might wonder. And what of the triangular dentition that illustrated the combination of the scroll as its centerpiece? The one that merely had an imprint of a small hand etched into the center, the four pieces making up a perfect triangle that pointed downward. One triangle surrounded by three more. The centerpiece which is the only section that’s not written on. Seemingly unimportant, except to show what scroll went where? The only given knowledge that nobody happened to pay attention to Delaney Dixon approached it in his first visit to the ell, and it threw him back. Without the entire mural the Well will retain its secrets of existence from all men who search for everlasting life, or the Living Water, which is what the Aztec Indians named the well. For they had the knowledge of how to locate the well and spiritually activate it with a guardian to keep the souls from escaping.

The Aztecs had trapped many spirits of mankind over the centuries, all of which now stood and protected the wealth of the Well against any living person. Great minds had decorated the planet and adorned the finest of warriors, with the utmost knowledge, creating the absolute best tools possible! They would use those tools to assemble unbelievably complex buildings, homes, and perfect, precisely constructed temples and pyramids made of stone so that they could sacrifice the weak and feeble-minded men down into the Well of Eternity and trap them there to occupy it.

ORGANIZATION INTEGRATION

It was there, between this realm and the next, where their spiritual elegance and celestial auras were to be used as magnets for the dead. A beacon for them to follow. Like a lighthouse for those caught between the two realms. By using the spirits of the dead, the ancient Aztec rulers could partake in this bountiful floodlight. Including the ability of second sight, just like Cameron was starting to have. What better ability was there to have, besides maybe your own mental time-traveling ability and the possession of a second sight? This eyesight, by way of a “hand-me-do.” Was basically the ability to travel and maintain a presence anywhere at any time?

These Time Walkers could see through the eyes of and occupy living animals or travel anywhere in the World or out into the Universe as long as there was a living person or animal to exist through in the physical realm. Cameron was no regular Time Walker. Instead of having the ability to remain young, she was instilled with the gift of second sight, or the ability to travel in time or from the worlds within, able to see things that had happened already or were about to happen. She could tell the future with relative accuracy. The past, however, was an open book! Forward or backward, whichever happened at the time? Sometimes she couldn't even tell the difference between the two. If it was in a modern day city, town, or parish. This gift didn't come with an owner's manual. Once a person had lost his body, it was generally considered harmless. Yet the more people who were sacrificed to the Well and endowed with spiritual powers, the greater the immense amount of pressure it built.

It one day became full of trapped spirits, and the only way to allow them their birth right of passing on with their relatives was to reincarnate in a natural form, leading the soul back into the normal

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

state of existence in a human or animal form. These spirits had become restless. The Mighty Companion had been the one to maintain the sanctity of the spiritual affairs of those dead people who were trapped there and granted a gateway between this world and the next. But now the cave was no more than a cavern of gold made for the dead.

Nobody knew just how yet, but both parties involved wanted the power of the Well to be reinstated. To, of course, keep it as their own. But neither side knew where to begin to reactivate the Well. In order to figure it out, they would have to study its existence in hopes of finding the answer as to how and where to find the key! Jeremiah was actually able to drink from the Well before Alvin Richardson, but only a short while before. For that reason, Alvin knew less about the inner workings of the Well than Jeremiah did. Not only that, but Jeremiah carried the knowledge of the Well's location. He was having all the fun, and Alvin thought that he was entitled to a little bit of that money for himself. After all, it was he who was paid by the Nevada state government to see to it that Delaney Dixon's house and property was "taken care of That was so that the head honchos could get along and finish this deal before the Shoshone Indians' high council decided against it. Which would've incited a war, something they couldn't afford at the time.

So they were pushed into the land deal, which is some- Thing that even up to this very day is a sore subject between the city and the Indian chiefs. They all vowed one day to grow strong and take on the white man, but so far that day had never come. Alvin himself was the one who was in charge of "clearing the land" so that there would be pasture for their cattle and the start of a burial lot for the Indians' dead to be buried in. This was the plan, and the white man tried to sweeten the pot by suggesting the Indians take over that now old and abandoned gold mine that was producing only a small amount of ore. Of course the Indians happily accepted. Why wouldn't they? They were allowed to leave with their lives. Besides that, they had all of that great ore to look forward to that the Ore Lander Mining Company would be glad to run through their smelters, transfer to the bank, and send all the way to San Francisco. Besides that, they were actually allotted a pretty sum of cash. When they became young adults they would have enough money to build a house and have a car. The best part was that the United States government was going to build these

houses to their specifications due to the fact that the Indian Nation could neither speak nor write plain English, let alone take on the responsibility of actually building houses on their reservations!

“Put up the tents!”

The white man would say.

“You can go home now Live in a modern-day home with heating, air conditioning, electricity, hot and cold running water, not to mention a toilet that didn’t require a septic tank. How could they lose? And as far as Delaney Dixon was concerned, Georgia Dixon was an Indian. And since she was a woman, the government gave her a small land settlement just to keep the boys down in the press room from coming up with some wild story about Indian savagery being played out by the conspiracy of the white man! So, even though she was Hopi, not Shoshone, all of the Indian people were going to be treated exactly the same!”

In exchange for her life and property she would be given two hundred and fifty dollars in good old American currency—enough to open a bank account if she wanted to! Besides, it wasn’t going to be much longer before those kids of hers were old enough to take care of themselves. Then Georgia could finally go to work for the Ore Lander Mining Company if she wanted to. Wouldn’t that all be just great? She thought to herself. And what’s with this little killer that she once called her son—the one who ruined everything? The whole family could’ve been rich with gold and life-everlasting had he not killed the man in cold blood. There would be no use trying to explain it because the only judge who would listen was the one in White Horse.

The same one that employed Deputy Marshal Willie Pantalero, who she was sure would give her a fair and objective take. She was so very lucky that Willie claimed his death was indeed an accident, caused by a loose rock from the upper part of the Well getting disturbed and falling down into the pit, hitting Delaney directly on the back of his head, crushing his skull and ending his life in an instant. It didn’t look to him like Delaney suffered at all.

The boy, Jeremiah, seemed to have come up with a few injuries of his own because the next time he’d returned to White Horse, this boy, all of fourteen years, came in with a pair of six guns and loaded down with a pocket of gold. Alvin just so happened to see this, and Jeremiah was none the wiser. Poor, dumb, and ignorant, the young boy would be easy pickings if Alvin could keep this whole land

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

deal under his hat until he could find out a little bit more about the goings on that were taking place over at that dead well digger's property.

The Indians didn't know anything—or have the means to dig a successful gold mine. Even Alvin, who was only about twenty-five years old himself, was smart enough to know that where there's smoke there's usually going to be a fire—which, from what he had heard, Delaney knew a lot about. As far as taking back this man's property was concerned, it would be like taking candy from a baby because it was for the Bureau of Land Management, a state-run facility that controlled open territories. All Alvin had to do was get the boy drunk and see if he started to talk, just like they always did. Then, after getting the goods, he was going to force him off his land. Just like the governor had suggested he do. But he never received his duties as a direct order from the governor, which meant that he was a willing participant working for free like a volunteer.

He just so happened to be heading out in this direction and was asked to talk to the Dixon family. He was to give them his condolences, talk to them about selling their land for a good sum of money, and then ask them to take that money to start over fresh somewhere else. Because there were no more places in the Sure Hill Valley that needed to have a well dug. Besides, Georgia's children weren't old enough to have paying jobs just yet, and with her being a woman, well?

“That wouldn't do either, right!”

He would say. Except he was given to the likes of a man who can never keep a secret or stop bragging about every little something. Especially if it was some secretly located gold mine wandering around loose somewhere in the forest. Because he had been up to the property and seen the mine for himself, and there wasn't anything in it for God's sake. He'd take the boy back over to the property with him in the morning. Better yet, he would avoid the kid for as long as possible. He had more inspecting of the property that he needed to do, just to make sure that he hadn't overlooked something. And he had. He'd missed a freshly assembled rock garden of some sort, with the freshest dark brown soil loosely packed, worms still crawling out. Must have been where the old man took his last breath. In fact, for some reason, Alvin swore he could hear the sound of water running down below the soil. Which isn't unfamiliar when a well had been dug and then

filled in. "That is a little bit strange." Alvin thought. And what do you know? It just so happens to be a full moon out tonight.

It was mid-August, when it's about eighty degrees at night, and Alvin was on a full moon trail that tracks about five miles back into Sage Canyon, as it was called by the BLM. While trekking through Indian land at half past midnight in the pitch-black forest if you ran into someone it could spell real trouble. Alvin had no idea if anyone else had caught on to what was going on up here. He guessed it must've been something people thought the boy had inherited, but not many black folks around these parts carried a six iron on each hip and rode a fresh horse with fresh tack. He was riding a horse he was calling Smiling Debbie because she came with a head harness that had a bit fit for a bear instead of a horse, so she was always trying to pull her gums back down around her teeth. After a while she just decided that to leave her mouth abreast was going to be the easiest task. Slowly she and Alvin worked toward the site.

As he came out of the forest and into the clear, Alvin could see the dancing of a thousand fireflies and what at first appeared to be blue mist. It became apparent to Alvin that these were spirits of some kind, because he could feel them passing through him! He wasn't scared at all, and the horse he'd rented from the local rodeo grounds was only scared for a few seconds. These spirits looked like they were very old; their texture just didn't seem like that of a young person. That's when Alvin knew something great was afoot!

How else could something so incredibly unappealing feel as wonderful as they passed through you? So, just like that, Alvin brought down his shovel and started to dig. Removing the large rocks was the difficult part. In fact, it was so bad that he didn't know if he was going to be able to finish the job before daylight when an Indian might come back. Then he began to notice the dirt at the edge of the hole had started sifting down into the ground like it would if it were in an hourglass, exposing what must have been a wooden cover or a door that looked so weak it surely would've failed by now if not for being wedged in a bottleneck.

It wasn't long after that larger rocks near the edge of the pit he was digging actually started to roll down the side of the embankment and slammed into the already weakened wooden plank, exposing well-lit hole in the ground. Alvin heard the rushing water of the underground rivers. He was sure this was no regular spelunking cavern

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

because the sound of the running water was almost too much for his human ears. After a minute of holding his ears closed, he began looking around for his shovel to finish clearing a path down into the opening. After a few minutes of hard work, he seemed no closer to finding a way down into the tunnel. Just then one of the remaining planks gave way, sending him sliding down the shoot just like you would any park slide. Only Alvin was riding a dirt and stone rollercoaster car and ran straight into the wall on the other side of this cavern,

“Look at all this dirt and crap, and who turned out the lights?”

He said out loud.

It took a few seconds of dusting himself off to recover from the fall but he could still make out some semblance of the full moon above. Now that he was down here he could tell that it was some sort of crystal farm because of the way the walls were sparkling so beautifully off the back wall. And the rushing water was cool and fresh, he found, as he washed his hands and face off from the sand and dirt that collected.

With no light he thought he was going to have to wait for daylight, but it wasn't long before the keeper of the Well Delaney Dixon approached Alvin. Delaney was perceived as a black and blue see-through ghost with a golden aura around him. Alvin recognized the man's face from a picture of Delaney Dixon that the boys back in Carson City had given him, hoping that it might help him find the boy, Delaney's son.

After all, the faster that he got rid of the family before there was a town uprising over the misuse and misappropriation of some man's mining claim, the better! Claim-jumpers were hanged in this neck of the woods and that could happen if word got out that the government had sold a man's claim to the Shoshone Indian nation for a burial ground. Also, it could get ugly if the townspeople found out that the hard-earned tax money paid into what was supposed to be a local commonwealth was actually being turned over to the Indian nation for a housing agreement that was being put into construction without a vote.

It was the best way to keep the peace and keep the people's tax money coming in without question. Even with those taxes being over five percent of their pay checks, which they even had to keep in a bank account that sometimes handed out markers because there wasn't even enough cash in the bank's reserve to cover the amount of

currency that was going to be needed. Everything was okay as long as the trains kept rolling and the bar kept holding a tab with the local drinkers, gamblers, and brothel-goers. That way they had plenty of food, drink, and entertainment (not to mention hard work) to keep them occupied and unconcerned with much U.S. currency was available at any given time.

Even though it was illegal to barter or trade using markers or gaming tokens, it happened anyway. It was survival of the fittest, because now almost everybody was carrying a pistol of one kind or another where. Before, guns were mostly off limits, but those good old years had gone by with a forgotten economy that was meant to make every man in the valley rich and had been turned into taxes, corruption, and an unsafe working environment. The golden years of yesterday had finally passed, and American currency was taking over, giving the common person little to offer in the way of business or land ownership. Especially if you wanted to own a gold mine. Even the Matheson Brothers themselves had supposedly packed up and left without a trace. Disappearing off somewhere into the distance, their little train monopoly finally out of steam. Where they went, or how they got there, nobody knew, but it was clear that some things would never change. Like they would always say.

“Death and taxes.”

Alvin knew this for himself. He may have been a young man, but he wasn't blind to what he was doing. He knew that the judges and politicians who were involved in this land deal were pretty sure of what they wanted but this was just getting better and better by the minute. There seemed to be a light off to one side in a far-off corner.

“What the heck was that?”

Alvin said out loud?

“Somebody back there? Come on out of there and you best show yourself!”

There was silence.

“Listen!”

He said.

“I wasn't going to shoot you but if you don't come out of there I just might have to! You got that?”

When his words were met with no response, he began to wonder?

“What is going on in there?”

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

The whole place was lit up with sparkling gems and golden hieroglyphs that seemed to shine at him from every direction.

“I’m coming back there!”

Alvin said, drawing his .44-caliber Cold Revolver.

He only carried one, but he did keep it loaded with real ammunition.

“Hell.”

He said once again as he slipped a little bit to the left. Catching himself with his spare hand, he lunged a little in the direction of the light. When he first saw the Well and the blue creature standing before it, his gun went off. Not once but twice before he became weak in the knees and dropped to the floor. This person, or ghost thing or whatever it was kneeling next to him, was the spitting image of Delaney Dixon. He still had the same picture that he’d been given to look for the man’s son.

‘Kill him, and make sure that nobody from that family ever comes back!’

He’d been told by The Mighty Companion.

“It’s you!”

Alvin said with his mouth gaping open. He began to reach up to touch the man but nothing was there. Just this light that was coming out of the Well. And when he looked down, he saw the man’s face in the water which looked quite clean and calm.

LIVING ASPECT OF A SINKING WELL

It was reflecting off of the murals and hieroglyphs that were drawn on the dome ceiling in the room. It didn't take long before he noticed that the walls of this cavern and this Well were made of gold. Gold bricks and crystal shells that displayed huge gyms of all shapes and sizes. Rubies, diamonds, emeralds, sapphires, and not just flakes of gold, but bricks of gold! Alvin brought a small amount of the water cupped in his hand up to his nose and sniffed. Putting the water back down into the Well he scooped up a little more. Running his fingers over his left-hand thumb while feeling the texture of this water that seemed to be glowing. It smelled fine and appeared to be just a regular pool of water, except lit up with shards of a bluish light.

What the hell? He thought, as he took a sip. As he began to swallow he felt himself slipping into a dream. One that could've only come from God. It had an extreme feeling of well-being, lightheadedness, and eternal joy. This was something that had to belong to him, and himself alone. But that Dixon boy was down here, he just knew it. Before he was ready to pack up and go he wanted a piece of the Well itself, just for good measure.

He would fill his canteen. Never could he bring himself to deface the glory of the Well, so he attained a sample. A sample that would last for generations. He would find that boy and discover where they kept the gold— because he'd examined the mine the boy's father had been working on all of these years, and it definitely looked like a dummy shaft to him. Someplace that may've at one time produced a little gold but was probably more of a rock quarry. In fact, Sanford had used these rocks to build his house, garages, fence, and what appeared to be the start of a well that had gone south. It looked almost as if somebody was buried down there, and who was he to

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

exhume a freshly buried body? That would be just wrong! So he marked the grave site, and when the demolition crew that was set to arrive within the next few days came up here he would be more than happy to help conserve nature and make the land as safe as possible for generations to come. They'd have to fill in the grave site with the broken remnants of the log cabin itself. Right now, though, he had to clean up the mess that was left down below.

After shoveling the excess rocks and soil that had Alvin down into the cavern he had to clear the room of any foreign debris by putting the excess rock and soil into the fast-running torrent that occupied so completely and capped off the sheer ruggedness and beauty of the cavern. Just like the other Time Walkers, it took time for Alvin realize what had happened and what it meant to be a member of the ancient order of the Time Walkers. Alvin also believed that the mine located above was in need of another look after what he'd just witnessed below. He couldn't tell just by looking what may lie somewhere inside that mountain. He had never been a miner before, but he would see to the fact that this one was sealed up from the outside in an attempt to make the area safer for the public and fulfill his duty as a game warden and field officer for the Bureau of Land Management for the state of Nevada.

Then he was going to find that boy and make sure he didn't talk. Had he even been told about the sister, Tabitha, or about the man's wife, Georgia, he may've been able to do something about them, too. But the way it was looking right now, if he wanted information, he was going to have to find that boy, Jeremiah. Their appearances remained undisclosed to Alvin all the way up until he was hopefully going to meet them for the first time in the flesh, right there in good old White Horse. He was actually a little anxious about meeting another Time Walker for the first time, let alone a whole family of them. It was a shame he wasn't going to be able to have a friendly relationship with the entire group, but it just wasn't in the cards. He needed to provide ownership to the wealthy, and if he wanted to get rich doing this deal, he was going to have to eliminate the competition. It wasn't anything personal, per se, but whatever was?

He simply thought with the coldest of calculations. It wasn't something he hadn't thought about—even fantasized about for just over a century. Born in the summer of 1896, Alvin Alabaster Richardson was born into this world in Grand Junction, Colorado, where

he grew up just west of the stone face of the majestic North American Rocky Mountain range, the birthplace of the mighty Colorado River that carved the Grand Canyon, better known for its Spanish name "The Rio Grande Which was Alvin's reason for moving out West. It was his father's job to create the most detailed and accurate map needed to document the dimensions and exact whereabouts of the river, including its depth and treacherousness in any and all locations along the way.

Plus, they wanted an actual geological blueprint of the entire region. It needed to be determined just exactly what was in store for the brave men who were going out West, down the Rio Grande, to build the most monumental of projects the American government had ever attempted. The Hoover Dam. Whose construction wasn't even going to break ground for another decade, but the planning and engineering that went along with completing the job needed to start now. First, they needed to know precisely what it was they were getting themselves into. They weren't even sure just yet whether they could complete the job or it was going to be a catastrophe on a monumental scale! So, the planners and engineers who were working on the project and designing the dam needed to know where the water was going to be when the dam was finished, down to a foot. They needed to know how much weight it could hold, and whether or not such an undertaking would even be allowed to come to fruition.

Alvin, as his father had called him, was young and full of vigor at that time. He loved to explore. Especially if he was allowed to go along with his father on his wild adventures down the rivers and into the West. His father gave tours through wannabe-rough river rapids, as they called them back in those days. He was also a geologist and part-time professor at the Colorado State Geological Institute located in Grand Junction. That, with a natural love for the river itself, made the man who was in great shape and with a healthy son of about twenty-two years old, invaluable for his expertise and all-around knowledge of the river and the areas that surrounded it on all sides.

The government even wanted to know where the river began when the many snow packs, glaciers, and underground rivers and streams all come together. They provided for such an outstanding and powerful act of nature, and Alvin's father needed him to help survey the land. Especially since it was going to take years to properly map the entire region by hand. And it would turn out to be almost two

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

decades before the dam itself was completed in 1935 (after starting in 1931), two years ahead of schedule and in good fashion.

Alvin found himself working on the build site itself, surveying the land in a project where, if he was off by just the tiniest margin, it could ruin the whole project and destroy the dam. Not to mention the millions of gallons of water that would flood down into Arizona and New Mexico. It would be a disaster.

But the boy had proven himself in a man's world and was then accepted as a Federal Game Warden who was currently on loan to the Nevada State Bureau of Land Management to work this case. Not only was he smart, but he was really strong! All the ladies loved him, and he wasn't afraid to get the job done no matter what that job may be. So he was perfect for running these poor black folks off their single-acre land plot which they'd been so ignorant to build on in the first place. Things will go pretty smoothly from here on out Alvin reckoned as he began to crawl out of the pit that he'd clumsily Alvin into an hour ago. Or at least it seemed like an hour. Fact was, the sun was out, and today being the day the wrecking crew was going to arrive.

It was just a short while before several truckloads of men were seen coming up the road. Instead of taking it down piece by piece, the foremen who were working there that day decided to burn it. That would be the easiest way. Plus, the trees had already been cleared for several hundred yards in every direction. Mostly used to build the houses, car garages, and outhouses. The trees were also used as firewood for the Indians, because the Indian nation had no qualms about taking wood from a black man and his land. That was necessary because the Indians refused, due to tribal law, to cut down any trees on their land for any reason other than for building a boat known as a canoe. It was an old law that still stood firm to this day. They still refused to do any deforestation on their land.

If the white man wanted to share some of their wood for making non-cooking fires, then that was going to be fine with the Indians. Which is also the reason they decided to put the burial plots, or graveyard as it was called by the white man, on that section of the land. Because the forest was already cleared there. It wasn't much longer before the wrecking crew had set their explosives, centrally located throughout the property, including the fence line. They destroyed the place in several earth-shattering explosions, leaving very little to clean

up. The house's foundation had been made out of layers of loose gravel with dirt piled over it, and then finished off with a couple layers of wooden planks. They crisscrossed the outline of each and every room for a double layer of protection. The dirt base would trap the cool air in the summer and provide plenty of insulation from rainwater, snow, and ice and prevent them from rotting the floorboards in the winter time. But now that was gone too.

Everything after that was to be done under Alvin's direct orders as the head officer on the work site. They needed to push all of the debris that the explosion had caused and pile it in the gaping hole that was once a well. First, he wanted the wood to go in. He explained that it would begin to rot and become susceptible to drying out in the spring and summer months during fire season. It was better for the environment to put the rocks on top of that and then add the top layer of soil. The area wouldn't wash away if they embedded the area with a wood, then stone, and finally a layer of nature's finest forest-floor soil. It would make the land fresh and ripe, giving the trees that they were going to plant a chance to grow. Nobody was allowed to be buried in this area. It was amended in the paperwork that would seal the deal.

A man was buried in that place already, and the soil needed to be kept from eroding. A few seasons of steady snowfall and rain could weaken the ground and cause the entire graveyard to collapse into the ground in a giant sinkhole. One that would turn the soil upside down along with the new project's landscaping and newly planted trees. With these precautions, when the water came running down the hill, it wouldn't cause the whole section of land to sink into the ground which could cause a landslide, sending the entire Indian burial ground down to the bottom of the canyon and into the open spaces of the valley below. After crumbling down, it would put the entire property gently to rest at the same level as the valley floor. Where the earthworms would still be lurking around inside of it all,

"Good news for fishermen, but some really bad news for the burial ground."

Alvin had explained. After the land was clear, which only took a few days, Alvin decided to roll up his blankets and tent, tie them down to his horse, saddle up, and head into town. He was tired of sleeping out here in the forest! He needed a bath and he knew just where to get it! He was going to make his way to The Grand Stockade

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

Hotel and Casino located right in the center of town down in White Horse. It was time to blow off a little bit of steam and have a little bit of fun with all the money he made coming out here. Five hundred when he returned with the signature of the boy on the paperwork stipulating that neither he nor his father Delaney Sanford Dixon had ever legally owned this land in the first place. And under penalty of law he must attest to that fact. Which Alvin knew would, with a little persuasion, might just slip the boy's mind. Temporarily anyway.

The boy would be quite sure, now that he had a chance to think about it, that the land his father had been using was never really his legal property, but the Indians had just let him live there for a time. Finding the boy was going to be the easy part. The boy still didn't know who he was. But getting him to sign the papers was going to require some creative thinking. For a boy of thirteen, he sure did look much older and rugged. He wore a full beard and was hardly recognizable by that one photo Alvin had of the boy's father. But someone with a trained eye could do it—and Alvin had perfect vision. He could draw, point, and shoot accurately out to about fifty yards using only his side iron. One was all he carried. He figured that if he ended up in a knife or maybe just a fist fight, anything at close range, he wanted to be the only one with a weapon—no extra one just hanging off him for the other guy to get and shoot him down with. It was something his father had taught him a few years back. Besides, he couldn't be too careful considering what he had in that canteen. The Dixon character was now small potatoes to him. But he was going to finish this deal with a simple stroke of the pen. He was going to be another five hundred dollars richer by the end of the night.

It was late afternoon, and in a few short hours the sun would be down, so he did the obvious. He walked right up to an empty table at The Grand Stockade and ordered a bottle of whisky and a few beers if they were cold. Which they were. This place was great. Nobody back home would believe this place!" It was decorated all in white with stone staircases leading from the lobby up to the hotel rooms. There was a private bathhouse and a good place to get cleaned up. Step out and into the barbershop just around the corner, and you would be plenty ready to join the boys in a game of roulette, blackjack, or poker. They had games like five-card draw and low-limit Texas Hold'em, a few cast iron slot machines which were a marvel

back in the days, and even a telephone at the front desk and one in the lobby.

After a few drinks, the music started to play. It was an old player piano and, of course, a nice young lady wearing her undergarments in a flagrant yet formal manner. She would tastefully strut her stuff and dance with and sang along to the piano as it did its thing. There was a post in the center of the small stage that rested below the upper bannister for the second story hotel rooms, plain to see from where the girl was working on top of a stage. She was just above the barroom floor and behind the bartender himself who was always friendly and ready to serve you a drink. The all-too-familiar, yet personally unrecognizable, ladies of the night even had a real red velvet curtain with gold lace trim and ropes made from the same which could open or close the curtain as the show continued through the night, providing entertainment of one sort or another.

It was mostly musicians and dancers with a burlesque show, but sometimes there would even be special acts like a female comedian who was set to come on later that night. She was little on the heavy side, but still an attractive woman with a perky rose-colored blush surrounding her cheeks, beautifully curled blonde hair (which all the boys liked), and perfectly soft milky white skin that looked like the sun had never shined a day on it. She was also funny, too!" All the boys with their hand-me-down girlfriends, bottles of whisky, plenty of gambling for everyone to enjoy, and an occasional gun fight, loved to get drunk and listen to Big Suzie's Cowboy Country Relic Song and Dance routine. It was played up on stage featuring a very fast-playing southern banjo player who also used a harmonica mounted on a metal bracket that fit snugly over his shoulders.

It allowed him to play both of these musical instruments as fast as he possibly could! While Suzie fished out the laughs from all the hardcore, drunken bar-goers that frequented this neck of the woods. No colored man passed through White Horse without stopping off at The Grand Stockade, where sometimes everything was on the house if you were a big spender, a heavy-hitter who just loved to spend his cash, or had won lots of money. There were several bar rooms in town, but the one down the street called The Clear Water Saloon was where the poor black folk could go to have a good time by playing a few card games and having a little something to drink.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

They weren't allowed in the white man's club and had to do their drinking elsewhere.

After his bath and a quick trim, Alvin walked down there and looked around to see who he could find. It really wasn't such a good idea for a white man to walk into that place these days, either. Unless you happened to be accompanied by a colored lady. Other than that, you would have to do your drinking outside, and after the sheriff was through with you for drinking in public, it usually ended up costing you a few nights in jail and a hefty fine of twenty dollars a day. Alvin would have to find the colored boy and avoid any kind of situation that could lead to big trouble. All he needed was a few minutes with the kid to get a signature. That's all he needed to return to his bosses in Carson City and finish the job without losing his position. But he knew even then it wasn't quite time to fade away. First he wanted gold, then he wanted the life of Jeremiah Dixon.

That boy had suddenly turned into a full-grown man right in front of the eyes of the townspeople and everyone else that mattered. Everyone who had known him or seen him around when he was looking for something in town with his father. They both loved to fish, which is the one thing that Jeremiah missed most about not having his father around anymore. But now, Jeremiah had to the opportunity to be a father to his grandson, who was, for all intents and purposes, his father. It was the opportunity to give him back everything he'd taken from him all those years ago. For Alvin, finding a colored lady who was willing to show him around town on such short notice was his next big idea for finding Jeremiah. But it wouldn't be much longer before Jeremiah would find him. Alvin was the only Caucasian to have partaken of the bounty of the well thus far. And for some reason little Miss Rhonda Dailey was so infatuated with this man of twenty-five. He dressed nice and seemed to have the job of a gentleman. Not like the men around these parts. And she was always looking to have a good time. Her modus operandi was a heavy attraction to any man who was new to the scene in Briggs County. Wherever she could find them. Especially the well-dressed ones. The ones that still maintained a rugged look, like Alvin's soft, brown-leather, weatherproof, riding trench coat that went all the way to the floor. Or his Carnegie riding chaps and his ivory-handled United States Army thirty-two caliber, long-range pistol (which was more accurate and easier to shoot than the large-bored sidearm generally worn out West and could kill a man

just the same). Not to mention his Allister Buchanan cowboy hat and leather riding boots. Those could've only come from a certain well-known tack shop owned by a second-generation son back east in Colorado someplace. She'd only seen this type of riding equipment this far northwest of the Rio Grande on the Matheson Brothers. Alvin had gently strolled into to looking for Jeremiah Dixon,

Mam'."

"He'd said as his rented four-year-old horse named Palisades gently came walking by. He tipped his hat to her and stated his mission again with the soft tone of a person who's a little far west to be riding alone. Unless, of course, you were looking for trouble. From the looks of this guy, somebody was bound to take him for what he was worth. The town and its laws had changed since the Matheson Brothers and their railroad track monopoly had finally stopped turning a heavy profit in the second decade of the nineteenth century when the valley had finally been mined completely out. Twenty-two-year-old Rhonda Dailey said nothing in return to the man as he slowly rode on by, only smiling back at him with the quick glance of an oncoming derailment. By this look he knew: The locals might not be so open to strangers around these parts now. Now that the law and all of its money had moved on to bigger and better places than the dried-up sagebrush dust bowl that now occupied the lower end of the county.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

FIVE TIMES A WINNING HAND

The wanted to play it cool at first. She knew for a fact that after a few drinks over at the local watering hole, and once the sun started to go down, the town's night life would begin to trickle into the many fine and once-extravagant Western hotels featuring lobby saloons and gambling halls that ran the show here in this part of the county. Mostly by people who kept to themselves. But tonight had a feeling like a completely new venue had come waltzing into town. This gentleman cowboy had an arrogant, Eastern club mentality of superiority that was quite apparent by the way he dressed. He looked like he was going to a tack and pony show over at some city-limit rodeo grounds on the outskirts of town. He was not from here, but from somewhere far from planet Earth. Or at least not any of these parts of the Old West. Reluctantly called that because everything there was no longer part of a new beginning, but a sad ending to a rich man's tale. A story involving lots of loot and bounty for the Americans, but also full of Native American domination and spiritual intrigue. How could it ever get any better? The common people had begun to wonder. But it wouldn't be long before modern-day, industrialized mining would come to White Horse on a much larger scale.

This time it would be copper, which was found in a very rich abundance just northwest of town. Not far at all. Maybe a four-hour ride by horse? Even faster, of course, if you had a motorized vehicle which everyone seemed to have these days? This was going to be where a massive open-pit mining operation went into effect, lasting all the way up to modern times and continuing to flood the region with a rich bounty of naturally occurring raw copper and iron ore. A process, the tailings of which, would be sifted on a large scale in a modern society. Not just for steel and copper, but also for gold.

Rhonda was young and very attractive, and she knew that she would be first on this cowboy's list. How could she not be? She was the first one to spot him as he entered through the east part of town, finally coming to rest at The Grand

Stockade in downtown White Horse. He immediately walked up to the desk and rented a room. No bath this time, but he did want to buy a small marker against the house starting at one thousand dollars.

The casino floor itself was surrounded by two stories of hotel rooms that lined the walls and upper staircases, connected by a balcony walkway. The rest of the hotel was built above that. All five stories of it. This hotel was special because it was built with a modern, brick construction method that made it solid as a rock and one that could last to be well over a hundred years old. Making his way slowly back to the far end of the room as the music once again started to play, the man was welcomed to sit down across the table from you-know-who. Rhonda Dailey. This wasn't a low-limit poker table, either.

The ante was a relatively small one. One that required not only a small blind, but a big one, too, meaning that the pots tended to fill up faster than those over at the low-limit tables. This one also had a three-raise limit, but anybody could go "all in" at any time because there wasn't a limit to the amount of money you could wager in this game. High card Texas Hold'em Poker. The latest craze at the local poker tables throughout the region and throughout the West.

"Well, friend, welcome back to The Grand Stockade. Everybody, meet Alvin all the way from Colorado originally!"

"Isn't that right, Alvin?"

"Yes, sir. That would be right."

He said, once again tipping his hat to the lady.

"So what brings you all the way here from back East, my friend?" Rhonda asked?

Inquisitively, Alvin kindly asked the lady,

"What might your name be, madam?"

Smiling back, she showed off her beautifully sculpted ruby red lips, perfectly curled long brown hair, and green eyes over a very smooth and appealing young body.

Then she said,

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

“Well, the people around here call me the Beauty of the Lake, or just ‘Butte’ for short. And I’m not talking about the ones coming up around the ridge, either. I mean it with respect, so please allow me to ask you for the same, young gentleman.”

“You asked, and I listened.”

“He said, tipping his head back to one side, and smiling generously back at him.”

“Well, gentlemen. Shall we begin?”

The dealer said, and it was ladies first of course he said enthusiastically, winking back over the table at the Butte.

“How much would you like to wager?”

The dealer said. He had a little red garter with black trim wrapped around the starched, white, button-down shirt that went with his bolo tie, black pants and boots, and black leather vest with a hanky in the pocket. Just like they used to wear back in the good old days before time and money had brought the town to a halt. After her reply, the dealer said,

“Well, sir, that kind of money is definitely welcome here at the table, but I can only give you two hundred dollars in chips at a time. You can leave your markers up against the railing and stack them next to your pot. But keep them out in plain view and whatever you do, never add anything to.” “I got it, mister. Now deal.”

Which he did, consistently trading out every so often making up everyone happy and feel welcome. With other gamblers in the nightclub. Dealing the game of Texas Hold’em wasn’t something that every gambling man could do. Once the procedure was learned, a person had to be capable of performing the basic necessary card dealing functions that came with dealing any table game. How to pitch the cards and hold the deck? Move the marker and keep track of the amount of money in the pot. Know when to rake it for the house’s cut of the profit and know how to accept a toke from a player.

Side pots were an issue in this game, too, because of the no-limit betting requirements that went with this type of set up.

So he had to be aware of where the players were positioned in relation to one another and the clockwise rotation of the button so that everybody was playing in turn. He had to spot amateurs who would play out of turn or forget to show their cards at the end of the hand. If the person across from you wanted to see what you had in your hand—even if it was a losing bet and the player just wanted to

fold—the hand had to be displayed for all to see. Just in case somebody was cheating. That way, everybody knew that the game play was on the up and up. It wasn't until later when surveillance cameras were installed in the sixties that the rules would change. But until then, the hand had to be displayed. But it didn't matter, because it wasn't long before the trouble started. Who came strolling in but none other than Jeremiah Dixon,

“Hey the bartender was yelling, running down the bar keeping pace with the black man, telling him in no uncertain terms! Your kind aren't welcome in this establishment! Seriously?”

But Jeremiah walked right up to the poker table and bought in with a thousand-dollar marker all of his own,

“Where did you get that, Jeremiah? You know you're not allowed in here, so get out before somebody gets shot.”

The bartender said in his kindest, most well-intentioned tone. Then he whispered slowly

“You're going to get yourself killed.”

“Let him play!”

Alvin shouted out loud.

“Let him play or I'll challenge any one of you to a gunfight right here, right now. Anybody up for one?”

“Nobody said anything in return except the Butte who muttered out of the side of her mouth “

“This is going to get interesting”

The kid next to her was saying.

“I've never seen this before. Do you like him?”

“Shut up and play your cards.”

She said back to him in an affectionate way, smiling at him the whole time with that million-dollar smile and those soft hazel eyes shaded by her beautiful auburn-colored hat.

“Let him play!”

And that they did for several more hours, weeding out the early evening and daytime gamblers who dropped like flies. They fell mostly to the Butte who seemed to be unstoppable on that night. A few hours later, the trouble started,

“You guessed it alright!”

The angry dealer yelled out!

“We got a cheater in our midst! Yeah, that's right. I see it. I see that extra five of diamonds laying over there!”

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

He pointed first at Jeremiah who immediately pointed out that the card was in the lady's hand, not his. Even the white folk couldn't deny that. Of course she had been cheating. She always did. This time she got caught, that's all. She discarded the wrong part of her corrupt hand, exposing an extra five of diamonds when the river card was turned. She'd had the man beat until he called to see her hand and she mistakenly threw out an extra five card, adding to the two already in the community hand, dealt into the river after the run card.

The real cheater was exposed when Jeremiah laid his hand flat on the table with the correctly suited five card that he had left in his hand. He had been bluffing the whole time with a queen-five hand dealt to him and continued on after the flop into the turn card with a check raise now that he had a large pair when the card turned out to be a queen. The Butte, on the other hand, now had a four of a kind. All five with a deuce kicker, which just so happened to match the river card. After poking around at the arm of her vest, the lady screamed “

“Don't touch me she struggled free from the grip the man had on her now-discolored again.”

“Isn't anybody going to defend the honor of a lady?”

No one said anything and the place went dead silent. Nervous with anticipation, young Jeremiah was slowly reaching in and pulling the pot into his greedy little hands.

“Leave that pot where it is, mister. We're all going to split it equal ways... And after that, we're going to go outside and end this like gentlemen, but first I have a paper for you to sign. It's the reason I'm in town. Your father's property was built illegally on government and with government water right.”

Jeremiah hardly looked surprised,

“I'm just here to make sure you know you have no claim to that land or anything left on it.”

And the man went on.

“And if you don't sign the paper, I have orders to bring you in. Dead or alive. This letter says you are willingly vacating the location and you understand now, but never before knew, that your father had wrongfully homesteaded on that land. Unless, of course, you wish to purchase the property from the Shoshone Indian nation who is the rightful owner of that land and is allowed to defend it with deadly force. Besides, you don't look thirteen years old to me. Your father

must have lied to the government hoping the land would end up in your mother's hands if anything should happen to him. You don't look a day under twenty-five, maybe even thirty years old. Now do you, so?"

Jeremiah turned and said,

"Well, it's dark outside so we're going to have to do this in the morning. I didn't want to have to kill you, because you seem like a nice guy, but this isn't about no land settlement. What I want is in that canteen of yours that you so humbly brought in with you."

Alvin had to hold off another local cowboy who knew the rules of the place and was always ready to enforce them on new-comers. Especially customers who thought they could just come in here and run the place. He was reaching for Alvin's canteen to see if there was any liquor in it, because it wasn't allowed to be brought in off of the street. This was a respectable establishment and there would be no bootleggers in this town's bar or anywhere else in the now-vacant Sure Hill Valley, either. Everybody knew the rules around these parts that all the beer and whiskey had to be bought at the bar. Same thing went for the feed and tack store, the horse corrals, or any other place in this city. If you wanted to be in the establishment you had to abide by the rules. Everybody. Including Alvin, who saw the sign posted on the wall as he walked in? Jeremiah drew on the man reaching for Alvin's canteen, shooting him dead in the chest, putting him down in an instant,

"That canteen is mine, and anyone else who wants it is going to have to go through me first!"

Jeremiah knew he would only be allowed back into town after this if the shooting turned out to have been done with good reason. But there were more pressing issues about Jeremiah who was still alive then, he would be tried for murder. If convicted, he could be hanged. Then there was Alvin whose issues of going out in that little town a mysterious canteen. But before the day was over, somebody was leaving town in a pine box come high noon.

"I left the bar with the Butte in tow!"

And Jeremiah? Well, he just sat there drinking all the rest of that night and into the next morning. When the sun did finally manage to make an appearance, things were looking pretty grim. The folks in White Horse seemed to be on the verge of removing him from the

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

area, same as his father was two decades earlier up in Richmond, Oregon. If he couldn't manage an upper hand, then this whole thing would become uncontrollable. Fighting this man with a gun was a no-win proposition for a man who already had everything you could possibly offer. Besides his pride, which in these cases seemed to blindly "Lead them down the garden path." So to speak. If Jeremiah did win, he most likely would end up with the Butte who was small-time professional at milking a man out of his money and throwing away the empty shell once she was through. There wasn't a man alive who could resist her, although she was wise enough not to get together with a man of Jeremiah's stature.

Even if he was in the money, which he wasn't at the time. No, good old Alvin was next on the list, and if he succeeded in killing this dumb old man and successfully retrieving the canteen, then he would be run clean out of town anyway. When the man finally came, he came only with his gun. No fancy attire and just a handkerchief around his neck. He didn't even have to ask the Dixon boy into the street. When he saw the man coming, he stepped off the porch where he had been drinking all night, and took two steps out into the street. Alvin reached for his revolver from some fancy-looking shoulder holster that might've disguised itself from another man, but Jeremiah knew of them all too well. He'd even practiced with it for a short while until he discovered, like all the rest, that shooting from the hip was the fastest way to draw on someone. As the gun came up, Jeremiah spun on his heels and waited for the man to shoot.

Which he did from the shoulder where the gun barrel was, and even with the recoil of his small-caliber revolver it may've actually struck home if Jeremiah hadn't Alvin to one knee in the act of turning to fire. So there he stood. Guns blazing and right in the crosshairs of Jeremiah Dixon's small-caliber thirty-two. He'd normally carry it in a shoulder holster of his own if he wanted his weapon put away or concealed but never in a gunfight. As Jeremiah took advantage of the man's unfortunate shortcomings, he found himself in the perfect position to end it right there in the street. But out of sport, he took this young man's overeager, trigger-happy pride and sent him packing with a perfectly placed single round that shot clean through him. In one side and out the other. He would suffer a mortal wound to his pride, but with modern advancements in medicine, the man would have a

chance to save his leg if he was quick about it. For now, Jeremiah was in control of the situation.

By now he knew the Butte was now one of them. If he'd killed the man, the next time the Butte was on his trail, she'd be able to catch up with him and put him in another no-win situation. There was no way he could win if it came down to a gunfight between a colored man and the Beauty of the Lake. It was thought the Butte would nurse the man back to health and then forget about him. But as time went by, it seemed they were meant for one another. In fact, it wasn't long before they had a son together. Little Jim Richardson.

Later, because it was up to the Butte, who was now better known by her God-given name of Rhonda. Little Jim would keep her maiden name of Dailey. She said Richardson was no name for a God-fearing boy to have—even if his father was some sort of mastermind with the county, or wherever he'd come from. But shortly after the boy was born, they moved west. Back to Carson City, where they lived for a while. Until one day, Alvin just up and disappeared after Rhonda made some bad choices, upsetting the Chicago Mafia with the little games she liked to play, laundering the mob's money through the casino she'd built early on in Reno. She called it the Red Star Casino after coming in with a diamond flush and pulling down a progressive bad beat jackpot of over a hundred and fifty thousand dollars back in the sixties just before she opened the place for business.

Big Jim had made his way in this business all on his own and when his mother needed him, he was there for her. And now it appeared the old flame was starting to come back to life with this nice little bankroll Daddy seemed to have come up with over at The River Bend Club. It was all over the local news how a businessman from out of town was able to pull off a million and some quarter dollars in a single day of betting on the futures six months beforehand. He was quoted as saying to the press,

"It was much faster and more fun than investing in the stock market." Now, with his life back in order, the future of the Well could wait. He still had a truckload of military-grade firearms to deliver to the Shoshone Indian nation. This was something he had to do all on his own. He'd made good on his retrieval of the money he needed to get his load out of impound. How much of a fee was yet to be seen? Mr. Chin found out about this character from Jeremiah Dixon after showing him the film of the man on camera. He gave him

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

the low-down on this man, and they found out that he was in need of a certain load of groceries bound for the Shoshone nation's grocery store in a vision that Cameron seemed to be having about all sorts of things lately.

This was one of them. Cameron had begun to see the future and other events from the present and even from back in the past, ever since her little visit to the Well of the Eternal. Somehow she had been tricked into turning the Spirit of the Well into something dark, something ominous that weighed heavily on the thoughts and actions of all mankind, as it had been foreseen by the prophets of the past. The War of the Eternal. The warmth and good in the world was going to have to face off against the negative void that makes up all that is cold and lifeless in this universe. The war between the two polar opposites of the Well of the Eternal, whose negative energy was beginning to grow, and it was starting to affect the way the world was shaped, changing in an unnatural way. A way that was not foretold by the Well itself but by its all-seeing prophet that was now Cameron Dixon.

There was another storm coming. Jeremiah could tell. And this time there was going to be bloodshed. Bloodshed, and lots of it. This was the same war that the Aztecs fought against the negative force of darkness that brought an entire civilization to its knees. From its temples and pyramids, all the way down to its extravagant, solid-gold artifacts and an amazing array of gold bullion, it was clear that this was an absolutely, totally, and incredibly advanced civilization. Its construction methods outlasted and have even surpassed modern day steel structures. These once thought to be primitive ancestors to the North American Indian who got their start in places like the coffee fields, and heavily-rained-upon equatorial jungles of Peru, and even north into Central America.

But it was never thought that they made their way this far north of the equator where the beach and open sea and island inlets provided everything that was needed to form a culture and build cities and towns with gold structures. And temples for the living dead farther inland with the restless spirits of the thick forests and mountain passes that, when combined together, began to sink back into what is known as the low-lying benches and treetops used by these ancient farmers and cattle ranchers. Back around 3000 B.C. or the same period as the Ancient Egyptians who ruled the world in those days with their mighty fleets of warships laden with lightly armored and well-

armed, trained warriors, foot soldiers who were brave enough to confront anyone—even on horseback while using bows and long-range arrows.

The leader of the fight would travel out in front, in carriages built for speed by a captain who welded the sharpest and the best, strongest steel swords that could only have been granted to them by a genie in a bottle. These captains would lead the charge and the pack of thousands of soldiers into battle against any army, foreign or domestic, that tried to take on the pharaoh or challenge his authority or stature as a living sun god. All of this was due to the battles that took place and the trouble of mankind over the Spiritual Pseudo Alchemy that had created the different civilizations of the Alien Race of the Gray, and also the human race.

By no accident were these events occurring, but only through the wonderful creator himself. It was when the greatest monument that has ever been known to exist by mankind was erected. Something of an enigma that appeared to be a spin-off between the two civilizations, which were operating in a parallel way to one another, but on opposite sides of the world. After that, both civilizations somehow up and vanished without a trace. Except for large, pyramid-shaped constructions that, even by today's standards, are considered a humanly impossible feat. As the cold darkness that had taken control of the Well began to grow, it became increasingly harder to fend them off while trying to reach the centermost cavern of the Well, known as the Glimmering Forest of Light. Now, more properly addressed as the Forests of Fears.

A place where three thousand devilish, screaming banshees now stood their ground with high-pitched sonar resonance protruding from their enlarged penal glands just like bats, dolphins, or whales might use for echolocation. But in this case, it was for penetrating the mere fiber of one's own being, tearing through it and ripping it apart with a sound. A sound that resonates even to this very day in the minds of a madman or in those who were but have ceased to exist. The Forests of Fears are dark and foreboding and something that were going to have to be settled in a spiritual manner by those people, and by those people alone. No man nor spirit can change the destiny of another. The path one travels is one's own, whether or not he knows it. The laws of karma are clear.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

WATER WELL, NEVER ENDING

Positivity is created by the hands of justice. If the spiritual well-being of one person becomes more important, then the almost unnoticeable flow of positive energy, when adapted to a negative outcome, is very strong, violent, and seductive. All characteristics of a psychopathic serial killer. Cameron Dixon had somehow managed to turn up missing. She was last seen swiping her identification badge through the time clock, caught on camera punching out shortly after noon the previous day. Just after she had been in a meeting with the boss during which she was let go. She'd been missing ever since.

There wasn't anything the cops could do for twenty-four hours after the time she turned up missing. She was also caught on camera filling up her 2014 Jeep Wrangler, topping it off at a local service station about a mile from the track. She also bought two cartons of cigarettes there, a bottle of Wild Turkey, a twelve pack of Budweiser cans, and topped it off with about fifteen or twenty bags of beef jerky that came in all different varieties and flavors, everything from the sweet and salty ones to the hot and peppery ones. After that she was seen getting back into her brand new sports utility vehicle and turning south onto the highway, the direction that lead directly out of town. It was the perfect time to continue betting at the track,

But Alvin needed to leave to finish the job he came here to do. Deliver that load to the proper people, pick up the cash, and report back to the mob in Chicago when the deal was through. That windfall would allow him a larger cut of the profits, Alvin thought. The cash he turned over to the Chicago Mob would already be laundered through the racetrack, because with this new set of unexpected wins, he could turn the winning money over to the mob to cover for the

money that was going to be collected from the Indians for the shipment of small arms and munitions that would hopefully be delivered today.

But why the Indian nation was so willing to trade part of their sacred land over to Big Jim in a shady under-the-table gun deal of fully automatic weapons and military-grade, remote-detonated munitions was a puzzling thing that needed to be pieced together. They surely weren't going out trophy-hunting, unless they'd gotten tired of using hooks and fishing twine to ice fish over that last few generations. With all the cards in his favor, if Alvin was going to broker this deal, he wanted a full fifty/fifty cut of the profit, a say in what happened with the guns, what they'd be sold for, and at what price. Even Big Jim knew not to try and cheat the Chicago Mob, who had ties in every corner of the nation— any place you could find corruption, whether it be politicians or judges, all the way down to the beat cop walking the mean streets of the big city all alone at night.

“Nobody” was never truly safe, but if you knew what you were doing, you could turn a small profit. This deal was turning out to be huge and Alvin needed to parlay his winning streak into finding and reactivating the Mighty Well of the Eternal. First, he needed to be granted three wishes by the Well, if he was the one to first return to the Well in trade for the return of the Mighty Companion, the spiritual guide for all mankind, He once again needed to get the scrolls. Especially the one that Cameron Dixon had found down in that old mineshaft. He didn't know it yet, but it contained the incantations and procedures one must follow to return the Water Well of the Eternal back to its former positive state of glory. Hopefully before the darkness, which permeated from the wellhead, took control and destroyed a once great civilization of mankind, bringing it once again down to its most basic elemental condition, threatening the mere existence of any human life that may or may not then be able to reestablish a foothold on the planet. An extinction of the human race altogether, maybe causing another Ice Age like the one that killed the dinosaurs.

They didn't have forever to stop this darkness that possessed bodies and minds from destroying all that there ever was! Hard lessons had to be learned and personal responsibility for saving the world had to somehow surmount the feud between these two sects of the Ancient Order of the Time Walkers. They both had to put everything

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

they hated about each other off to one side and focus on reactivating the positive energy that needed to be dwelling within that water well to sustain all human life. In this new darkness, Alvin decided to keep his shipment of guns for himself, if he could get them out of the impound lot. The truck was registered to a shipping company back in the heartland called Griffin dales, who he promptly called after the afternoon he spent down at the track. The truck, the trailer, and the shipment all belonged to a smalltime mobster by the name of Billy, or Billy “The Banana” Flick, for his uncanny ability to slip things past certain checkpoints, like weigh stations and ports of entry that littered the highways across the nation.

Instead of calling to tell the boss that he had the money and finished the deal, he told him the truck was impounded but the good news was, the cops couldn’t search it without a warrant, justification, court order, or consent. And because the truck wasn’t over its weight limit and the log books and proof of insurance all checked out (and there was no sign of Stitches on the front grill), they had to accept a small payment for the impound lot fine. And in order to complete the paperwork, Alvin needed the title, shipping invoice, and a small inventory inside the back of the truck, which was what the cops were after.

So, Alvin went downtown and hired a Briggs County private attorney, who was able to specify implicitly that the numbers that were branded into the crates hauling this precious cargo could be run against the factory invoice that Alvin had after a short conversation with good old Banana Man. That was followed by a very large wire transfer to the bosses back East.

They signed the title to the truck and all of its contents over to Alvin Richardson, who finished his business over at the Nevada State Department of Motor Vehicles with two hours of taking a battery of tests to verify his ability and ensure he had a legal Certified Big Rig Driver’s License for the State of Nevada. He had to have a brand new CDL and pass a big-rig-driven obstacle course before they could finalize the deal. If it weren’t for the lawyer, he never would’ve gotten that rig out of that impound lot so he could take the driving test.

Not bad for a day’s work, and he still had well over a quarter of a million dollars when the deal was all done and through. Not to

mention a big rig and a load of brand new automatic, hand-held machine guns. With the money he had left over after taxes at the race-track and after the impound yard with the purchase of a new rig, he was left with a small bankroll of about seventy-five thousand dollars. In this day and age, it wasn't enough to retire on. So he accepted a position working for Rhonda and Big Jim in the nightclub down in the old Intrepid Star, just like one big happy family. But this was the calm before the storm. Alvin and Rhonda spent another restless night fighting off the negative energy being amplified by the negativity coming up out of the Well. God knows what the Dixons had done, but now was the time to find out. They decided to pile into one of Big Jim's limousines and stop in down at The Lonely River Pass Bar and Grill for a short cocktail hour amongst old friends.

Upon arrival, Jeremiah knew what was up. He had been able to identify the million-dollar man from the security camera footage at the track. Right there, as plain as day, alongside the Butte who, up until this point, had been pretty insignificant as far as a Time Walker goes. She had successfully been able to keep her identity up to date all along and was actually quite wealthy. Unlike the Dixons, who never could spot a winning hand from across the table?

Maybe a show of cards would sweeten the pot a little and get the Dixons out from across the wrong side of the tracks! They had the keys to the Well and knew its exact location from its original position in reference to the main entrance, or what should've been the main entrance. In reality it had been sealed up behind a huge, flat rock the size of a five story building, smooth as if it had been lying in a creek somewhere for the last five thousand years. Setting off the charges had left an indentation in the solid rock, but the doorway to the Well from this side of the mountain had its gold mining shaft up higher and the rocks were cut from above in a downward direction.

They wanted to know what that of the living was below the crystal gardens and gem clusters of the Cavern of the Dead, soon to be discovered once again. By now the tribe had finally found out that there was something going on over there in the far eastern corner of the reservation, and they had apparently become aware of this mine that the Dixon family had been digging for over three months now, right under their noses. So they sent the local shaman, Hunting Sticks Madison, to check in on the spiritual affairs of the dead and ask the ancestors what had been going on.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

In good faith, they also sent several young men. Armed and painted, their faces were almost completely black, red, and white. They came in full Indian regalia, and each man carried a staff with feathers on it if you were the shaman and spearheads if you were one of the warrior class. As they rode into the area, the place looked a little overgrown, but that was all. The mining claim was posted on the other side of the mountain, which hadn't been specifically granted to the natives. The treaty only stipulated the forest and valley from one end of this canyon to the other, so the tribe wanted to take the Nevada state government to one of the higher courts in the land. It would be handed over to the supreme justices that presided over that state and county where the mining claim was granted.

It was no revelation to the courts or to the panel of judges who sat in as the first Appellate Court Panel (three to five judges depending on the statute that was being reviewed) because this was the highest level you could appeal your case to. This was the level where the laws were created. Each hearing set a precedent for the lower courts. This being a land deal that was signed into law at the level of the federal government, if the tribe wanted their land deal verified there was no telling where it would stop! They might start poking around into a land deal that had been something of a shady occurrence.

Demolishing a man's house on his property after such a tragedy was tricky. Jeremiah Dixon had lost his father in a murder that appeared to be a cold and calculated, surgically executed murder ordered by the leaders of the Shoshone Indian nation. That's why they sent Alvin to verify the land was free and clear of any mining claims or homestead properties that may or may not have been legitimate purchases. Not to demolish whatever was out there, plant a few trees, and rule that the land was liable for a mudslide if the trees weren't planed in a certain way.

The rest of the property was promptly handed back over to the Shoshone Indian nation to be used as none other than a cemetery. Hunting Sticks did find proof that the forest surrounding the Indian reservation was now haunted, and the source of that haunting was right over here on this far eastern corner of their thirty-two-thousand-acre reservation. This was a spiritual manifestation and had to be handled by the spirit of the wolf, the mountain lion, the big-horned sheep, and wild stallions that still managed to roam free as warriors

for the living across the foothills between the sage covered valleys and the wooded forests, streams, and lakes through the entire region. Because if the banshees were allowed to grow, they could begin to manifest into something that could destroy the hearts and minds of any poor soul who found his way into this part of the country, and eventually farther out. Who knows where it might stop—if it stopped at all!”

The place would become a broken shell of what once was a mighty civilization that roamed the mountainous terrain for thousands of years.

Cameron’s visions of the past were the key that was going to unravel the mystery of the inner workings of the Well of the Eternal. Namely, how it was created and how it could once again begin to heal the planet and save all that exists on earth and in those worlds above. Cameron’s section of the scrolls was put away where only she knew. This triangular deer-hide scroll was written by the Prophet of the Well. The only one that can explain exactly what needs to be done to receive the three requests from the Well in return for restoring its positive life-giving energy and freeing the Spirit of the Well, the one known as the Mighty Companion. The one who is perceived as being something that belongs to mankind from all walks of life. The Keeper of the Well himself.

Now the members of the tribe were starting to figure out that there wasn’t going to be any transaction or trade with the organized crime organizations back East. The truck had come to town, but apparently the driver of the truck high jacked the load right out from under them after paying off The Chicago Mob. He had gotten past the boys from back East, but now he was in their neck of the woods. Big Jim had promised them a shipment of good old Russian-made AK-47 breach and stock assembly and 50-round banana clips filled with ammunition. The Indians had the barrels, wooden hand grips, and shoulder straps.

At the time the tribal police were holding Cameron for questioning after she had supposedly gotten drunk and slapped Hunting Sticks all the way down to the ground before letting him back up. A public intoxication charge on the Indian reservation was a serious offense. The Federal Bureau of Investigation for the United States government had to be notified, to get involved in the prosecution of the person or persons who had perpetrated such an act. And the Tribal

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

Police were well within their rights to hold that person indefinitely, or until the FBI was able to bring the defendant before a federal judge to answer for what could be perceived as a felony charge.

With no job, no money, and caught in the middle of a nasty divorce, it was starting to look like Jeremiah's little plan for Cameron had backfired. From the way things were looking, Cameron would probably have to go before the judge to be reviewed by Child Protective Services and be cleared as a legal guardian for her children. But with her history of a mental disability and not always taking her medication, mixed with these new assault charges and public intoxication, she would be lucky to see daylight five years from now, let alone get custody and be allowed to raise her kids.

The tribe had sent Hunting Sticks to work out whatever was going on with the driver of the truck. Hunting Sticks knew exactly what was going on, because Georgia had been around these parts for over a hundred and thirty years now. The gray tractor-trailer was parked inside the gates of The Horseman's Ranch out in Cherry Creek, thirty miles from White Horse. As for the driver? He was down at the local bar The Lonely River Pass living it up. After all, he had singlehandedly settled up with everybody. Everybody except the Shoshone's higher echelons who felt like a deal was a deal, and that backing out was not an option.

"That land was now cursed by the scourge of death himself and guarded by the maddening effects of a thousand screaming banshees."

Jeremiah said.

"Now that everybody is here, we all agree on one thing. The Spirit of the Well must be restored, and the Mighty Companion must once again watch over it and its followers, the Time Walkers. The only way to reinstate the power of the Well to its rightful eternal glory is known only in the hindsight of the Prophet of the Well. The only one who can trade the sanctity of the Well for three holy requests? Something that the Well must grant unto the Keeper of the Mighty Companion. Three gold coins. One for each wish. Each one had to be tossed into the bottomless depths of the Well where they would remain protected against the thieving hands of man. Any gold would do. Even if it wasn't in the shape of a coin. Just as long as it could mix with the minerals and everlasting enzymes that lived inside the magical Well in such abundance it forms an extra helix of genetic

code that is sustained by these life-giving anomalies as they take on the form of a carbon atom. That which is a part of every man, women, and child, "The Well must be expel." Jeremiah went on.

"It has trapped my father, my mother, my daughter, and now my grandson, who still hasn't had a chance to be truly born into this world. Without natural reincarnation, our souls remain trapped and will continue to be so in the ebb and flow of money, power, poverty, and pain. All the things in life that are unchosen, but chosen for us. Our lives are like a rainy day that never ends. Love that has nothing in return. Charity that has no benefactor. Solace that only ends in adversity. Followed by the loneliness that ends everything within a shadow of a doubt. An endless ripple in a shoreless lake that transforms into nothing. Never ending anywhere. Just an endless life that has no meaning other than that which is vested in having the riches of the world at your feet. Once you've achieved that, he who would seem to be your best friend is actually only motivated by the joy he receives by taking from you what matters to you most. In this case, my daughter. If she is not released from that jail cell and allowed to raise her children then nobody can continue on,

That means that those guns need to be delivered to the Indian nation, and in return you can all have my scroll of the Well and Tabitha will give you the key. The last scroll is the one you are going to need to fix the Well and stop the land of the dead from taking control of this world and making it subservient to their own dominion. Hunting Sticks is the only one who can lead you past the Forests of Fears, for everything therein is controlled by the dead, and once in and among the dead you have to play by their rules. This means that if you open your eyes and see their faces, it will rip your mortal soul from your useless body, just like throwing a rag doll onto a bonfire. Tabitha's newly born child must be allowed to live his life here on Earth, leaving my father, Delaney Dixon, to once again occupy his place on the throne of all mankind and continue shaping the forces of good versus evil on this planet as far as the human race is concerned.

"Cameron's dead."

Hunting Sticks said suddenly,

"Cameron's dead!"

He reiterated. And even louder this time!

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

“She was beaten to death by some of the tribal leaders and their drunken warriors who tortured her in hopes of obtaining her section of the scrolls. Once she relented, they killed her anyway and are now in the process of finding the Well for themselves. They’ve seen the signs and know of its location because of the specifics laid out in this gun deal that’s been put down before you. Those guns are worthless against people who are already dead anyway. Besides, without the different components that make up the entire weapon collection, it’s useless to all of us! With Cameron dead.”

Jeremiah went on,

“And the tribal leaders having her section of the scrolls and knowing of the Well and of its power to grant three requests, the spiritual war will begin between the Time Walkers and of those who are still mortal. Who will be granted a coin to toss into the Well? Let us all pray for ourselves, because tonight, it’s every man, woman, and child for himself! This will be the last epic battle to end all battles, to create a new destiny and course for the lives of all mankind.”

It wasn’t long before gunfire broke out and fighting began to spill out of buildings and flood into the streets. A dark storm rolled in and thunder and rain began to pour down on the frightened city of White Horse. The explosives and military-sized crates of ammunition boxes from the tractor-trailer was suddenly being distributed throughout the county as the first wave a banshees rolled in with the ferocity of the coming storm. Not just any storm, but the one that would end all storms. The ground began to rumble, and the earth gave way to another day. One when Cameron was sitting under the tallest shade tree on The Horseman’s Ranch right next to Ruger, and her mother Brenda was standing there smiling at her,

“Would you like another hamburger, my dear.”

She had said softly, with a very proud look upon her face? When Cameron looked around, she found that they were having a great big picnic, or was it a birthday party with hotdogs and hamburgers? Each one grilled to perfection on an open fire with pickles and ketchup, potato salad, and raspberry punch to go with it, all served out of her grandfather’s old five-gallon Igloo water cooler Delaney used to make sun tea out back. The air was filled with the freshness of a cool autumn breeze on this twenty-first day of October in the late summer of 2004. She was turning sweet sixteen all over again, with Charles, who was playing in the yard, chasing a Frisbee

that her older brother was throwing for him to fetch. He couldn't catch that well, but he always brought it back anyway, just to fetch it once again. And then it was time for Cameron to blow out the sixteen candles poking up out of a heart-shaped sweet sixteen red velvet ice cream birthday cake.

The same one with candles that her best friend Carrie was helping her extinguish! Cameron was wearing her favorite and most treasured yellow sundress that was knee-length and featured a U-shaped neckline that was now displaying a brand new Mizpah. One with half a hand print on it—her father had the other half. It was a perfect birthday gift with the perfect birthday card. The best gift she could have ever gotten from her beloved father, Jeremiah, here on her brand new sweet sixteenth birthday party. The card had a golden light that shined at you from the center of a far-off star that read,

“One wish granted, and another one lost, the last wish was handed down to you by a golden coin toss.”

“Happy Birthday from everyone, Cameron! Signed by, the Boss.”

It was the perfect ending to the perfect day out on the range. The same day she planned on reliving over and over again from now into eternity. Which turns out to be a very, very long time...

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

UNHOLY WELL OF THE ETERNAL

By now, everybody knew of the Well and its no-longer secret location. Not of its power to fulfill life everlasting. Nor the secret to the Well, and how to change this now toxic doorway for the spirits that hadn't moved on yet, but were still stuck here on Earth for whatever it may be. Whatever it was that kept one from moving on could, for instance, be a strong attachment or resentment toward another. Revenge is another great way to be locked up between worlds. That could force you to channel your energy in an unhealthy way and not even be aware of the fact that you were once alive, but now you're dead! The question always being, of course, how could that be if I'm still here? With that in mind, and with questions like that, everyone is protesting against their positions in life, but also in death."

"Where do I come from, and why am I here?"

There are never any answers to these types of questions. You must just accept the fact that "it" is, and that you're it. Whether that be in part or as a whole collectively. It's up to you to decide which. Regardless of what the answer is, you must first begin to realize that if it weren't for you being here, whatever there is out there wouldn't exist! If you couldn't, then how could you have not? The fact is that you dwell from within, but the things that you perceive on a daily basis are experienced outwardly, which leads us into circumstances that are beyond our control! Then, we are subject to "IT".

Whatever that, which is not a part of you, becomes. That which you realize is in existence, but is not "of you. Per se, nor is it of your creation. This part of our reality that is not of you, but can only be perceived by you, is what makes up the outer worlds, along with the five senses, and a human body. That is what separates us, but God is what holds everything together like glue. Making everything a

part of “One That One which “is” or has been created which you’ve become a part of. This, in itself, is what the Cavern of the Living and the Water Well of the Eternal are made out of.

It’s a mix of several different, yet basic aspects of life activated by stimulating enzymes that can only be manifested with the precious metal of gold interacting with the chromosomal DNA of a living being. This activates a perpetual reconditioning of the genetic makeup that allows selectively permeable cells that make up the human body to keep producing brand new living cells that do not reproduce through regular cell division by creating an exact clone of the cell that produced it.

This method cannot be sustained over a long period of time because nothing is exactly the same forever. After however many reproductions are accumulated, it degenerates. After drinking from the Water Well of the Eternal, cells do not multiply, nor do they regenerate, because these cells are run strictly off the mitochondria of that living cell. Which come from and are attached directly to one another. These special enzymes are produced using mineral deposits (made of gold) that can only exist and come up from somewhere under the mantle of the Earth’s crust! Brought to the surface with the rising vents that put off heat, they expand with the release of pressure.

From there, the enzymes begin to grow and mix with oxygen-infused water molecules that are able to connect directly to the genetic make-up that deals with the basic construction of the human body’s protozoa through its newly engineered mitochondria. At the same time, each enzyme actually binds to a carbon atom in the Well, and in doing so, it has created not a reproduction of the cell, but one that gets its energy on a molecular level. Giving it the ability to bind with the person’s DNA on a level that allows it to give off the same energy found in any living star in outer space. Causing un-multiplying human cells that give off an atomic energy not derived from a chemical reaction or by cellular division within living cells of a human being or an animal body. Which cause the degeneration of cell growth over a period of time.

The spiritual aspect of the Well disheartens the souls of all mankind at a molecular level. All the energy in existence is made up of mass multiplied by the amount of energy equals mass times the speed of light squared. Also included is Einstein’s Theory of Relativity, which is what allows spiritual energy to exist. There has to be

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

electrons that are real and substantial in the creation of the physical plane. With the restoration of the Water Well of the Eternal to a positive state, they could banish the darkness that now infested it and the vortex the darkness had created for the dead who were still walking between this world and the next. The only way to free the souls that were attached to the negative energy of the Well, binding them to this planet, needed to be found. The only way to do that was through the incantations and instructions still plain to see on the backside of the rawhide deer-skin scroll that Cameron was killed for.

Jeremiah Dixon was the only one who actually knew the original location, and the whereabouts of those scrolls. And now someone was after the power of the Well, someone who knew about the incredible powers that make up the Well. As it stood, who that person was, was unbeknownst to everyone. Once Jeremiah found out, water well or not, the people who did this were going to pay dearly for what they'd done. Killing his only daughter, and the only family member left he could trust. She was now long gone, but not forgotten! Jeremiah was going to find whoever it was that did this, and bring him down vigilante-style! All the leaves had left the trees on this very cold, crisp, yet sunny winter day. It was most noticeable in the forests and valleys that surround the Sure Hill Valley at this time of year.

During the day, some people were actually brave enough to venture out into the wooded areas of the backwoods forests, but at night there were thousands of screaming banshees occupying those woods, bringing the deafening tone of a madman's voice clear across the valley. The sound of it caused one to drop to his knees while screaming in agonizing pain, the likes of which are seldom experienced on this plane of existence. Things were going to have to be done from the inside, and the only way to reach the spirit world while still living was through a visionary like Cameron. Now that she was gone, the only way to find the answers that were so desperately needed as to how to get rid of the banshees was to ask the ancestors for assistance from the other side of the veil of illusion that is cast down onto all walks of life here on this planet. The same one that sets us apart. So, the three sides of the warring factions shared an uneasy alliance with one another. But once the gloves were off it would be every man for himself!"

The Shoshone warriors who had locked up Cameron, tortured her, and eventually killed her were all going to die if the Dixon clan

had any say in it. For now, though, the two sides of the Time Walkers that just so happened to be the Dixon Family and Big Jim Dailey's family had to get along. His parents may have been older than him but he was the one in control over the whole situation on that end of the barrel, keeping his anxious Time Walker family from coming apart at the seams while looking for those scrolls. Jeremiah was right! The only way to see into the past was to find the answers from within! The first order of business was to make sure that his truckload of guns remained out of the hands of the enemy. Either one of them! The Indian warriors were now able to find the Well and bring it back to life. They had all the pieces to the map they were going to need. And that semi-truck full of good Old Russian firepower was already on its way over to where the Indian Nation would be able to unpack and assemble an arsenal of modern-day weaponry. It was lucky that Hunting Sticks was still considered the tribe's shaman, even though it was really Georgia Dixon herself who was now occupying his body. She was the one that Jeremiah needed. A person on the inside. One who could see things from the native point of view and help him infiltrate and annihilate the red man's stronghold, destroying them from the inside out. And when he found the party responsible for his daughter's death, he was going to make them wish they had never even heard about the Water Well of the Eternal.

Regulations or not, Mr. Chin and Jeremiah were going to go out on a limb and sell the River Bend Holiday Park Horse Racetrack located on the outskirts of White Horse. Five acres of gambling and bar-room atmosphere mixed with an outstanding customer service staff. The track itself wasn't solvent due to the outrageous amount of money that had been won by people who were betting on the futures because the odds that they originally posted were substantial compared to the usual everyday run-of-the-mill wager.

Besides that, people were able to see well into the future of the events yet to come. And they were able to change the odds and the outcome of a future race by betting heavy on one end and light on the winning end, evening the odds of that horse winning, or at least covering its allotted handicap. This drove up the payoff on a horse heavily wagered against, in some cases, up to a hundred to one odds, which were astronomical when betting on any one payoff and the odds of that horse pulling off a winning position according to its modified future payoff. The closer the race came to being run, the

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

more lopsided the payoffs could become, and now if Mr. Chin didn't cut his losses, he would end up losing everything in the process. Besides, Big Jim was able to replace Cameron Dixon with the only other logical choice: Rhonda Dailey.

Better known to some as, "The Butte!" This provided Big Jim with a lot of leverage down on the racing end of the track. Rhonda being an equestrian herself, coupled with the fact that she had quite a bit of experience in managing a gambling establishment, made Jeremiah and Mr. Chin practically give the track over to Hunting Sticks Madison for a small fee of just over 16.8 million dollars. This would be handed over to Hunting Sticks and the Shoshone Indian tribe, who was none the wiser, putting them in a perfect position for Mr. Chin and Jeremiah Dixon to stalk down and ambush. Those warriors couldn't take back what they had done and now the only way to make things right was to get rid of them all!

The problem was, they were heavily armed by Big Jim Dailey and his new stupid little Time Walker sidekick, Alvin Richardson, who was now making White Horse his permanent home while working for his son, Big Jim Dailey, as a blackjack, roulette, and poker dealer. Something that he hadn't done in a very long time, but had enjoyed doing in the past. Besides that, it was kind of nice coming back home to be with his family once again.

After he and Rhonda had split up back in the sixties, they were separated for a long time. All because Alvin had refused to get a social security number back in the forties when the United States government started handing them out to all of its citizens, one at a time. Alvin was terrified of war and had left the civilized world behind, moving all the way to the Alaskan-Canadian border, where he spent his days as a mountain man. The Butte loved him, but was reluctant to join him, and after that she lost a lot of respect for him for taking off like that, leaving the country and abandoning his family just to keep from going to war with the rest of the nation. The Butte found that to be cowardly, but it seemed that things had changed since then and now she was more apt to keep him around. Just for old times' sake, since they had known each other now for over ninety years and had been together as husband and wife for over half a century. It appeared they would be a very close-knit family now.

Rhonda and Alvin might not have been sleeping in the same bed, or even under the same roof for that matter, but neither of them

were with anyone else at this point in their lives. And they both felt like this was the right thing to be doing at this point in time—sharing life as one big, happy family. Now all Alvin had to do was explain to his only son, Big Jim Dailey, the truth about his father and why he'd had to grow up without one. It wasn't going to be easy, so he and the Butte decided to wait until the time was right. Then they would slowly break it to him. But not until some more time had gone by. Right now, they just wanted to stay close to one another without any hard feelings shared between all three of them, not to mention Big Jim's young wife, Brittany.

But she seemed to be out of the picture for now because she was still laying low, trying to cool her heels after losing her casino, The Red Star, in Reno, Nevada, which was just a front business for the Chicago Mafia. After a money laundering business for the mob was discovered because of her negligence, they'd lost a lot of money. Not to mention bringing the heat down on them from the upper echelon of the Federal Bureau of Investigations for money laundering and racketeering charges, not to mention the tax evasion and drug running. Which the old-world organized crime families would've never even touched. But these new-world gangsters? All they ever knew was what they could get for themselves. No family creed, and definitely no family loyalty. Nowadays, everybody was out for themselves, and only the rich would survive by the power they wielded in the legitimate world of the upper class multimillionaires, who in today's reality, could choose where and when to put down roots, hide in plain sight, and relocate without having to worry about having enough money to continue on living. Even one who had decided to cut and run while he was still ahead of the mob life. And without the fear of getting caught up in it or being caught by any number of enemies, whether they be a rival family member or even from the federal government itself.

Now Brittany was back home with Big Jim after spending some time in New York City with her family and relatives who lived back East. Big Jim had sent the limousine down to the airport to meet her at the gate and bring her back to The Intrepid Star Casino where she would start to take up her daily routine of running the main business offices where all Big Jim's business transactions occurred. Right along with his accounting and personnel offices, everything was maintained with her in charge. He knew that she had to give it a hundred

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

and ten percent, because she was in no position to negotiate with Big Jim being the only thing standing between her and one of those big-city butchers in Chicago, Reno, or anywhere else she may've made people angry. Like out on the Indian reservation after sleeping with Hunting Sticks' nephew, Dusty Leaves, or just Dusty for short.

She'd allowed him to make a sex tape of the two of them together and then had Big Jim interfere with the relationship when the boy from over at the reservation was well within his rights, according to the Indian nation, to keep Brittany as his own. After all, she had slept with him. So why was there a problem between Dusty Leaves and the white men in town who pretended to run things? The thing snowballed into Big Jim giving in and having a truckload of guns brought in from overseas originally and then a trip through America's heartland all the way to Briggs County, Nevada. Alvin was the one Big Jim had known in the Chicago Mafia for all those years. He was the one who tied the family to the Mob back East.

Big Jim was never told that the man was his father for security purposes. And to keep the family secret alive and kicking, Alvin actually started out as a bookie working in the Chicago underbelly during the Vietnam War, after he had been discovered in Alaska. Turned in by the Eskimo tribes in the area because he greedily refused to stop over-poaching the animals that ran free in Alaska. He was making a lot of money selling the fur to Canadians who could get a pretty penny back in the States, and they were easily smuggled into the country. Since they were still legal in Canada, all a person had to do was cross the border wearing a fur, and there was nothing the border patrol could do if it wasn't purchased in America. And even though it was illegal to sell them, people did it anyway. That was when he'd moved to Chicago. He just so happened to have a contact with The Mob, already have been doing business with them, and after he had proven his worth as a bookie, they allowed him a fairly decent existence this side of the Vietnam War. Simply because he was anonymous and his identity couldn't be traced.

THE ENGINEERING OF THE WELL

His immortality had allowed him to live through the better part of the twentieth century in the United States of America without being noticed. Just the opposite from the Dixon family. And now that he was back, the Butte was finally going to marry him—making him a citizen of the United States. But it would come at a cost. He had to give her the \$250,000 left over from his winning streak over at the horse track and finalize the deal with the Shoshone Indian Nation by delivering them the goods that Big Jim wanted.

A win, win, win for all of them. And, as it turned out, the Butte also wanted him to work the casino floor, managing the place for her, Brittany, and Big Jim, which was full-time job to say the least. That way, they could all relax for a while, and anonymously look for the secrets of this magical water well that was hopefully going to remain in the family for a good, long time. It was race to see who could reach the Well through The Forests of Fears, and into the Cavern of the Dead, as it was now known. The trick was to find a way to somehow get through the thousands of dead souls that had entrenched themselves in the forests, mountains, and caves that surrounded the area where the Well was located. After that, you had to know what the writing on the scrolls meant. Which could only be read and understood by a Time Walker. And then, after tossing in a small coin made of gold, you would have to make three wishes.

“But beware!”

Warned the scrolls!

All three wishes must not conflict with one another, or the dead who walked the earth will take your life, petrify your remains, and keep you locked in a purgatory just short of hell for trying to take that which is not you. Which happens to be somewhat of a gambler’s

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

creed. When they win, they always put it back for the simple reason that it wasn't theirs to start with! That was the secret to the Well, which nobody, not even the Indians who had the proper piece of the scrolls, could figure out. That was the bottom line, but nobody seemed to know it. You also couldn't make anyone do anything that they didn't want to do, and by trying to make them do it, you'd be breaking a spiritual law of karma. That would not be tolerated. Also, the last wish had to be on someone else's behalf. These three things had to be recognized and executed.

Meanwhile, there had to be a wedding. A wedding between two of the three warring factions. Only then would the forces of righteousness and good be strong enough to cause the spiritual and physical transformation of the Well back into its original condition that the Aztec Indians had left it behind in. The one that cost them a civilization. In the end, it needed to be reborn again to its former glory, returned to the way that it had originally been found in. Thousands of years before the birth of Christ, there reigned a mighty yet humble civilization that occupied the land of the Central and South American continents. A civilization whose legacy is legendary and the answer to its secrets hard to find. They existed by learning to adapt to conditions that others could not.

They did this by moving to the highest possible locations on the tops of mountain ranges where the sun was closer to the ground but farther from the warmth of the heavy atmosphere that belonged to the planet Earth. Being closer to the sun, they had a less dense atmosphere of cool, semi-oxygenated air, which swept up off of the valley floor in giant thermals starting at the base of the mountain, creating an updraft known nowadays as ridge lift. This would eventually lead them back down into the valleys below, for only their temples and monuments were made at such an uninhabitable climate. They would also build their star-gazing outposts that they used to study the movement of the Earth, the sun, the moon, and all of the planets in the solar system while making note of twelve different constellations in the sky.

This was the age of the Leo, or The Lion. All of their construction would involve some type of alignment to the stars, and their doorways always opened to the east toward the rising sun. This was done so that people could live in harmony with the energy that brought itself down amongst the many different forms of life that

existed on a single planet that rested next to a magical sun. One that is perfect in its creation—not too big and not too small. The sun was also the proper temperature and distance from the Earth, because they believed the Earth was formed before the sun. They thought the sun rotated around the Earth along with the oblong shapes of the planet's rotation, only spared by being destroyed by the Earth itself in a mid-air collision. Because everything rotated around the Earth, which was located at the center of all that is. The sun was the epitome of life itself, as it gave off the life-giving warmth that sustained all life on Earth. And so it was worshiped as such.

The Egyptians, who occupied the other side of the globe, also worshiped the sun god that they called Ra. After the birth of Ra into a human form, the world was cast into a thin light of darkness as the forces of good versus those of the stars began to face one another in an epic battle of wits that would last for many centuries. It suddenly ended with the annihilation of entire civilizations of very sophisticated natures which built many fine examples of pyramid construction, columns and pillars on temples and galleries, and artistic and fundamentally sound buildings. They even had massive stone blocks that were somehow moved into position one on top of the other which seems to have lasted through the generations and up until this very day!"

The people's history and culture that created such phenomena as these monuments somehow managed to disappear into the sand along with stone buildings that they once occupied in the many cities and towns of a once thriving community. Civilizations were snuffed out before they could completely and totally populate the planet with billions of souls, all striving for a long life of happiness and the creature comforts that have become so abundant amongst modern day society here in the twenty-first century.

As for the existence of a power greater than that of the human race? A power of a life-giving force that has occupied the gassy annals of outer space that started at the beginning of time. This magical substance which allows the spiritual energy to flow down out of the fountain head of the Well of the Eternal into the hands of the greedy and the undeniably greedy hands of the individual self. That's all the partaker of this life force can attest to: its intoxicating effects, and source of spiritual bliss that this cool, blue pool of shimmering light can

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

bring to the thirsty spirit of mankind. Whether it be for the betterment of the life of mankind and his society, or for the detriment of his time and energy here on this planet, or even worse. For the betterment of the life which is not actually for his betterment. Nothing can escape the trials and tribulations that occupy the lives and times of all life on Earth.

Just like the words that people recite as they become joined in the state of holy matrimony, which can only be shared by those who love one another in a way that they love no one else in this universe. Or in any other at this moment in space and time, anyway. Sure, there could be others, but in order for the Spirit of the Well to return to its rightful place at the forefront of mankind, there must be an easy truce between the warring factions of The Eternal Order of the Time Walker. They must form a loving bond between them, and only then will they be strong enough to take on the forces of darkness that grow in strength and cunning with the passage of every hour in every day of the never-ending years that have filled the space in between this world and the next.

A marriage between the two. This world, and the next. One that is combined of both. That which is the Well, or what you make of it. The Aztecs knew this after they first discovered these waters back in the twenty-fifth century A.D., when the alchemy of the universes held machines that could manufacture gold from a carbon or lead ingot. These waters were made fresh from the Earth and hidden by the influx of man into this world and the exit of the star people. The star people could only trade the everlasting life of a star for the selectively permeable form of reproduction that the energy of the stars occupied. It was through the movement of one's energy through a magical machine that was able to transform the body of a gray with the energy that only a star can possess, giving way to a star person. This person was able to maintain a body while still occupying the seemingly never-ending energy of the stars.

In the end, though, a species of giants was finally engineered out of mankind. They were strong like humans and could reproduce sexually yet could also communicate telepathically if they wanted to, by using their enlarged penal glands that lie just above and behind your eyebrows. These giants could travel through time and space and were able to explore other star systems, yet still had the ability to carry

on with what was mentally stored and shared throughout the collective community. Never before had something so simple become so complex, only adding to the confusion of the different races of mankind. Therefore, it was God's wish that the wells that rose up from the center of the Earth could supply the body of whatever had partaken of it with a change in its genetics on a molecular scale. This was never thought of by the leaders of the spiritual hierarchy that controlled the races of man, keeping them subservient in an attempt to force the hand of God into giving the laws of creation over to the energies that make up a star. This type of piracy was never allowed to continue, but a dragon had formed within the lives of all mankind. A dragon that threatened to ruin the inner life of every man.

So, after the initial discovery and the subsequent construction of the inner chamber that surrounded the glory of the Well, they left a set of scrolls. The scrolls that were written by a visionary who could tell the future and were sealed up with the majesty of the Well, where it would remain hidden from the eyes and ears of the Royal Race of the Zodiac. Because it wasn't a matter of if the well would once again be discovered, but when. So, they tried to give as much assistance to the next generation of Time Walkers as they possible could. But the modern-day visionary was lost to the seekers of the Well in search of what they thought would bring them one step closer to the Well of the Eternal. And as before, Cameron's spirit was once again transformed into the life of a giant among men.

A leader of the spirits of the dead and those who had been trapped and imprisoned was to lead them out of the darkness and once again into the light, where they could finally be set free to translate from this world into the next. There was nothing that Jeremiah could do. Without that section of the scrolls, and without his daughter to lead the way, he was lost and confused as to what to do next. Why not just forget about the Well altogether and find and kill the men who had harmed his daughter? The answer was: because if he wanted to make things right between him and his father, he could never see Cameron again or survive the conquest to take control of the Well.

The only good thing about this entire situation was that his grandson, Red Hawk, was with his father, Hunting Sticks. Hunting Sticks would have to be the one to reinstate her husband, Delaney,

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

who was now just a child of three. It had been a long time since they had last visited the Well, and except for mining the back side of that mountain, they had never returned. Tabitha was going to be back in town as soon as she could get there. She would be the one to protect the children of the Well who were both born with a destiny to allow the Well to return and continue on in a positive way. They needed to be kept safe from the hands of darkness that had been portrayed as being logical. In fact, these forces are extremely emotional, always reacting to that which is all around them, not creating life like the positive forces of the Well always do. Once Tabitha returned with the keys to the safety deposit box in the National Federation Station Bank in Carson City, they could retrieve that section of the scrolls.

The one that nobody understood until the day had come that the entire Dixon family was either laid to waste or cast aside in the process of saving the Well of the Eternal from darkness. They were only to be rewarded with a never-ending suffering that went along with all the deaths in the family and the strange alliances that left the family poor and in constant search of a better life. Mr. Chin was going to be the one to escort Tabitha to Carson City and to retrieve that section of the scrolls, which explains how to move spirits from one form into the next. Say, for instance, moving a spirit from a person into the Well— and vice versa. Or the secret rituals that bring one person's soul out of a body and put another one in. Just as they had done in their journeys into the inner worlds were spirit dwells.

Cameron was now in control of the guardianship of the Well and was the leader of the spirits of the dead, but her authority stopped there. As long as the Well held the spirits of the dead, she could wield their power to affect the living. But once they recited the incantations that were written on the back of the Indian Nation's section of the scrolls, they would be set free. And once they had performed the necessary rituals, the howling banshees that had taken up the guardianship of the Well would be gone. And it was the only thing that was keeping them from getting their wishes, which they deserved for returning the Mighty Companion back to the Well.

It was Tabitha's baby, Delaney Sanford Dixon, who had to be returned to the Well using the directions that were inscribed on the back of the scrolls that Tabitha and Mr. Chin were on their way to

retrieve. The only thing to do now was get the two boys, Red Hawk and Delaney, into safe hands. And where better to put them than in the Indian's back yard with Hunting Sticks Madison? Georgia Dixon would be the one who to safeguard the children until Delaney could be freed back into the Well where he belonged. Which would free the child's spirit that was naturally supposed to be born into that body, out from under the magical weight of the Mighty Companion, which had been forced to occupy that person's body.

That person, who is now in no position to act upon the living, but is reserved for the beloved child of the Mighty Companion. None other than Cameron Dixon herself. The way it stood on that very day, Hunting Sticks Madison was in control of the incantations that would free the Well, as well as the Golden Child, Delaney Dixon, who had to be returned to his place as the guardian of the Well. Hunting Sticks explained to them that the only way to return the Mighty Companion to the Well was to retrieve the section of the scrolls that were being held in the National Federation Station Bank in Carson City. They would attain that position and take the section of the scrolls by force. The only problem was, how were they supposed to know when they would be at the bank? At this point in the game it was in the red man's favor to leave the protection of the well intact until they could finally return the Mighty Companion back to the spirit of the well.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

HIDDEN HEARTACHE

The First National Bank of Nevada in downtown White Horse had no qualms about the fact that the best person to continue on running The Holiday Park River Bend Horse Racetrack was going to be the obvious choice: Big Jim Dailey himself. And his daughter, Rhonda Dailey. It was too much for them to oversee the joint on a day-to-day basis so they were going to have to hire some extra help. And now that Rhonda had stock in the company's ownership and management, she couldn't run the races as a jockey anymore.

As a means to an end, Big Jim and his crew decided to turn the place over to none other than Walter Grandt and his good buddy, Kal Pantalero. They'd just been waiting in the wings after they had lost The Lonely River Pass to Jeremiah Dixon and his family. They were trying to get by on what was left of the insurance settlement after Walter's wife, Georgia, had supposedly lost her life to Tabitha and Jeremiah Dixon way back in 2004. With them now on board, Big Jim's army was growing, and his alliance with the Indian Nation seemed to be growing, too. They were both interested in attaining Tabitha's section of the scrolls. It also became apparent to Jeremiah that Mr. Chin was sitting on a small arsenal that he'd been collecting for over thirty years. It was high time he got in on the game and claimed his prize of drinking from the Well! Jeremiah and Mr. Chin needed to leave town and lay low. That much was obvious.

The only way to settle this whole dispute over who should own what would end in a bloodbath. Not to mention the need to reinforce those questions of ownership by show of force. If a war did break out between all three of the different factions (the Indian race, Jeremiah Dixon and his family, and finally Big Jim and his crew), God only knows what evil could pollute the land and destroy the lives of

many. That would turn the entire town over to be haunted by the spirits of the dead.

After thinking about it, Jeremiah had an idea.

“What if everybody agreed to play another card game that would legitimately decide who gets what? Fair and square. Right down the line! The person with the most money would get to buy the scroll of his choosing. Jeremiah decided the best thing was for everyone to buy in with an equal amount of chips, and team up in pairs against one another in a six-deck shoe blackjack tournament to be held at any one of the locations they were all in possession of.

Since Walter Grandt was now in charge of the racetrack, in order to make it fair for everyone, he and the head warrior for the tribe, Cousin Mike, would take on Jeremiah and Tabitha Dixon of the Lonely River Pass. Meanwhile, the Butte and Big Jim would represent The Intrepid Star. The only way to make it fair was to have Alvin Richardson do the dealing. He was the only one in town everybody could agree upon who wasn't playing in the tournament, because whoever the dealer was needed to know how to follow the proper procedure in order to deal a fair game for everyone involved.

To set up the deal, Mr. Chin and Jeremiah strapped on several firearms each. Jeremiah with his double-holstered utility belt holding two Glock forty-four-caliber handguns with twelve rounds of semi-automatic high-powered ammunition each. After placing one round in the breach chamber, the weapon could fire twenty-six high-powered forty-four-caliber semi-automatic rounds as fast as you could pull the hair trigger. Mr. Chin decided on something a little more appropriate. Throwing-knives and hand grenades. As they gently strolled through the main entrance of The Intrepid Star it was plain to see this place needed an overhaul. Everything about the joint screamed worn out and outdated, from the frazzled carpet to the stale smell of a million lit cigarettes.

As they walked up to the front desk, the attendant immediately pushed the little white button that was mounted beneath the counter, sounding the silent alarm. Surveillance was notified right away with a quite beeping tone and a red warning sign on the monitor's computer screen. As soon as that happened, that person would get on the open microphone hand held CB radios that were carried by the security officers down on the casino floor. Once that surveillance officer had sent out the call, he was to grab a weapon of his

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

choice out of the gun vault and settle the situation one way or the other. Dead or alive. Once the call had been given everybody of importance was notified and began to circle the front desk. Now, standing back to back, they drew their weapons and pointed. People with guns started to show up from every angle.

Once they did, Mr. Chin dropped the pin to one of his grenades. It sounded like the faint noise of a pin dropping to the floor. But it seemed to echo louder than the entire casino floor staff as they pulled back the levers, chambering a round with the steady yet unmistakable sliding noise followed by a grating metal on metal sound and the bolt sliding back into place. So there they all stood, looking like a crowd of men standing around with their pants down or something. The looks on their faces were anxious. Jeremiah could even recognize the man standing in front of him whose brow was suddenly covered in more than a few droplets of sweat,

“You fire, we fire!”

Grunting and clenching his teeth in a manner like that of a puppet or a wooden dummy. Slowly Big Jim began poking his way through the crowd, using his arm to steadily raise the arms and hands that held at least fifteen guns all pointed in one direction, stopping the bloodbath just long enough to see what these two were doing over here and what they wanted!

“That’s it going to be fellows?”

“Trick or Treat!”

Big Jim said, and since it was the twenty-third, with Halloween and Nevada Day just around the corner, it didn’t sound that cliché’.

“You boys better start talking before I light this whole place on fire, and I guarantee that you two will still be in.”

How’s that, Big Jim?”

Jeremiah said without hesitation.

“Because there’s a man up there on the catwalk with a rifle trained on your head this very moment, as we speak.”

Big Jim said, pointing up at the tiled, mirror ceiling that ran above the lobby. Without even thinking and with no apparent hesitation, Jeremiah suddenly raised his pistol and fired two shots into the mirror ceiling, causing the false ceiling to cave in, raining shards of broken mirrored glass. The two hundred pounds of dead weight was the body of this man projected onto the majority of the clan.

Suddenly the lights went out. The only way anybody could see was when there was a flash of light. It was created by some of the electrical lighting that was part of the false ceiling touching bare, exposed wires, causing sparks to fly in loud pops all across the room!"

Muzzle fire was seen coming from around the bar area, and Big Jim started to scream!

"Cease fire! Cease fire."

After a few more gun shots the building went quiet,

"Come out and show yourself!"

Big Jim was saying. You could see that he was fighting mad, almost to the point of being out of control. But he managed to hang on to his sanity long enough to bring the firefight to an end before the whole casino was demolished with everybody in it!

"I'm coming out, Jeremiah! Don't shoot!"

You could hear Big Jim say as he slowly walked out from behind the bar. Which hadn't been broken just yet.

"Let's not destroy the place, okay? I'm coming out he reiterated, followed by a simple request. Show yourself."

A live roadside flair was struck, looking like a long candlestick, only brighter. With the orange light of a very large, fiery candle, the room once again lit up, casting a lot of shadows around the rows of slot machines and through the bar room tables and across the wooden dance floor where there was usually live entertainment above. Tonight just so happened to be a slow night, and the band had taken the day off, thank God. But there were still plenty of other every day, run-of-the-mill casino floor employees who had nothing to do with this situation. They were told to leave work and go home to their families. Never in the last hundred years had this place closed its doors to the public, but tonight was a special night. One that would never come again. And Jeremiah wasn't wasting any time proposing a winning proposition to Big Jim—or they could fight it out the medieval way and kill each other,

"Call your buddies at the reservation and tell them to send down Hunting Sticks Madison and their cowardly warrior friend, Cousin Mike. I've got a winning proposition to offer you all that could settle this, once and for all."

"And just how you plan on doing that Jeremiah!"

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

Alvin Richardson said as he came down the stairs, shot gun in hand. He'd been up in the second-story offices where the casino surveillance office was still located after all these years.

"That man just happens to be one of your Indian friends, in fact, it was Cousin Mike's younger Cousin Alan 'Dusty Leaves' Madison of the Sure Hill Valley Shoshone Indian Reservation. Now how do you think that you're going to explain that to Cousin Mike?"

"Pretty simple, I would say."

Jeremiah started

"One or more of your little cronies from out on the reservation brutally murdered my daughter, idiot! Now get them down here before this place really goes off. The Dailey clan was approached by a thin, young man jogging over to Big Jim and whispering something about the power into his ear. He said,

"Great news, everyone! The Intrepid Star is officially closed for business. I hope you all are happy!"

Big Jim yelled,

"Call your friends, Big Jim, and get them down here. Find some candles while you're at it. We have a blackjack tournament to play, and it's only fair if your father does the deal."

"My father Big Jim asked with a face so taken aback that it totally caught everybody off guard."

"Don't worry, Big Jim, I'm not expecting cartwheels, but I am your father Alvin said. He was standing a little too close to Big Jim who struck the man down with a hard right across the chin of this blasted man with his infamous remark about being his father."

Alan stood back up on his feet, exposing his boot where a stocking gun and a Bowie knife with a serrated edge were clearly visible. As he reached for his weapon, the Butte stepped on his hand, stopping him from killing the man.

"You're not my father."

Big Jim said to the man, spitting off to one side. Alvin's gut reaction didn't go well with the Butte either. His quick and impulsive temper hadn't changed a bit over the last ninety years or so, and the Butte wasn't having any of it,

"He's not your son, Alvin, and if you ever raise a hand to him again I'll see that he gets his revenge. You got that? Are we clear?"

"Yeah, we're clear,"

Alvin said.

“Let him deal.”

Big Jim said, and the Butte had agreed. She definitely didn't want him sitting next to her in an all-out epic card game that needed a level head and a cool hand if they wanted to come out on top. They all agreed to the victor goes the spoils. The scrolls and who gets what would be decided upon before the game. They would have to give the first pick to the winner, the one who had the most money, and the second pick would go to second place. And of course the remaining piece of the magical scrolls would go to the final and last-place win.

“A six-deck shoe?”

Jeremiah had said.

“I want a royal match bet of three to one, and ten times the winning bet for a royal match which turned out to be any king and queen combination that occupied the same suite. The next thing I want is that you can split as many times as you want, you can double down after splitting, and you can split pairs as many times as you want. There will be no rule that you have to match the bet that you originally placed on the table when splitting your hand. You can bet high or low and there will be no minimum and no maximum limit as to the amount of money that can be bet at any one hand. Surrender would be an option, but insurance would not.”

There was no insurance against the house getting a blackjack. They would use a six-deck shoe that was shuffled by hand and then placed into an automatic shuffler. Once the cards were shuffled, the shoe would be cut in order of the direction that the cards were being dealt and separated at the bottom of the shoe, about an inch up from the bottom of the stack. That meant about an eighth of a six-deck shoe, which worked out to be somewhere around just under a full deck before the cards were to be shuffled again.

That would leave enough cards in the shoe to finish any given hand, but would give a good thorough run of the cards. After all, six players had a chance to cut the deck one time, and the final shoe had run out of cards, the person with the most chips could decide first and so on. Each player would be given a token that would match the amount of money that was wagered on a person's last hand before they went broke. Sort of like a second chance, but it was only worth the same amount of money as your final wager. If you kept your wager button throughout the entire game and you still had it at the end of the tournament, then your winnings would be considered double.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

There would only be three stacks of twenty chips handed out to each player. A single stack of white, red, and finally green, which meant a stack of dollar, five dollars, and twenty-five dollar chips for a total of \$620 for each player at the table. They would draw cards from a deck at the start of the tournament. The first six cards out of the shoe were going to determine the betting order, or more practically stated—what seat they would occupy. To see who would receive the first card, a raffle-type betting system was put into play. Every player had to pull a number out of a hat before they sat down at the table for the first time. Then the single card would be dealt to each player in that order and they would all take their seats to begin playing the game. First, though, they had to convince the natives that Jeremiah and Big Jim had something to offer.

“Why should we bother? It’s only a matter of time before we catch that Dixon girl, Tabitha, and make her squeal!”

Once they had that, they didn’t need anyone else— those black people or the white man. Hunting Sticks Madison had convinced the leaders of the Indian nation that they needed the part of the scrolls that Tabitha possessed, but they weren’t about to budge on their position of wanting to just go to war and take what they wanted. After all, they would just have to take it back from those who had already stolen what was rightfully theirs. Hunting Sticks was able to convince Cousin Mike to come down off of his perch and listen to what the man was saying. If they did win, then they could have the Well, and if they didn’t, they could always revert back to Plan A. It was a no-lose situation. At least that’s how the desperate Time Walkers were willing to portray it—as being putting every man on equal terms. Besides, it sounded like fun. And bring some candles Big Jim shouted as Hunting Sticks Madison was leaving the conversation to find Cousin Mike. He’d said,

“The two of them would be right down within the hour, and if this were some kind of ambush, nobody would walk out of there alive. There were going to be snipers posted throughout the area, covering the casino from the rooftops of the surrounding buildings.”

But the tallest building belonged to Big Jim. The Intrepid Star was the tallest of the downtown businesses, and he had a few trained gunmen of his own—like Mr. Chin, for instance. That meant Jeremiah had to come up with a new partner to play with in the tournament, and it just so happened that Tabitha herself had been able to

make a guest appearance in downtown White Horse. She was just in time to represent her family in this epic, no holds-bared competition that would last well into the night. So, there was Hunting Sticks Madison and Cousin Mike pitted up against Big Jim Dailey and his lovely daughter/mother the Butte. And last but not least, Jeremiah, who was pretty much down and out with his team being made up of Tabitha. But Georgia Dixon wasn't going to allow the scrolls to become a part of the Native American heritage just yet, or go to Alvin "The Fly"

Richardson, as he had been called by the mob for his ability to lose his identity, sort of like a fly on the wall might be. It was around a quarter to eleven when the final party finally showed up. Cousin Mike and Hunting Sticks had made their way through the darkened casino all the way to the back of the establishment where the game was already set up and ready to play.

"Here's some candles."

Hunting Sticks said. He would be the one doing all the talking.

Cousin Mike was just there to play his cards.

"Light them up please?"

Alvin requested, and Big Jim followed to light the candles one by one with his gold-plated Zippo lighter. After a few short turns on the wheel, a steady flame began to burn on the wet wick of the lighter, bringing each candle into light,

"So what's the deal?"

Cousin Mike spoke up.

Big Jim slowly began to explain to Cousin Mike and, of course, Hunting Sticks the rules and regulations of this blackjack tournament. Once they had heard what the man had to say, they agreed to be a part of it.

"Did you bring your section the scrolls?"

Cousin Mike slowly reached into his coat and about ten people began to draw on the man, shouting for him to get down on the ground. Once they had them both on the floor they were patted down and searched for weapons. These primitive natives wanted nothing more than to shoot them all down, even though none of them seemed to be very proficient with a handgun,

"There, now that's more like it!"

The Butte spoke.

"Now, is everybody ready to begin? Then draw your number."

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

She held out one of Big Jim's forty-gallon hats that he'd usually wear for luck, and since it was his establishment, he was well within his rights. After the numbers were dawn by everybody, Big Jim retrieved his lucky hat and gently placed it atop his head, adjusting it by pulling on it from the sides and then moving the brow down in the front. Brittany was even allowed in on the action after coming downstairs after she'd been woken up by gunfire. She was now dressed and coming downstairs since it seemed the coast was clear.

As he spotted her slowly walking over to him, she asked, "Why is the power out?"

"Don't worry about that right now. Do me a favor and serve these people some drinks and make sure that they're taken care of for snacks, drinks, and cigarette. The Butte let it be known that it would cost a person a full dollar out of their pile to buy a drink, and a pack of cigarettes was going to cost you a red chip. That being said, nobody was allowed to smoke their own cigarettes during the game."

At least, nobody but the Time Walker dealer Alvin Richardson, but that was only because he wasn't playing in the game himself. The order of seating was going to start with chair one on the left-hand side of the dealer in the first base position, and rotate all the way around to the other side of the table, where the last person would sit in that spot widely known by blackjack players as "third base"—and probably the most important place on the entire table. He would be the one that would ultimately decide the outcome of the dealer's hand—whether the dealer drew a bust card after showing a small card on top of his hold card that he kept hidden face down under his top card. Or whether he would take a card in an attempt to salvage the table when the dealer was showing a high card. It was all left up to the player who sat in that seat. After they pulled their ticket number out of the hat, the first ticket went to the most appropriate positioning in the entire game, which was to be first base. Next to him on his left was the second spot on the table drawn by Tabitha, then Big Jim, who would sit in the middle of the table alongside the Butte, who sat next to Jeremiah. Jeremiah currently held the third base position on the far right-hand side after drawing number six out of the hat.

Now, a single card would decide the pecking order. Six cards were dealt face up in front of the players one by one in a clockwise motion around the table, starting with Cousin Mike and working its way around to where Jeremiah was sitting. The first card dealt was a

deuce, pretty much guaranteeing Cousin Mike the seat that he was already in. Next it was the five of spades, representing Tabitha's position on the table. Next out of the gate was Big Jim, who ended up with an eight and the Butte with a queen. And finally an ace was handed down to Jeremiah, leaving the players in the same positions in which they'd started out,

"Now, everybody must put their prize up for grabs. That means you, Jeremiah, Tabitha, and Hunting Sticks must couch up a section to the machine."

After Tabitha laid the keys to her safety deposit box on the table, the Indians were still reluctant. Same thing with Jeremiah. But after a few minute of silence, Jeremiah produced his section of the scrolls out from under his jacket. Then there was the all-too-familiar sound of a revolver's hammer as it was brought all the way back. It was the sound of a snub-nosed thirty-eight special, or the Saturday night special as it was more widely known. It was carried by the police for many years and by criminals of all varieties, too, for its reliability. And the number of rounds you could carry and refill with the removal of one cylinder full of empty bullets, immediately having the capability to attach another one to the weapon and start firing again. It was also fairly easy to shoot and could hit a target at close range with a lot of stopping power. And one was now pressed to the back of Cousin Mike's head. The person who was standing behind him was Brittany,

"Where's your piece of the scrolls?"

She said,

Just as Cousin Mike began to draw his weapon. A semi-automatic nine millimeter hand gun Hunting Sticks began to say,

"Take it easy now! Put the gun away."

Then Cousin Mike began to say,

"The guy who works here. My cousin Dusty Leaves has it. We thought the best way to keep them safe from the rest of the tribe or anybody else for that matter would be to put it right under your noses! Nobody would ever look for it down here in The Intrepid Star. Silence broke out amongst the crowd, and very softly Brittany spoke up and just then as she said,

"Alan Madison is dead."

"And then automatically the blackjack table was turned over in the blink of an eye, shocking and distracting everyone in the room.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

After a loud grunt, all the chips, cards, their drinks, and candles were dumped all over the floor as Cousin Mike went berserk. He was able to distract Brittany by scaring her for an instant that gave him the upper hand. He held her from behind, gripping her thirty-eight special and twisting it from her hand. Turns out the safety was on, so the trigger never went off. And it was still off when he tried to execute Brittany right then and there. Before anyone knew what to do, Cousin Mike found the safety mechanism on the weapon and gently flipped the switch from left to right. And he was suddenly struck directly between the eyes by a well-placed shot by Jeremiah's Glock forty-four. At that point nobody in that room moved a muscle.

"Now what are we going to do?"

Big Jim asked as he picked up a candle by the light of his trusty old Zippo lighter and lit its wick.

"Hunting Sticks is going to have to have a partner. Why not Walter Grandt? He has a stake in this whole mess too! He could even be considered as on your side, since if he had a piece of the Well, you would be the first person that he would come to, right?"

"Get him on the phone."

Big Jim said to nobody in particular, while pointing over to the bar,

"I got this, boss."

Alvin said to his son. He'd accepted him for what he was, and left

It at that,

"Where's the prize?"

The Butte had said, turning to Hunting Sticks. She still wanted to know where the Indians' section of the scrolls was,

"Where's the what?"

Hunting Sticks replied, his eyes squinted and his back bowed downwards at the shoulders like he was leaning over, out of breath and panting for air. Then before anybody could get the least bit suspicious about the fact that he was actually the spirit of Georgia Dixon hiding beneath Hunting Sticks body. Hunting Sticks began to say,

"As far as I know, it's still on the boy. He still has it with him, or at least I hope he still has it, anyway."

This thing still had to end in a civilized manner because if the Shoshone Indians decided to raid the town in search of something they felt should belong to them, then the gun battle would be back

on. And then nobody would get out of this ordeal alive! Sure enough, the boy had it on him, tucked down into a cotton pouch with a drawstring that had been taped to his lower calf for safekeeping. After a few short phone calls, Walter was made aware of the situation and was ordered by Big Jim make an appearance. He also told him to “bring his, “A-game.”

Upon Walter’s arrival, he refused to sit down at the table until he’d had his coffee because he’d been sound asleep when they called. Scrolls or no scrolls, he was going to have his coffee. That gave them time to put the game back into its proper order. Walter would take the first seat position at the table to sit in for Cousin Mike, who wasn’t quite with them anymore at that time.

There was obviously a lot of bad blood circling around this table, so most people tended to keep to their selves unless they had a question for the dealer. Or if they maybe wanted to say something to one of their team members. You have to remember: in blackjack, you play against the dealer. Everyone does, so you all have to communicate in order to win! Nobody wanted to reach the end of the last shoe and have no money left over, but with six full shoes of cards and only three stacks of chips, that was going to be a very large possibility. Unless you were betting a very small amount of money at a time or you bet a lot of money up front and then decreased the amount wagered on each hand. But you never really knew when it was time to strike! They were all very familiar with the game, except maybe Tabitha, who seemed to be turning out to be the weakest link. Her and Hunting Sticks, too, who was supposed to know how to play the game? And when she kept asking stupid questions about it, people began to wonder,

“He’s just trying to throw us off!”

Jeremiah would say while trying to get Georgia to keep her mouth shut.

Big Jim said.

“Just go over the rules one more time for Hunting Sticks, because it’s obvious to me that he’s on something.”

And just before Big Jim could say,

“Then maybe we should just end the game...”

Jeremiah almost exploded. He started shouting about Hunting Sticks’ condition was his own damn fault and that,

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

“He was plenty awake and aware of his surroundings to play the game the way he was right now!!”

And they left it at that. So it was finally time to deal. By now everybody was a little bit anxious with butterflies in their tummies as the dealer began to say,

“Well, now. It looks like we all have our positions decided, and the betting must begin! Good luck to all of you, and remember to keep only one hand on the table at any given time. The cards will be bet face-up, except for the dealer, who will not expose his hold card. Tapping requires that I give you a card, and a simple wave of the hand means that you want to play. Now, that’s two taps, mind you, if you want a card. Okay?”

And nobody spoke.

“Now let the games begin.”

Then the Butte spoke up.

“The first round of drinks is on me!”

Then, she asked Brit to,

“Bring everybody at the table a drink of their choice.”

Corona and Bud Light were the two drinks ordered most frequently throughout the night. Except for Jeremiah, who insisted on having a mixed drink? That was considered going out on a limb because somebody could put whatever they wanted into that drink when it was brought over in an open glass instead of a bottle with a cap on top of it. But he stuck with his infamous rum and Coke anyway. Now he’d flushed out the Indian who had killed his little girl and he’d even collected the scrolls from his dead and soon-to-be buried hand (or leg, for that matter). And he had the opportunity of having two out of the three scrolls to the Well of the Eternal in one place. It was hopefully just a matter of time before they had them all in place. Just like they did before Delaney, Georgia, and Cameron had all died due to the inner workings of that Well. Jeremiah wanted his family back, but not the way it was right now. He wanted everything to be the same as it was when this whole thing started back on the Bare Mason Ranch in the fall of 2004. Only this time, with his entire family still intact and in their original bodies. So they could all be one big, happy family again.

Including his father who he’d so viciously killed as he drank from the Well of the Eternal so many years before. If it hadn’t been for that bowling ball of a rock that had just so happened to have been

sitting next to the Well. The one that he had used to take the life of another human being in an attempt to claim the Well for himself from some other Time Walker who was unfortunate enough to have been murdered right there as they drank, God knows how many years in the past. It wasn't fair, and he only wished that he could take it back. Not for himself, but for others, like his father and for Georgia who'd been made to suffer for all those years and was now trapped inside another person's body. Not to mention his poor daughter who'd been undeservingly tortured before being brutally beaten to death by wild-eyed gold-seekers and powerless, money-hungry low-lives, who knew nothing of the Well but what they could get out of it.

They knew nothing of the importance of the Mighty Companion and of the Well itself and the role that it had played in the existence of all life on Earth. Now, all that mattered was that it was once again put to rest. Sealed up until the time had come for another generation of Time Walkers. For it is their destiny to once again find the Well and drink from its bounty, starting the battle between good and evil once again raging within the inner worlds of all mankind in a bid by the dead to force the hands of the Lord into allowing them through the heavenly gates without first paying their dues?

These souls were granted, through spiritual law, a trial so that they could once again be judged. If they had not progressed then they wouldn't be allowed to reincarnate back into another life here on planet Earth, but had to be kept hidden in the rafters of the physical world until they had been found worthy of another life on this plane. Or until they had been set free from the worlds between worlds and finally move on into the higher worlds that lay above this one. Granting the dead who were stuck here between worlds the ability to finally move on was the original purpose of the Well as it was designed at the beginning of time. It was the giver of life and the savior of humanity after death.

It was for them that Jeremiah would now fight, and maybe, if he got lucky along the way, he might even have a chance to say good-bye one last time to his beloved daughter. She was now a trapped soul ready to move on or be allowed a body for another life in the human existence that makes up mankind itself. If she progressed in that life she would finally be able to continue on into the god worlds above. First things first, though. Right now, all of the Time Walkers were

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

sitting ducks for the Indian Nation who had set up snipers on the rooftops above the city streets and planned on ambushing the Time Walkers. They were out for blood and it was only a matter of minutes until the Indians inside the casino were supposed to radio back and let everybody outside know the plan was still in effect. If they hadn't heard back from them soon, the orders were to "collect the scrolls from the building and kill everybody else inside. They didn't fully trust Hunting Sticks, after him being one of them in the past. Besides, they had killed his ex-wife Cameron. She had divorced him, not the other way around, and he was probably still in love with her. Because she could've easily been swayed in the other direction long enough to get revenge for the death of his beloved ex-wife and the mother of his child, Red Hawk,

"You shouldn't have done that, Jeremiah. Stupid ass!"

Hunting Sticks said not to happily.

"Now that you've come across as some type of loose cannon, how am I supposed to get our children back from the tribe while they're still alive? Do you know how many men there are outside waiting for us to come out into the street?"

"Head count."

Jeremiah said into his sleeve, and then they could hear some type of communications device come back from Mr. Chin up on the roof.

"Twelve. Come back? "Copy code 4."

"Stand by."

"Copy that."

The radio said.

"Twelve."

Jeremiah said to his mother, Hunting Sticks, who now appeared to be in the prime of his life.

"You're one of them, too, aren't you?"

Big Jim wanted to know. With a short glance in his direction, she said nothing and walked right past him, taking a seat over at the dimly lit surface of the full-service bar."

"Let's all have a drink, shall we? Come sit at the bar!"

Britany said. She motioned everybody over to join her. Looking for a little company from the people who had made White Horse the town that it is and always had been up to this very day. And now,

with a small measure of uncertainty, the odds had swung in the opposite direction. Now it was they who were being stalked. It was finally them who had become the prey, and on no uncertain terms was any one of them going to get out of this place alive, unless it was from the power that was vested in the scrolls. They would have to turn to them for direction. They would have to think positively and creatively if they wanted to solve this problem: an enemy with little compassion for its adversaries and no mercy. Intoxicated by the fever of the Well, they would never stop at just obtaining the scrolls. At this point, nobody really needed them anymore because the location and incantations of the well were already being made to be common knowledge and the location no longer a secret. They just needed to keep them out of the hands of any of the other factions that were searching for the well.

Besides, the banshees would bombard their enemy until they existed no more. Then and only then would it be over with. Then and only then would it be complete. Those men out there knew that the keys to the security box in Carson City were in that casino right along with the rest of the paraphernalia that went along with learning how to use the power of the Well of the Eternal, either to one's own advantage, which is against spiritual law, or for the good of the many, which is why it was created in the first place. To free those souls that had accumulated over a period of centuries, to finally have a chance to pit the good of the many against the will of a few who want to have the Well all for themselves. Just then there was a rumbling. Just real faint at first, making a small amount of dust come down out of the ceiling and drizzled onto the wooden dance floor. Hunting Sticks was standing there at the bar, closest to the dust falling onto the floor. Holding on to the back of the bar chairs and looking up at the ceiling!

"That can't be good!"

Rosenthal said.

There were a few more seconds of silence before there was another moment of rumbling that came up from out of the ground. It was followed by a large squealing noise, and then an almighty crash over by the front desk that could've only been the hotel's elevator crashing down to the ground level and slamming full-speed into the emergency brakes. But the weight of the carriage was too much to stop the bottom of the elevator from crashing all the way down into the basement level, where it exploded through the elevator door.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

Then the roof itself began to collapse. Not over the casino floor, but the one at the very top level of the building! Mr. Chin barely had time to see it coming his way. A very bright light flew overhead, lighting up the town as if it were midday, and then it hit. It started out as a wave that crossed the roof at an alarming rate, collapsing from behind, it rippled at him from across the roof heading in his direction for only a short second or two. Then it picked him up and tossed him over the edge of the building. As he fell, he managed to grasp the edge, but it only slowed him down for a second before his hand slipped and he plummeted a few stories before landing hard on the edge of somebody's balcony. As the building continued to crumble and the ground began to rumble and give way, people started running out into the streets, screaming and waving their hands in the air as they struggled to keep their balance.

The old-style steel platform with its rod-iron guard railing acted as a metal cage, and as the building fell, the balcony broke his fall, crushing the limousine below which softened the blow. Gunfire began to erupt as people were gunned down in the streets. Amidst the confusion, people began to exit the buildings that lined the four-lane section of Highway 6 which was called Allister Street as it made its way through the small curbs and gentle hills that made up the town's downtown area. The Indian gunmen who were causing most of the gunfire were perched atop the buildings lining the main drag.

Same as Reginald Chin. As he fell, so did the others, and now the ground had given way, splitting the road in half as a visible ripple swept through town destroying everything in its path. Half the building had already collapsed, and the other half was on its way, which razed the entire downtown area to the ground. Fires began to break out and the sound of sirens filled the air. Then there was another flash that lit up the sky as it flew overhead and crashed into the ground just south of town, causing another large wave of destruction and what felt like a sonic boom.

The Cavern of the Well came crashing down, sealing up the entrance to the Well. The strong arched ceiling that was constructed out of a single chunk of solid granite protected the Well itself, but now it was buried well below the surface of the ground. Whether, or not the main entrance to the Well had survived was yet to be seen, but as the town lay, the people who lived there were going to be in for the fight of their lives just to survive the night. The spirits of the

dead were released from their confinement within the holy ground that once protected the living from the dead! Cameron had found herself sitting up in her bed, gasping for air, because she felt like somebody was choking the life out of her. Like somebody had a rope around her neck. She began to scream but the sound wouldn't come out, causing her to panic even more!"

Finally, after jumping up and running into the bathroom she was able to catch her breath. The hands of death finally seemed to loosen their grip around her windpipe. Sweating profusely, she fell to the bathroom floor as Hunting Sticks finally caught up with Cameron. Pulling the clothes from her body and placing her in a warm shower, Hunting Sticks tried to revive her by tapping her on the cheek and calling out her name. She finally came around again and she saw who was with her and noticed what was happening around her. It had all been a terrible dream, and she had finally woken up from it. But she insisted that it was all real.

"I have woken up from a dream within a dream!"

Hunting Sticks held her for a few more minutes until she stopped trembling, and then he got her up and got her dressed, telling her "

"Come downstairs and have some breakfast with the family."

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

LAST REMANENCE OF THE WELL

It had all been a premonition. After she was fired from her job and left Mr. Chin's office, she had apparently made it home. She took a few Xanax pills and drifted off, never imagining that she would have such an experience as the one she had just had. Where the line between what was real and what was just a dream? She couldn't tell.

All she knew was that she had to get out of the house before the people who abducted her caught up with her once again! It was as if God himself had bent the doorway of time, allowing her to choose her fate. One where she trusted and believed in the premonitions that she'd had or one where she'd write them all off as the delusions of a madman? This was something so real, yet so hard to explain. All she knew was that she had to get her and her son out of this house. Hunting Sticks should not have been there and she didn't trust him one bit. That was Georgia Dixon in there, and she knew that she was out for blood. She was going to see to it that Walter Grandt paid for what he'd done to her once and for all. Then, if she had to, she would end this pathetic life, and finally be able to move on after bringing life back to the Well.

If she did that, she could be freed from her curse one more time.

Drinking from the Well the last time only immortalized the body that she was in now. Taking that away would have to be done after the spirits of the Well had finally moved on. That was her motivation for returning to the Well and making it right. Cameron insisted that Hunting Sticks leave before she called the cops on him. Even though it was Georgia, she still had a restraining order against him. As she left, Cameron began packing up a few things. She was going to take Red Hawk to Plain View fifty miles to the south on

alternate Highway 6, which ended in Plain View. Tabitha was also there, hiding out on Appalachian Pony Horse Ranch that Cameron had purchased outright. She won that along with the custody of her son, Red Hawk, in the landslide divorce proceedings that would've buried Hunting Sticks in lawyer fees and court costs.

She also demanded that Tabitha give her the keys to the safety deposit box, trying to explain just how it was that she knew what was going to happen. Tabitha had no choice but to listen. The mine had been shut down, and the majority of the gold ended up in the possession of the Mexican Consulate. She'd squandered the rest on extravagant cruise vacations where she spent just about everything betting on number twelve. She was lucky she was able to get out when she did and was actually able to smuggle two cans of paint away from the factory. Each one worth around twenty-five thousand.

But in the condition it was in, it needed to be separated from the water and clay mixture, which was a simple process of heating the substance to a certain temperature so the chemical pollutants would burn off and the heated clay would sink to the bottom, allowing the gold to be poured off of the top of the clay. But she had no idea how to complete that process, let alone be able to translate that into dollars. If they knew how to properly forge the gold into jewelry, they might have something with that amount of raw, unsmelted gold. But the process eluded them. The only thing of value that they had was this horse ranch, and the only way to keep it up was through hard work.

There were twelve horses that had to be tended to and the hay fields needed to be planted and harvested. They had the proper farm equipment, but it was hard work to make a go of it. A person had to have a fair amount of knowledge to complete a harvest, and of course then there was the need to feed and care for the animals. They also needed exercise, and all of that ended up costing money. Sure, the ranch had moneymaking potential, but they were going to have to take a risk and hire a helping hand. It wasn't long after Alvin had settled into his new life in White Horse before he asked the Butte to marry him and finally give him full U.S. citizenship. But he went through the proper channels before he said anything. First, he had to get the blessing of his son, Big Jim. The one who ran the place.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

It was a matter of respect to the family. Alvin wasn't in charge and by allowing him to marry his daughter, Big Jim would be extending a favor to Alvin. One he was going to have to pay back. Big Jim didn't exactly like Alvin. He had disrespected him before, and if it weren't for his mother, the man would be out on his ass. When he did finally approach Big Jim about the subject, Big Jim wasn't going to let this little weasel pin him down to some type of an agreement. Alvin had nothing to offer Big Jim, and for him to even consider such a thing, he was going to let Alvin know he was doing him a favor.

And it came with a warning:

"Don't mess things up on the casino floor, because you're going to have to sign an agreement that you're entitled to nothing if and when you decide to split. After he gained his citizenship, Rhonda could throw him away at any time. Plus, Big Jim wanted that \$250,000 that he had left over from his race day winnings and from the sale of that truckload of illegal firearms to the Shoshone Indian nation on the black market. When Alvin finally did propose to Big Jim's mother—for the second time—she would require a really nice engagement ring. In the form of his \$250,000 windfall.

That was the agreement, and if she accepted, there was going to have to be a wedding ring of equal or more value as compared to the engagement ring. Alvin just about blew his top when Big Jim laid it all out, but Alvin bit his tongue. And even though he was red in the face, he smiled and shook Big Jim's hand and actually kissed his ring as a show of respect. He couldn't believe it! His own son telling him what he could and couldn't do! How ironic! But he still loved the Butte, and his job here at The Intrepid Star was the only thing left that he could call his own. He was working under the table, for God's sake, and was given a free tab at the bar, in the coffee shop, and at the hotel front desk. Everything else he needed he had to ask for. He was given a \$350 allowance every month for clothes mostly, and of course to try his luck gambling in the casino or at the bar where he spent most of his time drinking free beer.

The blackjack tournament to end all blackjack tournaments was scheduled for New Year's Eve 2016, which was right around the corner. It was already late October and little did Alvin know (or if he had at one time, he'd forgotten) that Halloween was also Nevada Day around these parts. There was always going to be a big celebration

with a ten-minute fireworks show and the whole nine yards. The casino was going to be packed thanks to the excitement of the events coordinator, Vince, talking this year's celebration up. He talked about how great this year was going to be and how this year was supposed to be the biggest celebration of them all! He expected the whole town and even boys from out on the reservation to show up to dance, drink, and have a good time,

"This year is going to be great!"

The said quite excitedly. When promoted, Alvin just stood there, and the guy was asking him if he was okay. Because he had a lost look in his eyes and seemed to be somewhere else at the moment. After a few long seconds Alvin spoke up.

"Sure, sure, it's going to be great!"

He said without much excitement with an almost dazed and confused look upon his father's face.

"Excuse me for a second, would you."

Vince Alvin asked. He'd just remembered. The canteen. The one that he had brought with him out of the Well's chamber. He had hidden it in the room that the two of them had shared that night when this place had only been open about fifteen or twenty years. Back when it was all made of wood with a brick facade and cement stone pillars that held the center of the building up and kept the upper floors from crashing down into the lobby. He had left it hidden in the wall of the room they were in. He had removed the bottom board of the window pane, exposing a gap that was created between the brick facade on the outer shell of the building and an old wood panel that used to be the inside covering of the wall. That wood had been covered in a modern-day sheet rock after one of its many restorations since it was built in 1903.

The renovations had never removed the window panes. They just replaced the glass in the framing that was still part of the original construction. No reason to remove and replace something that was still intact. It just cost extra dollars and the contractors had said it would also take away some of that old-building style that the building had become so famous for. Finding the room and recovering the artifact was going to be a challenge! The interior of the hotel had changed over the years. Back then everything was made of wood, brick, and concrete where huge rock-and-mortar support columns protected the open hotel lobby, which ran the length of the building. Its ceiling on

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

the main floor at ground level was two stories high with rooms that ran the entire circumference of the hotel, lining the outer walls, with first floor rooms having balconies above that also ran the whole way around the outer walls. A bar occupied the wall on the left side of the gigantic lobby just under the balcony of the rooms above it on the second floor.

To get to the higher levels of the hotel there were staircases, which were still intact, along with a metal fire escape out the back. Today, they also had a modern-day elevator for guests to conveniently traverse the entire hotel, casino, and restaurant. The restaurant was constructed in the center of the room on something of a second-story island that reached up from the center of the lobby into a restaurant surrounded on all sides with a wooden deck, which the slot machines and cashiers' cage were now fitted beneath. With its cedar-wood posts and solid oak construction back in the day, the casino was quite extravagant for its time. Things had changed over the years, but somewhere in the walls of this building, lay a canteen filled with the Water Well of the Eternal's bounty. It would be invaluable to him if he could find it again. His time had finally come. Even The Butte didn't know about the canteen.

He'd just poured her a shot after falling in love with her that fateful evening. After being run out of town by Jeremiah Dixon, Alvin knew his secret would be kept. He just had a feeling about it. His time would come, and he had forever to figure out a way to get back into that hotel and find the canteen's secret hiding place. If he hadn't been so drunk that night he might have remembered more details about it now, but when Vince reminded him of Nevada Day, things just started to click. He had stored the canteen in room number I03I, or at least that was the marker that he'd left inlaid in the door frame of the main entrance to that specific room. So, somewhere upstairs he was hoping he could find that door frame, locate the canteen, and discover once again the power of the Well for himself. This time he was going to be in control. And that son of his, well he was going to have to learn to respect his father and realize that, "Hey, dad's not such a slouch after all, and if it weren't for him, I would have never even been born."

That was the kind of respect that he was demanding, and when he found that canteen he would make sure that he got it too! But before that, Alvin wanted to finish this wedding business. He

truly loved the Butte and always had. Yet, he knew he had to keep his distance on this one. Right now he had to find an acceptable engagement ring. A one-of-a-kind ring unique enough that it would tell people that this ring was made only for her. It would have to be an exquisite diamond, a masterfully done piece, with the right cut and clarity, not to mention the karat weight that the ring must command. But this was supposed to be an engagement ring only. The wedding ring itself would have to be a diamond of nature and type, but the initial ring would have to have some rubies, sapphires, or maybe even an emerald or two. He knew enough to know Jeremiah Dixon probably had the stone he needed. Maybe, after all these years, they could finally see eye to eye about what had happened. Maybe even be friends for the first time. Something that Alvin desperately needed at this point in his life.

He felt all alone. Even when he was finally completely surrounded by his family, he seemed all alone. And that was starting to bother him. He was fine as long as he stayed away and kept a safe distance between himself and them. Because the thought of what happened between them still hurt to this very day. Maybe coming back here wasn't the smartest thing to do but he was stuck here now, whether he liked it or not! Where else was he supposed to go? Become a mountain man? He didn't think so. That meant he had to stay put, even if he wasn't emotionally detached from the situation at hand. What he needed to do was stop over at The Lonely River Pass Bar and Grill in Cherry Creek. A place that he had actually never been in before. This was going to be his first time, and as expected, he wasn't going to travel unarmed, but he was going to be on horseback. He'd stop at The Horseman's Ranch that Big Jim's family had owned since the beginning of time, pick out a worthy steed, saddle up, and ride it on down into the heart of Cherry Creek.

All the way down to the end of town where The Lonely River Pass was located. He picked up a horse that he guessed they called Mattie, because that's what it read above the horse's stall. He'd seen the horse when he first got in. They were just bringing him in from his walk around the corral on a circular trail laid down by the horses as they were pulled forward by a motorized engine connected to a long pole that gently walked the horses around. It gave them the exercise they needed to stay fit,

“Afternoon...”

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

Alvin said as he pulled up to the corral in his 1986 Ford Ranger with the six-cylinder motor, the larger of the two made for that model that year. Brittany was usually the one who drove that vehicle, and the horse trainer working with the animals that day was a little shocked to see a stranger,

“Kalvin here?”

Alvin asked the man as he pulled up to the side of him,

“Who’s asking?”

The man said?

“Tell him Alvin’s here!”

He was shouting,

“What’s that, mister the man asked several times!”

Alvin kept saying over and over to him.

“Alvin?”

“That’s what I said!”

“Kalvin?”

The man kept insisting,

“Never mind that. Tell him Big Jim sent...”

“What did you say your name was again?”

“AL.”

“Yeah, I’ll go get him. Just hang on a minute then the man slid up onto the back of a horse and started to ride him bareback over to where a large cylindrical metal building was standing. One of the ones “The General”

metal building looked like with their polished steel siding that was painted a dark brown mahogany color that went well with the mountains in the background. Next thing, you could see the two men exit the open door of the building, and the horse trainer was saying something and pointing in the direction of the truck. The other man, who must’ve been Kalvin, started to wave Alvin over. So, he pulled the truck around, stopping in front to the steel building, and tried to explain what he was doing, “Never mind that Kalvin interrupted.”

“Take what you want, just have it back by sunup. The lock on the gate is twenty-eight left three times, thirty-six twice to the right, and sixteen one spin in the opposite direction. That should get you in. Got that, mister?”

“Yeah...”

“Get a move on, I ain’t got all day!”

After parking the truck somewhere out in the open off to the one side so that it wouldn't be in anybody's way, he walked over to the stable and went inside. There was a horse he recognized as the one that had just come in from the exercise corral, and that was the horse he wanted. A fresh horse, by the looks of it. One that already had its energy up. He didn't want one that was lazy, as was often the case with modern-day ranch animals. People just didn't have the time to ride them all that often. The only reason he wanted to show up on horseback anyway was to make an impression. One that only a Time Walker from the past could possibly understand. The gesture said to people

"I recognize your seniority, and I respect it as being successful."

It wasn't but a twenty-five-minute ride down the unpaved access roads that zig-zaged their way around the fenced-off fields of hay, alfalfa, and grazing live stock. Not to mention, of course, a few horses scattered here and there. This was cattleman country. That was apparent. The difference between Jeremiah and Alvin was that Alvin knew everything there is to know about geology, minerals, rocks, and all the different types of soil content. What they were good for, if it was precious, or if it was not. He was looking for something from the Well, or at least something that had come out of the ground from that area, and Delaney Dixon's hidden mine shaft was perfect for finding the exactly right stone for this project. Alvin, with his wide knowledge of stuff like this, was a perfect combination with Jeremiah's booty. Alvin knew everything that there was to know about metallurgy, and gold-smiting.

He knew exactly how to separate the different metals with their different levels of oxygen molecules that made some metals lighter than others. Gold was the softest and lightest of all, so it would rise to the top just like the cream does in a gallon of milk. Everything below that would glow, but with a different color and consistency. The trick was to know when to stop pouring or you would end up right back where you started with a lot of nickel and chrome that would mix back in with the purest of gold. You wanted to leave a small amount of gold behind guaranteeing the cleanest metal possible. Of course, you had to know how much nickel to mix in to keep the gold from being too supple and to make sure it was strong enough to wear as a necklace, earrings, wedding band, or whatever it needed to

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

be. But you had to have enough gold to make it quite beautiful and valuable. The evening sun slipped behind the mountains in the West, casting beams of orange and purple across the sky.

BREAKING THROUGH HEARTACHE

The wind was calm, but there was a definite chill in the air. The sound of crickets filled the world with their familiar song that is hardly noticeable unless you're paying attention to them. In that case, they were as loud as the traffic that echoed off the freeways and highways of the big city of Chicago.

It had been a long time since he had been out West but he was no stranger to the great outdoors. And these conditions were nothing compared to the isolated areas of the Alaskan outback, and definitely nothing like the city! Not at all. Nor would it ever be. He would have to get used to living around here. The last time he was out West was when he lived with his father in Carson City, which looks nothing like it used to, so he would have to get acquainted with the territory and the people who lived in it. In full riding regalia, he dismounted and tied Mattie to the front porch of The Lonely River Pass. He pushed his way through the double-hinged double doors and slowly walked inside. The sound of his black leather steel-toe harness riding boots sounded like the thousandth drop in a tank where he was bound for Chinese water torture. The sound seemed to resonate and become louder as he approached the bar in what appeared to the local patrons as slow motion. Almost like time had stood still for this man.

The place was fairly crowded, but Alvin wasn't there looking for trouble (even though he had two semiautomatic handguns hidden beneath his full-length black leather trench coat). He had been able to attain his attire and tack from The River Bend Holiday Park Horse Racetrack. Big Jim had called over and told Walter that Alvin was coming, and when he did, Walter was waiting. He was allowed to pick and choose from any of the riding material that they had stored in the stables and back rooms of the establishment. Which was why

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

he needed a pickup truck. It was all Big Jim's idea that he shows up looking like he was trying to be an Old Western cowboy gunslinger. When he arrived, some of the guys occupying the place just couldn't resist leaving their game at the billiards table where they seemed to be playing a game of eight ball.

The first thing Alvin heard as he entered the joint was the crack of the cue ball hitting a freshly cracked set of billiards balls and the not-so-gentle sound of the balls ricocheting off of one another, the outside rails, and even two or three that sounded like they went into a pocket as well. As he glanced over in that direction, he saw a well-built man wearing a leather riding vest, jeans, a tank top undergarment, and a pair of black Adidas running shoes with yellow shoelaces. Maybe six feet, he had a thin black mustache, jet-black hair pulled back into a ponytail, and the olive skin color of somebody from south of the border.

A Mexican, alright. Alvin could tell by the gold chain and pendant in the shape of a cross around his neck, the thick gold Rollo bracelet that he wore along with a pair of gold rings that adorned his pinky finger on the right hand and the wedding finger on the left. He sported a tear drop tattoo under his left eye. The next guy playing the game looked like your common, run-of-the mill ranch hand. He and his white buddy who was sitting at a small circular table that had tall bar stool chairs. Two of them. There were drinks on the table. Some Coronas and what looked to Alvin like a Bloody Mary, as well as several burning cigarettes and a young blonde lady who resembled a rock star with too much eye makeup on. The cue sticks were held by a wooden bracket that hung on the wall with a small shelf on it for some chalk. There was also chalk on the corner of the table, indicating that this wasn't their first game— not to mention the quarters stacked underneath the inside rail where they showed that this group also had the next game.

As the smaller white guy started to move toward the table to take his shot, the Chicano reached over and lightly took his hand. Then he slapped the guy on the front of his left shoulder in an attempt to get his attention. Alvin saw this, as the two billiards guys stopped their game and looked straight over at Alvin. One guy looked at the other, cupped his hand in front of his face as he turned to the other man to say in his ear—something that Alvin couldn't understand. Not because he couldn't speak Spanish, because he could. It

was just that the sound never reached his ears. Although he had a good idea that it probably had something to do with him. His suspicions were confirmed soon after. He walked up to the bar expecting to see Jeremiah standing behind it, but it wasn't. It was Walter Grandt, of all people. Somebody Alvin didn't know. This guy was no stranger to Walter, though. Jeremiah was upstairs watching the whole thing on his closed circuit surveillance system with audio and video, so he could see and hear everything that was going on down there. He had asked Walter to come over for a few hours and help him out, stating,

"I would consider it a favor."

Jeremiah knew it was better to keep his enemies near, which was always a better position than to face off directly against one another where the circumstances could easily become no-win situation for either party. Besides that, what Georgia and her children had gone through at the hands of this man was unforgivable. Even though she had been resurrected.

This situation, however, required someone with an extensive knowledge of the joint, good bar tending skills, and no fear of a fight. And who knew how to handle the customers. First thing Walter did was notice the situation as the man walk through the front door matching the description of the man Jeremiah had provided. After clearing it with Big Jim, he knew just what to do. Walter was just standing there, wiping out some rock glasses as usual. He was constantly wiping things down, cleaning the bottles of liquor, running the industrial steam dishwasher, putting out coasters, and filling the pretzel bowl. Almost like he had an obsession.

The thing was, he did it just to keep busy. To pass the time. It was better than standing around drinking while he was working or sitting on the far end smoking cigarettes, which was something that he didn't do unless it was on his own time. Never on the clock. Because he was the consummate professional and was considered the best bartender in the valley. Which, according to the patrons and bar owners alike, was true. There was no getting around that. Alvin would do this favor for Big Jim in return for, ironically, the favor of protecting him against what Jeremiah wanted to do to him. And he knew it! So there he was. In a soft tone of voice, he spoke up "

"Could I have a bottle of Bud in a cold glass, please He set down a ten-dollar bill and asked for some quarters. He waited for the bartender to return with the drink and the roll of quarters, then he

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

started to play the poker machine. He reached over and placed a dollar on the bartender's drink well on his side of the bar. The bar tender thanked the man and tapped the bar twice showing the camera that he was accepting a tip. Walter turned and put the dollar in his tip jar. It was still the same old brass spittoon that had been in the bar for the last hundred years or so. It even still had the forty-four caliber bullet hole that he and Kal had shot right through it after framing Jeremiah's only daughter, Cameron, for the murder of her best friend's family.

Alvin sat down and put the roll of quarters in the change dish, got another crisp ten-dollar bill, and fed it into the machine. He began to bet max credits while playing his favorite jacks-or-better machine. Amazingly, the machine began to payoff first with a few four-of-a-kinds, which was astoundingly followed up by a progressive win with a royal flush dealt in spades. Alvin looked up at the progressive jackpot sign that was flashing to see what he had won, and it turned out to be \$1,800. As Walter stood there wiping out some ashtrays, he seemed mesmerized by the people over at the pool table who hadn't even begun to finish up their game. Alvin had only been in the place for five minutes and he had already pulled down a \$2,000 win. It wasn't long before the bartender was coming around the outside of the bar to open up the machine to write down on the log the time and amount of the jackpot and his initials as the one who made the payoff. He made up a jackpot slip for \$3,600 and had Alvin sign for it.

"This says thirty-six hundred!"

Alvin gasped,

"It's double jackpot Monday. The last day of the month. And it also happens to be Nevada Day. Now, how do you want that paid?"

"Give it to me later."

"You got it, friend?"

Walter said with a smile! He returned from the second level where Jeremiah had gotten the money out of the safe and signed the jackpot slip, which required at least two signatures plus the customer. Walter didn't have a gaming license in the State of Nevada because he was awaiting trial on the murder conviction of his wife, Georgia. He and Kal both had to post bond and hire lawyers after what Cameron Dixon had done to them a year back, proving they were guilty by law. Tabitha was the one who had the murder weapon and in her plea agreement she had to testify against the two, but since Tabitha's

miraculous escape, because she was still at large, the trial was postponed indefinitely. That left the other two with a small amount of money. Enough to be secure, but not enough to stop working and retire on.

So Walter needed the job, and Jeremiah was happy to have him under his thumb, because after watching this man on camera, it was obvious he needed to keep Walter around. Bad blood or not, he needed good help or else he'd have to pull the weight of keeping the bar open all by himself. The off-hours and strange days of being open were taking their toll on Jeremiah's profits. He needed Walter to help improve his business, and Walter was reliable and loyal to Big Jim, which meant he wouldn't try to steal from the joint as long as Big Jim got his ten percent of the business. He also had to be paid on time and get a reasonably flexible schedule. He didn't want to work overtime, and he was only good for working the swing shift, where all the tips were made. Not graveyard. That would have to be left up to Jeremiah himself. And now Alvin had some type of business proposition for Jeremiah. He was notified by phone that Alvin was going to show up on a horse to,

"Take care of his situation."

Big Jim said.

"I want you to get some good old boys over there just to see what kind of a man Alvin really is. Since he chickened out of every war that was ever fought, according to his mother, Rhonda, it's high time he proves himself physically and show that he isn't a crybaby or a coward when it comes to dealing with rowdy customers."

That's when Jeremiah hired a couple of regulars of the bar, guaranteeing them an open bar tab as long as they paid it in full by the end of the week in return for their trying to see what kind of trouble they could get into with a man dressed as an Old West cowboy. When he came strolling in on horseback and walked around like he owned the place, Walter would give the sign. He wanted to make sure that everyone involved had a few beers before engaging in any type of altercation. The orders were to "hustle the man at eight ball, and if you lose, get your money back the hard way A sanctioned bar fight? These guys couldn't resist.

Maybe once everyone found out they were good for doing favors, the local powers that be would come to them when they needed to have a job done. So the leader of the crew, Poncho, was

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

going to whoop this guy's ass at pool and send him packing! He and his buddy, Secondino, the Italian looking white guy, would be the ones taking care of business. Poncho was good at eight ball but Secondino was the best. He would be the ringer. First they would invite him over to watch a few games, have some beers, and maybe play a little for a relatively small amount of money. Starting off with a wager of "maybe fifty bucks."

"They would say.

"Hay, Holmes, what cha' doing'? Hah boy Poncho whispered in Alvin's ear from behind."

"You wanna play some pool? I mean, all's you're really doin' is just sittin' over here doin' nothin'. Am I right, boys Poncho snapped his finger."

"You wanna fight or something, poor boy, or do you wanna beat me at a game of pool for fifty bucks? What's it gonna' be, huh?

Looking around, Alvin could tell nobody was going to help him stop this fight! With that in mind, he slowly got up off the bar stool that he was sitting on, took off his riding coat, exposing his guns all tucked up under his arms, and put it on the back of the bar stool. He turned his change cup upside down on top of the slot he was playing and said to Walter "Watch my machine for me, will you, friend?"

Walter who just stood there looking at him,

"Take that ten-dollar roll of quarters out of the machine, dog, and come have a seat. First, we're going to have you watch us play, and remember, those guns don't scare me. I got lots of homies out on the street willing to back me up. You got that, mister? Good. Now then, we're going to flip a coin to see just who's it going to be that whoops your ass at this pool game. Whether it be me?"

He said, pointing at his own chest—

"Or Poncho over here, or my friend over here, Secondino. Can you remember that Whitie? Me and Secondo."

"Sure."

Was the only thing that came out of Alvin's mouth?

"Bring your beer, dog. You're going to need it!"

So Alvin walked over and sat down at the empty bar stool across the table from the little lady who introduced herself as Ginger.

"What's your name she asked without the slightest hint of a smile?"

“Alvin.”

“The man said,

“What’s that? Album? Is that like a record album, or just like a streetwalking filthy bum she said politely, crossing her arms,

“You got it right the first time around.”

Alvin calmly said to the lady as she crossed her legs,

“This bum said he’s ready to watch you two play she said, motioning to Alvin as if she were introducing an actor or comedian to an audience,

“Here!”

Poncho said, pushing a pool cue of his choice up against Alvin’s chest. After he took the cue, Poncho said,

“Take those quarters out of your pocket, Holmes, and let’s get started, shall we? When those quarters are gone, you better be too. You get me essay?”

Without saying a word Alvin walked around the back of the table where a fresh set of balls were all in order: solid, stripe, solid, stripe, with the eight ball in the center of the triangle,

“Break!”

Secondino said,

“So I guess I’m playing you?”

Were the first words out of Alvin’s mouth?

“That’s right, Holmes! Now don’t say another word! You got me? Or else you’ll be leaving out the back door Poncho said. Alvin knew the man was carrying an ankle gun on the inside of his left pant leg, and Secondino didn’t have one at all, but the one he was worried about was the one in the lady’s purse. Only good at short range, Alvin had a bad feeling about the way this lady might react if prompted. She would show no weakness in front of her gangland friends. Just as Alvin was about to break she spoke up, loudly saying,

“Let the games begin!”

She clapped her hands together. Poncho snatched her up just above the elbow of her right arm and pulled her up out of her seat, telling her,

“This is serious business. Go put some money in the jukebox. You don’t mind if she plays your quarters, do you, mister? No. Of course not! Go play his quarters, you little hussy. I want half of that money you got out of that slot machine when our little friend here finishes with you. All ten dollars’ worth of quarters. You got that?”

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

Now, break. So, without further ado, Alvin pulled back on the heaviest stick they could find for him and took his first swing at it. You could tell by the way the balls sounded as they collided that this was going to be serious business. The eight ball sank on the first try out,

“Well, I guess that puts me in the lead.”

“Come on, man! Set the balls up again!”

Secondino demanded.

With his fingers up against the rear of the balls Alvin pushed them all together into a tight group without any gaps between them, rolled the triangle forward and then back again a few times before lining up the first yellow solid ball with the dot marked on the far end of the table and the second dot on the wooden part of the rail. Then he gently pulled the triangle free, letting the balls fall loose. An old trick, but one these two dummies didn't see coming,

“Let me rack the balls”

Secondino said calmly, walking around the table to do just that. When the man was up once again, for the first time against Alvin that night, he walked around the front side of the table and the Budweiser lampshade over the table began to sway. They all stared up at it, wondering what made it sway,

“It's just the wind.”

“Alvin told them, and they agreed. Then there was a strong, loud ringing sound in Secondino's ears. Slapping at the side of his own head, he started waving his free hand around as if he were being stung by a bee,

“I'm okay, I'm okay he insisted and bent down to take is shot. That's when the whole room started to sway in an awkward slow motion time warp directly followed by that same loud ringing sound in his ear.

“Is there something wrong Alvin began to say? “

Make it stop! Make it stop Secondino kept saying as his buddies gathered around him trying to help him up off the floor where he now rested on his knees with his hands over his ears. Then, with tears welling up in his eyes, Secondino's friend Poncho wanted to know what Alvin had done to him!

“Listen, son. I don't know what's wrong with your friend but you better get him out of here before I call the cops.”

“Yes sir, yes sir!”

Was all the boy could say as he and his little sister or whatever she was started to help their friend to the back of the bar, past the restrooms and out the back door leading to the parking lot. Breaking the stick in half and laying it on the table, Alvin started to look over directly at Walter, who said,

“Don’t look at me, mister, I had nothing to do with it!”

“No, but I ‘did.”

“Jeremiah said, smiling as he slowly walked down the last few wooden steps that lead down to the ground level from his penthouse up above. Smiling, he extended his hand to Alvin who took it and they shook for the first time.

“Well played, well played! I’m surprised it took you that long. And what was it that you did to my machine!”

Jeremiah said, chuckling.

“Come on now, pick up your quarters and come over here. Sit down and have a drink. It’s free of course. Meet Walter.”

Walter took the man’s hand.

“Nice to meet you.”

“This is Alvin, Walter. A very, very good friend of mine. Now, Alvin. What brings you to The Lonely River Pass? You just stopping in on your way through town? No, I guess not. Not with that horse outside. You came here to do some drinking, didn’t you? Bring this man a bottle of Bud. Make it two and some frosty glasses.”

As Walter was working on doing that, Alvin just sat there looking at Jeremiah with a half-cocked look in his eye as Jeremiah tapped his fingers on the table in a sequential fashion,

“Why’d you bring me here?”

Alvin said, but Jeremiah just motioned over to Walter and pointed at the table. Walter calmly took the bottles and poured their contents into glasses he’d brought. One for each of them. Jeremiah was smiling and tapping his fingers on the table, but he quickly removed them and put them down into his lap,

“What can I do for you Sir?”

Was all she said?

“I’m here on business.”

“What kind of business? I mean, you went through all this trouble to come down here, and it wasn’t just for a few drinks? Maybe you came to harass the local customers Jeremiah said as he chuckled the whole thing off. What did you really come out here for? It’s been

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

a long time since I've seen you. I guess you and the Butte still haven't settled up or broken that Time Walker bond you share, now have you?"

"No, shit."

Alvin said.

"We haven't done that yet. Which is one of the reasons that I came down here!"

"Well"

Jeremiah said.

"Don't keep me waiting."

"I need a favor."

Pulling back his hand from the table Alvin laid a five of diamonds right there on the table. It looked like it was a hundred years old.

"I'd like to trade this card, and a quarter of a million dollars, for the absolute largest, most beautiful, dark green emerald that you have and a gold nugget big enough to forge a ring."

"A ring for who?"

Jeremiah wanted to know...

Alvin looked at him with a dumb look on his face to say,

"As if you didn't know?"

Then Jeremiah explained,

"I want you to say it, Alvin. I want you to say who it's for!"

It's for the Butte!"

Alvin said, dragging his pouty lip up off the floor.

"And you know it!"

That's when tears started to come to his cowboy eyes."

"I've missed out on everything, Big Jim! All of it! Him growing up without me. Without his father. Now he's all grown up, and his mother only appreciates me for what I'm worth! She never truly loved me, but now I'm back and I have no choice but to do what they say! I'm sorry, Jeremiah! I am so sorry for what I have done, but I've paid my dues over the years! I've paid them, damn it! And its high time that I started to show. Jeremiah snapped his fingers and Tabitha, who had been there all the time, came walking up behind him, extended her clenched hand out to Jeremiah, and as she slowly loosened her grip she exposed a fifteen-karat raw and uncut jewel that sparkled in the darkest green that anyone could ever find! It's from the Well."

Jeremiah said."

"There's never going to be another one like it.

Tabitha then held out her other hand, opened it, and exposed a gold nugget just large enough to fill the palm of her hand. About a fifteen-karat weight altogether.

"Will these fine gems be sufficient for what you need? That, plus the card?"

Alvin asked in a somber sort of way.

"Yes, Alvin. That, plus the card. But, don't forget, you still have to come up with the other \$250,000 for the other favor regarding your truck!"

"How did you know that?"

That's when Cameron came walking in."

"She told me..."

Jeremiah said.

"You see; she saw it in a dream! Do you know what that means, Al?"

"No. What does that mean?"

"It means that the Well is speaking to us. Speaking to all of us! The Time Walkers. Now, I think I know how to solve your little problem. You share your half of the canteen with us so that we can make her immortal. It's the only way we can resurrect the Well. She's the one who can set everybody free! She's the one. The one who is destined to be the next Mighty Companion."

"The Mighty Companion!"

Alvin asked out loud.

"Who's the Mighty Companion?"

"You see? That's just it! He's the keeper of the Well! Tell you where the scrolls are hidden?"

Jeremiah started to say as he saw the look of confusion wash over this man's face.

"Get married, and after the ceremony, you can talk it over with the Butte. And we'll see if we can free the people trapped within The Well."

"There's no way to get into the Well anymore, Jeremiah. The forest is full of the guardians of the dead. We could never get in there. Heck, we couldn't even get close! Let alone enter the Cavern of the Well. You'll never see me set foot inside that forest, and besides, why should I? I already have the can't."

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

“Listen to me, Alvin, and listen very closely. You can never keep the Well for yourself. People will die. All of us! Every one of us will die! Now, think it over and you’ll truly repented for what you’ve done, not only to this family, but to your own family as well. You’ll find the courage to finally do things right for once in your godforsaken life! Do this Alvin. Do this, and you’ll have written your own ticket! Just like you always wanted to do. There will be three wishes waiting for us when we go. It says so on the scrolls. We have them, and we need them. They have the instructions to repair the Well, but we need all the pieces, Alvin. We have to work together on this and if you wait too long? We’re all going to die! So it is written, and so it shall be, Alvin! Your time has come to pass!”

For the sake of your family and mine you have to bring some of the contents of the Well from before it lost the soul of the Mighty Companion so that we can make things right! She has to be immortal before she can become one with the Spirit of the Well, and the only way to do that is with the contents of that canteen! You got that, Alvin? Now. Go home. Think about what we have discussed. Plan your wedding, and when you’re through, bring part of that canteen over to.”

“I don’t think I can do that as he reached for his gun, the entire Dixon family instantaneously produced a side arm each. Sniffling, Alvin said to himself “

“I’ve got to go!”

He said, standing up and pushing his chair out from underneath him, he put on his riding coat and walked out into the night through the front door. That’s not the last time we’re going to see him, Tabitha thought. Just then, he came back in through the double doors. This time with saddlebags draped over his shoulder.

“Here it is, boys and girls! Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars! I hope you can handle this. I mean, don’t bet it all on that race track.”

“Don’t worry.”

Walter said from behind the bleachers.

“They won?”

“So much for having a new bartender!”

Jeremiah turned to Cameron and said.

“We’re going to have to hire some new help and he left it at that. The Butte also knew of the canteen. Hell, she had drunk from it

ninety-five years ago in 1921. Right there in a hotel room at The Grand Stockade, which in those days was a priceless gem out there in that high desert country. Reminiscent of the Old West, its mystique flavor was popular with the American Indians and later by the first settlers moving west into uncharted territory to escape the poverty that they were suffering through back East. They traveled with the hopes of a brand new life where all you had to do was lay claim to a section of land and it was written down and considered yours for free. So everybody was looking for the best, most beautiful plot of land that they could find. It just so happened to have been plentiful and outright breath-taking in its rugged scenery. And after it was sanctioned by the white man, so long ago, it began to grow and take on the shape of the powerful backbone of The American Dream. The Dream that has been presented through the history of this country, and that holds up until this very day. But the Butte was also a little wiry when it came to Alvin.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

COMING OF AGE

Big Jim wasn't aware of what he was doing by picking on Alvin for not being there for him when he was a kid. As a boy, he was forced to grow up and attend the school of hard knocks. A bitter education that left him behind all the kids on the playground when he was in elementary school, all the way up through high school. He was picked on spiritually, emotionally, and physically by his classmates, which lasted over several decades.

Big Jim had wanted to know his father more than anything. He spent countless nights staring out his bedroom window, especially on a rainy night where you could easily see your reflection in the transparent sheet of glass. The glass was mounted into a wooden frame painted white so that it could be opened on cool summer nights or closed and latched from the inside for security purposes. It would also keep the cold weather out. It was nights like those that little Jimmy Dailey would spend his time dreaming about the life that could've been. Wondering where his father was, and how long it would be before he made it back home again. As he got to be older, time seemed to heal him. Like it can for all wounds. But there was a definite scar where his father had vanished without a care in the world, leaving him and his mom to take care of each other without any outside help.

Little Jimmy was obviously carrying a ton of baggage when his father finally came through those doors, looking to have some type of relationship with his only child. Big Jim. Alvin was proud of Big Jim. His business savvy was incredible along with his ability to control the environment around him with sheer brute force and wielding the mighty sword of land ownership. Not to mention the fact that he owned several gambling establishments. Nowadays, he even had his

very own horse racetrack, something he'd always wanted. It was good to be the king. Big Jim knew, when those two walked through the doors to that bar that night, that they didn't have enough experience or capital gain to increase their profits exponentially. And without that, you'd be dead in the water.

Your business had to keep growing in size over the first few years of its life if it was going to survive. And you should never allow a situation where the customers didn't have the ability to change the numbers on a particular day, or even of a particular year. They had a great idea, and it looked good on paper, but allowing people to bet into the future on any sports event applies pressure where pressure cannot be tolerated. And that's exactly what had happened in this case. Had Mr. Chin had any business experience at all, he would've known that strong-arming a high-ranking member of the community (like the deputy warden out at the prison) wasn't a good idea—unless you could continue to back up the threat giving you leverage in the first place. The deputy warden was off the hook for good, and now he had the chance to see just how much those hillbillies could take!"

The heat was on. Now all he needed to do was smoke them out. Everybody knew by now that the Butte and Big Jim Dailey were playing Alvin for a fool. The Butte knew about the canteen, but not its location. That was the reason they were keeping him around. Because by now its location could be anywhere. Alvin never told the Butte, who just happened to be gone by the time the sun came up on that awesome springtime day way back in the year 1921 or '22. Alvin couldn't remember which, but it was back in the age when Alvin was about the same age as the building was. That was the problem between him and the Butte. It wasn't that they didn't love one another, but she wanted that canteen, and he'd hid it from her. She thought if he loved her enough he would eventually hand it over to her for safe keeping that ended up not working out so well. Just after, the Butte began a conquest all her own, because she could see the problems arriving as far as keeping a fresh identity and a clean slate were concerned. How do you think Big Jim got so wired in with the higher-ups when he showed them some initiative? Rhonda was capable of taking on the identification of just about anyone thanks to her best friend who just so happened to be an employee over at the Department of Motor Vehicles right there in White Horse.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

It was a very small two-person office where, with a few clicks of the mouse, Anna was able to assign her a social security number from the system. Take it from somebody who died in a car accident at a young age, put it together with a Nevada State driver's license, and the job was complete. The card would only be good for a state identification or driver's license. If the law happened to pull her over, she could present a legal driver's license. That way, when the police officer or security guard or whoever needed to see a valid ID, she'd be able to produce one. That would clear through the records over at the DMV, but not with the IRS. That was another story entirely.

Luckily, Big Jim's high school sweet heart was now the county clerk and between the two of them, they could get just about anything done. Big Jim had noticed his mother didn't seem to be aging whatsoever, so it was a shock to everybody when he was oblivious to the fact that Jeremiah Dixon needed new birth certificates. In fact, they were astounded! It seemed people could be mesmerized by the power of the Well, causing you to do things that you normally wouldn't. And then you could only faintly remember their trip to the Well or its location.

Almost as if it were all a dream remembered for only a few short seconds after you wake up. Every once in a while it took some prompting to remember certain details that seemed to lead straight back to the Well itself. It seemed to be taking on a new form with the passing of each new day, and its intelligence was turning out to be second to none. And everybody wanted to know how Time Walkers possessed the ability to slow down time for just a few seconds, causing a high-pitched sound that sent most people off their rockers. That was another part of the mystery and mystique of the Well of the Eternal. The reason Big Jim was seemingly immune to these anomalies was because, of course, that his mother had been a Time Walker from the very beginning of his inception into the human race. Nowadays, Big Jim wanted a sip for himself, but he had nothing to go on. No scroll, no canteen, and definitely no Time Walker spirit of the Well. Nothing! So he was going to have to gain some leverage if he wanted to improve upon his hand. In this case, he needed more of the truth.

Big Jim thought it might be a good time to lighten up about his father. The shock that he'd felt at the moment he first met the guy had caused some animosity which allowed a certain tension into the relationship. After Big Jim found out that his father wasn't really a

coward, just soft at heart, he had more respect for the guy. Mostly, this whole ordeal was in the hands of the Butte. As usual! It was sun-down by the time Alvin returned the horse to the corrals, where he left the animal to roam around for a little while and get something to eat and drink. The crickets were up this night, also. The half-moon above was very bright and high up on the horizon when Alvin was struck from behind. A blunt object punched his clock, putting his lights out before he ever hit the ground. As he began to come out of it, he noticed he was being dragged and because of the smell of this guy's cologne, he knew precisely who he was dealing with,

“What's the deal, Viny? I paid you guys in full!”

He then started to say, but that short sentiment was abruptly interrupted by the other Vincent. He was better known as Vick (which was usually short for Victor) so that people could tell them apart. Their looks made it obvious these guys were twins. Viny topping out at a good three hundred and twenty pounds of six-foot-four potbellied Italian who was dressed to the nines with slick back hair. A wide variety of expensive parts that all belonged to different suits were put together to make up his ensemble. All the way down to his leather shoeshine, brown suede, lace-up shoes that had one of the knots coming untied. He wore no collar or necktie on his shirt, just a low-neck, generic white T-shirt on underneath and gold jewelry.

And the other guy? He was dressed like something out of Compton with a blue bandana covering his brow and nice, new off-the-wall Van's and long-legged shorts that dropped down around his lower hips. All tied together with a small amount of jewelry and a low-cut T-shirt of his own. Neither of these guys had any tattoos. A least none were visible. The Italian Mafia never wore tattoos for a reason Alvin never wanted to find out. He soon found himself in the back leather seat of some stretched-out luxury low ride. A Chrysler New Yorker to be exact. One of the newer models that had come out over the last few years. This one was a really nice one—if you had to drive from Chicago all the way to the Sure Hill Valley this was the car to do it in. As he began to come to, he felt a dull throbbing at the base of the skull. A bump stretched from one side of his head to the other, from the back of one ear to the other.

The dash and driver's seat console was amazing-looking with all the latest high-tech gadgets, a moon roof, and a four-hundred-and-fifty-horsepower Detroit six-cylinder under the hood. It ran so quietly

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

that when mixed with the sound proofing and the trunk doors, you'd never even know the car was running, let alone providing the driver with six gears of sheer terror for any novice driver! Alvin could feel the car moving pretty fast for a dirt road at night. Vick was driving and suggested.

"Alvin, put on your safety belt."

"Where we going?"

Alvin wanted to know. He knew these two clowns from working in the same organization, gun smuggling for the Chicago crime family. He knew they always worked as a team. Fat and skinny, they made a great couple, Alvin always thought. But tonight it looked like he was on the receiving end of the mob life. Not the other way around,

"We're going to see the boss."

Viny said as he tried to finish the last half of his Subway foot-long that had pepperoncini's in it. Alvin could tell, because the whole car smelled of fresh Subway,

"Don't worry, Alvin. We got your back!"

Vick was saying.

"Put your hands together and cinch this zip tie as tight as you can. When you're finished, put your hands forward, and reach up here so Viny can close it tight. You got it."

"Yeah, but that's not going to be necessary. Boss's orders."

And then they closed the tinted glass divider between the back seat and the front. There was no way he could hear what they were saying, but they were piping some old rock and roll station, 108.6 on the FM dial. KDNA, The Hicks Sticks Highway Six Hits broadcasting to all of the people out there who just happened to have made it all the way out here to the Sure Hill Valley without looking back. It was going to be a long ride back to Chicago, where Alvin assumed he was being taken.

"And one more thing;"

He could hear Viny saying as he took another large bite out of what was left of his foot-long sub and lowered the glass shield.

"Don't bother going to the bathroom. This is going to be a long trip so open up that duffle at your feet. Your food and water and portable urinal are in that bag. Got it?"

And then the window steadily climbed until it had reached its rubbery end at the ceiling of the car. The moon roof was real nice to

gaze up and out of. That, mixed with the light shining in from the passenger-side window, created a type of glow that he could never remember seeing before. It was as if the moon itself was communicating with him through some strange type of aura swapping. It was strange but somehow it was true. He would get this mess straightened out soon, and he would once again be a free man. All he had to do was square up with the Don, Arturo Paglioni, and head of the Chicago syndicate crime family. He was better known as “The Low-Ball Striker” for his uncanny ability to predict the winning outcome of any baseball game. Not just because he could find a way to rig an event—that wasn’t something he needed to do in order to make money in the trade business. The trading of information. When it came to statistics and stats pertaining to major league baseball, the man was a sheer genius. Anybody who knew him in any way, shape, or form would call him “The Striker” for short. Or just “Mr. Nice G.”

“Which is what the family had known him as from the beginning. The side of the tracks you were on determined how you would address him. If you were from the wrong side of the tracks, whether it be his friends or his family, there could be consequences. That meant everybody had to be on their toes at all times!”

So there Alvin was, in the back seat, listening to The Doors as they came over the radio. And just as the car headed out of the range to pick up the hick channel, Alvin fell asleep. Something he tended to do when he took a car ride of over fifty miles at a stretch. He didn’t know what these guys wanted, but he wasn’t that concerned anyway. What was done, was done, and could not be changed! He was tired of fighting this whole thing, anyway. All he wanted to do was settle down with his family. Something he hadn’t allowed the Dixon family to do all those years back. That was his fault, and now he was paying for it. Paying for everything that had happened to him over the years. His wife, his son, his financial windfall, and the detriment to society that he was. A gun runner nonetheless!”

And if he thought the Chicago crime family was going to let him off the hook that easy, he was dead wrong! He hadn’t settled up with the mob. He was just correcting a mistake that he had made all on his own—hitting that man back there on the highway and then being spotted walking around down there and actually picking up the man’s wallet and putting it into the cab of his truck! That stupidity

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

could threaten the entire operation. That coupled with the fact that he'd brought the heat down on the mob bosses. They were now having to halt their weekly shipments until things cooled off a bit, which was costing them money. And they placed the blame fully on Alvin Richardson.

HEARTBREAK AND HOMELESSNESS

It was a long fourteen-hour drive across Interstate 80 and then up Route 66 to the city that he used to call home. As tired as these guys looked from driving almost halfway across the continent, they actually seemed to be in quite a good mood. They pulled their sedan into an area of Chicago that was just off the docks, where Alvin was then blindfolded and escorted out of the car. They didn't have to use any force. They went up some metal stairs, through a metal door, and onto what felt like carpet, where what smelled like pipe tobacco was being smoked.

The two of them sat Alvin down in a chair and loosely tied him to it. After a short while they took off his blindfold and he took in his surroundings for the first time. It was an office. A nice one, at that. All except for the view, which it didn't have? It did have solid wood furniture, wood paneling, and solid oak shelves lining the walls filled with photographs of the city, what appeared to be members of the man's family, a few books, and full-sized autographed photos of major league baseball players. There appeared to be a virtual batting cage off the left of the room. Alvin had heard about this man before, but had never been graced with his presence. Nobody had.

So there he sat, looking across the desk at a bald man in a suit, smoking a tobacco pipe. Everyone seemed to enjoy the smell of it, although it wasn't a corn cob pipe like the one MacArthur used or the long spindly one that Sherlock Holmes would use. It was a carved ivory-handled mouthpiece in the shape of a beautiful naked lady, curved from the feet up to where the screened bowl that the tobacco went into. His golden, lever-action Cartier wick lighter was just shooting sparks as he turned the horizontal wheel that operated the flint. After a few more tries, the thing lights up but it seemed to be

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

running a little hot. The man had burned one of the ends of his fingers instead of the tobacco.

“Shit!”

He shouted.

“Does anybody have a light?”

Both Heckle and Jeckle started searching their persons when Alvin spoke up about the one he kept in his leather riding vest that he was still wearing,

“Well, well, well, Alvin. That is your name. Isn’t that right? Alvin, did you say? Better known on the street as Alvin “The Fly” Richardson, apparently for your ability to exist without existing. Impressive. Your reputation precedes you. The problem is, my young friend that the IRS is looking at people who just happen to be the higher-ups in this organization, which brings heat down on everyone. So, what happened out there?”

Alvin began to tell the man the whole story, starting at the part where the cops came to the truck looking for his credentials as a truck driver.

“You failed to leave in the part about running over somebody with a load of illegal weapons and then backtracking down the hill to see if you could find him, dumb ass the man shout.”

Now the man straightened the collar on his shirt and adjusted his tie as he said to Frick

“Go get me some more water.”

A man opened up the steel door to the room, exited through it, and quietly shut the door behind him. Vick was still standing there with his legs spread and his hands clasped together in front of him he said,

“They want fifty grand to pay for the taxes on that shipment and for the sales tax on the purchase of that truck.”

The man went on,

“I don’t care if you paid for it or not! That whole truck belongs to me! So, you’re going back to Nevada to get everything squared away with the DMV out there. You’ll pay the fine and return that truck to the lot you took it from. Then, you’re going to disappear! Just like a fly on the wall! Cut him loose. Give him the keys to your car.”

“What’s that, boss?”

"I said, give him the keys, and don't make me say it again. He turned back to Alvin."

"You have three days to come up with the money, fix the paperwork with the DMV out West, and have that car and the eighteen-wheeler back where you got them. And when I say three days, I mean three days. Get him out of here! Get him out of my sight!"

Standing up, Alvin walked over to the skinny fellow and held out his wrists where the man reached into his sock and pulled out a blade. Upon cutting the zip tie, he said to Alvin,

"I'll see you in three days, and there better not be a scratch on her! Got it!"

Then he looked down, spit on Alvin's black leather harness boots, and waved bye-bye to Alvin as if he were his mother dropping him off at the local elementary school for his first day of kindergarten. With a pursed-lip grin on his face, he slapped his clenched fist into Alvin's chest, moving him back a few feet. Vick just stood there, dangling the keys to his car. He promptly let go of the keys, letting them fall down onto this man's ugly green carpet. As Alvin bent down to pick them up, Vick kicked him in the stomach, causing him to stay down for a minute,

"Alright, that's enough. Let him go."

Upon hearing that, Alvin made his way down the stairs and into the nice warm car on this cold November morning in upstate Illinois. On his way back to White Horse, he realized that the only person who could possibly get him out of this mess was Jeremiah Dixon and his trusty sidekick, Mr. Chin. The problem was he had nothing to offer them except that canteen. He needed that if he wanted to resolve his problems before it was too late! Three days wasn't nearly long enough to come up with that kind of cash. He'd already spent all his money over at The Lonely River Pass for a priceless jewel and a fifteen-karat-gold nugget. The only way this was going to work would be through Jeremiah.

Alvin never should've gotten involved with the card cheating Butte in the first place! That's where his life went wrong. Before that, he had everything. The governor of the State of Nevada had him on his payroll. What could've been better than that? He should've just left well enough alone, moved on, and lead a happier life. I mean, look at me, he thought. Is this what life has come to? Is this really the legacy I want to leave behind? A two-bit hustler trying to eke by on the hand-

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

me-downs of an organization that was good for two things: free beer and a cot in the back room. Maybe a small cash allowance to buy clothes and whatever necessities were necessary to appear presentable.

Most of the time he spent out on the road delivering things for the mob. Brokering deals and seeing that the cash always found its way back to the boss. Now, it was him that was under the gun, and all because of that one fatal mistake of taking Stitches' life. It was an accident, but they were right. It was pretty stupid to walk back down the hill looking for him. If he hadn't done that, everything would've been okay. Just like he had planned. Now, he was going to have to sell his soul to the Dixon family. That's if he still could.

After talking to Jeremiah on the phone, he learned that the offer still stood! So that was the first step in plan A. The next step was problematic—the DMV. Then he would try to come up with the money to pay the taxes on the purchase of the big rig, fill it with gas, strap a trailer on to the already attached trailer that he drove the guns out in, and somehow get them all back to Kansas and up to Chicago before those assholes decided to come and get him.

If they did, God knows what would ever happen after that. And at this point in his life, he was finally looking forward to spending time with the family he'd missed so much over the years. He would have to take a Greyhound back from Chicago, because that's all he'd be able to afford after being out of work for so long. Over at *The Intrepid Star*, he hadn't been able to spend the time he needed to earn any trust or money that he may've had. He was supposed to show up for work as a blackjack dealer that night, which is where they needed him at the time. He could do any job in the joint but he didn't really have a say in what he got to do. He was considered a supervisor, though, which meant he'd be one in whichever department he happened to be working in at the time. Meanwhile, Tabitha had an appointment to pick up her scroll from the bank in Carson City. She didn't need to show them any type of identification at the bank as long as she had an appointment and both keys. First things first, though. Before she went to trial, she had Jeremiah put one of her keys into a safety deposit box all of his own, right there in White Horse. That way, nobody had both keys to the box in Carson City. One was in *The First National Bank* in White Horse, and the other was in Big Jim's safe over at *The Intrepid Star*.

Under the impression that Big Jim would see to it that she was taken care of while on the inside, she gave him one of the keys as a favor or gesture of goodwill. She wanted to stay in good with Big Jim's crowd, and in order do that, you have to have something that matters. Something that is good for business and makes money for everybody. This key was given to Big Jim as a show of loyalty, but he didn't know the other half was missing. Usually when you rent a safety deposit box, the bank holds the other key. In this case, the box was purchased outright, and whoever had the key could get into the box. It was all just a matter of making an appointment. For security purposes, the key was void of any markings whatsoever that could lead somebody who didn't already know the location of the box. The problem was, Tabitha never gave Big Jim the details that went with finding the location and the number on the box. Without the knowledge of the other key, it was hopeless for either Big Jim or Jeremiah to get the scrolls.

Only Tabitha could piece back together the jigsaw that made up the location of that most important section of the map. The one that gave them the ability to return the spirit back to the Well, granting whoever accomplished the feat three wishes. The scroll also gave the condition that the wishes were to be adhered to if you wanted to get out of The Cavern of the Dead with your soul intact. That's why this piece was the most sought-after. Cameron's section of the map only allowed its location and the necessary instructions on how to get through the Forests of Fears. This was the scroll that ended up with Hunting Stick Adison, better known to The Time Walkers as Georgia Dixon. After all those years, she insisted she be called by her God-given name, which happened to be "Little Feather", or "Light Foot."

As her father had said. She was originally a member of the Hopi Tribe. The same that occupied the rugged, unforgiving area that surrounded the Colorado River, or The Rio Grande south of the border. This tribe recognized her as being one of them because she still remembered the language and their customs. Things that were kept secret from all walks of life, including other Indian tribes. Why had she left the reservation, and how was it that nobody could remember her face or the faces of her ancestors? Through an ancient Hopi tradition, she introduced herself to her original family, and her grandfather still remembered hearing stories about her. He remembered that she'd been raped and wasn't forgiven by the rest of the tribe because

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

she hadn't killed any of her attackers. The Hopis also wanted to know how she'd become a man recognized as a Shoshone Indian medicine man.

But after she produced her section of the scrolls, these Hopi tribesmen accepted her as one of them. They knew of the stories told by their great, great ancestors back before the white man had even stepped foot onto this gracious land in the first place. This scroll was remembered as one of their own. Because it spelled out the way that a person may be removed from their body and placed into another. And Light Foot back again in a red man's body was proof enough. She told the tribe to hide the scrolls and when the time was right, they would know what to do. They decided to put the scroll in a sacred cave that had been kept a secret from all others since the tribe's inception. It was located at the very mouth of the Rio Grande as it exited out the bottom of a sacred channel.

It was where the scrolls had originally been created and handed down to their ancestors by the once-great Central American tribe of the Aztecs. That was after the creation of the scrolls was deemed necessary by the prophet of the Well who, in those days, was also a woman. The only way they were going to hand those documents over to anybody was if it were a Native American prophet of the Well of the Eternal! Which, in this case, ended up being Cameron. But she wouldn't be ready to complete the task of saving the Well until she had actually drank from its living waters. Something she was unable to do before the Keeper of the Well had been removed from its presence.

Light Foot was the only one who knew how to communicate with the elders of the Hopi Indian tribe, which occupied the land to the southwest Texas state line, stretching all the way up to the latter part of Colorado, down through New Mexico, and all the way past the Old Southern Texas border with old Mexico just across the river. To get this right, everybody had to put their hands on the table. No one person could do it alone. Everybody had to be in on this one and work as a team. If they couldn't get their stuff together, then only God knows what was going to happen. According to Cameron, it was of utmost importance that the Well be restored to its original glory.

Back to the way it was when untouched by human hands since the Aztec Indians and their gold-producing Center Top Box that they used so efficiently to create large bricks to encompass and surround

the precious waters of the living Well. With all that in mind, Alvin couldn't just show up on the front porch of The Lonely River Pass empty-handed and looking for a hand-out that he knew he wasn't going to get. But he decided to stop over and first anyway. As the mob car pulled into the back lot of The Lonely River Pass, Jeremiah could see it coming on his closed-circuit surveillance cameras and he watched the man he now recognized as Alvin Richardson. He doubted the man was coming to ask for a week-long bar tab just like those other jokers got. In fact, when Alvin walked in the back door, those jokers were in that exact same places, only this time their old lady was sitting at the end of the bar, still playing the video poker machine on the quarters Alvin had given her. Thirty-six hundred would get Alvin and his cargo back to the heartland and up into the Windy City of the Midwest.

The problem was, this little lady had overheard them talking about a canteen that was worth \$250,000 dollars or something like that. While Walter had just so happened to be enjoying the ball game on the television, little miss cutie pie seemed to have been able to make out a conversation. Big Jim had been the one to ask these kids to go over there and do the job for Jeremiah, who would reward them with a weekly bar tab. So, of course, they were in every night. After the week was up, they would just move on to another location, simple as that. But Big Jim was the one who introduce them, and she thought he might want to know a little bit about a \$250,000 canteen that they said was somewhere in the hotel—but they didn't know exactly where. That sounded a lot like they were going to try to rob Big Jim of something important, something valuable.”

It dawned on her that for the first time she might actually have something that could be of value. This little tidbit of a possible heist would either make her look crazy in the eyes of Big Jim or hopefully make him a friend for life. So off she went. She cashed out her six hundred and fifty credits that she had on the machine, signed for the ticket, took one last pull on her freshly light cigarette, and walked out the front door. Alvin said to the bartender who just happened to be Jeremiah at the time.

“Looks like we've made a new friend.”

“Don't worry about her, good buddy. She's got nothing in the way of a bargaining chip. Even if she does find the canteen before we

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

can get to it, we still have the scrolls, the profit, and even the incantations that one must perform to even get close to that Well.”

“I thought you said you needed it for Cameron to become immortal? Isn’t that what you said, Jeremiah?”

Chuckling, Jeremiah said,

“Don’t you get it? The Well is in control of us, we’re not in control of it. Never have been and never will be. If we can’t figure this out and start to learn to work together on this, then according to Cameron’s visions, we’re all going to die in a huge meteor shower.”

“That’s crazy talk. How is revamping the Well going to stop a meteor shower from hitting the Earth.”

“Jeremiah said.

“The negative pole of the Earth on its axis will create a different wobble on the rotation which will vastly affect Earth’s natural protection, disintegrating anything that enters it at too steep an angle. And the stuff that does make it into the atmosphere is usually deflected, just bouncing off the ionosphere or missing the planet entirely. But if the negative polarity begins to change, it will peel the upper atmosphere off the Earth’s sphere, allowing any type of space junk, meteorite, or chunks of ice to plummet all the way to the surface of the planet.”

“That’s just crazy, Jeremiah.”

Alvin repeated,

“Marry my sister, and I’ll take care of all your troubles with the Chicago crime family.”

“What in the hell are you talking about?”

“No questions asked?”

Then Jeremiah began to say,

“Three hundred thousand dollars to settle your account with Big Jim and the Butte, and the other fifty thousand you owe the IRS to keep from getting your semi-truck getting impounded with a load of illegal guns, which if you haven’t forgotten, are going to be circulated all around town. Then what kind of a place do you think we are going to have? It’s that same destructive force that has taken over the Well and is polluting the atmosphere, killing the planet and everybody on it, as we speak. It ruined the greatest empires in the world, including the Egyptians and the Aztec Indians of Central America all at the same time. Until one day they started to believe in what he Lady of the Well, who was having these premonitions, was talking about!

But it was already too late to save their once-great civilizations. They were able to reverse the polarity in time to save the Earth and the remaining remnants of the human race.

They all got together and made these scrolls so that not if but when the Well was uncovered once again, the writings on the walls would serve as a guide to maintaining the sanctity of that Well. There must be responsibility and accountability for what we've done! Not to each other, but to ourselves! Anyone who tries to possess the Well for themselves is breaking a spiritual law of karma. One must never wish for someone else. With that in mind, I would like for you to make up a set of Mizpah's that will be furnished to each and every Time Walker in this valley. That means all of them must be made out of pure gold!"

"Pure gold, my friend. Pure, unadulterated gold. They will be used for the three wishes that are granted to the soul who returns the Well to its former glory. But, as I said, there are rules that we must follow, and you must accept this is the way it has to be. For all of us! Do you accept?"

"Are you saying we should let Big Jim and the Butte have the canteen?"

Alvin asked?

"That is correct. But only to share in its bounty. It must be for both of them. Cameron and Big Jim!"

"How do you plan on getting them to do that?"

Alvin wanted to know.

"You're the only one, Alvin, who can locate the canteen, but you're not going to be able to search the hotel high and low for its contents. You must come clean with the Butte and offer an agreement that we can all live with. But first we need to have those Mizpah's made up, and we have to finish this business with the mob. Then we need to gather all three sections of the scrolls, and return to the Well all at the same time."

"How are we going to get past the banshees?"

Alvin wanted to know?

"Simple. We find the scrolls "But where are they hid?"

"In Carson City?"

Jeremiah said without hesitation.

"And the others."

"Down the mine."

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

"You're kidding me!"

Alvin said,

"Nope. No joke."

"And the last one?"

"I got it right here for you to look at. Come upstairs with me, and you can see for yourself. You're going to have to pay the DMV with cash, so here it is Jeremiah reached into his vest pocket and pulled out fifty thousand dollars in crisp hundred-dollar bills, just like Alvin had given to her."

"The rest is in gold. The other two hundred and fifty thousand that you need to settle up with the likes of your own flesh and blood will come to you only if you marry my sister. You must do it before you leave for Chicago. In fact, I have the paperwork right here, and I'm an ordained minister. So here she is!"

Tabitha then appeared then at the top of the stairs in a full wedding gown.

"It used to belong to my niece but I think it'll do for now. Wait until you get back for the formal wedding where we invite the whole town for a ceremony, bridal showers, stag parties, and the reception."

Jeremiah said.

"But you must sign this paperwork before you leave here tonight!"

Alvin waited a few seconds, and then began to nod his head yes. Then he said,

"I'll do it!"

So Jeremiah handed him the marriage license and all three of them signed it. Then, Jeremiah said happily.

"Now you're a fully-fledged United States citizen. We'll take you over to the social security office in the morning and grant you your first identity. Don't worry. By the time we're all through you won't have to worry about anything. But trust in the fact that the quest to attain all three scrolls and return to the Well will be anything but easy. And we may not all make it. That's why everybody needs a gold Mizpah. A real one. Twenty-four karat solid gold. That way, we all have an equal chance of being able to make a request from the Well. Agree."

"Agreed"

They all said at the exact same time. It was followed soon after by a huge, winning cry, and Jeremiah said,

“Congratulations! Drinks are on the house!”

And they all celebrated together one drink after another. Alvin set out the very next morning and pushed all the way through to Kansas by way of Interstate 80, considering the extensive mountain passes of Interstate 70 through Grand Junction, the gateway to the East. Then he went up Route 66 to Chicago after dropping off that old gray big rig for The Striker, or better yet, Mr. Nice Guy. Now that he thought about it, those mob names were really pretty stupid. Even worse than truckers’ C.B. radio handles and language. Not to mention the police and all their blooming ten codes. As he thought about it, things began to become quite hilarious. Now that he was married to Tabitha Dixon, he could spend his time either at the club or back on the Dixon horse ranch in Plain View. So he boarded the next flight out of Chicago’s O’Hare International Airport bound nonstop for Salt Lake City, where he would rent a car and drive home. He loved crossing the Bonneville Salt Flats about sixty miles west of Salt Lake City International Airport, where people stopped along the interstate to spell their names and proclaim their loved ones in rocks or empty beer bottles.

It was early late fall, early winter, and there was a thin layer of water lying in the median between the different sides of the interstate. After some time playing in the casinos on his way to southern central Nevada where White Horse was, he managed to rent a Honeymoon Sweet in one of the larger, more extravagant, not to mention modern-day, clubs about two hours north of Cherry Creek in West Wendover. It was also a border town, but not like Plain View where everything was rural. This was glitzy and glamorous with all the bright lights of the town displaying thousands and thousands of slot machines, huge lit-up signs of all verities occupying the main drag, and hundreds of table games. There were pools, spas, and nice restaurants just like there was in Las Vegas or even Reno.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

A FINAL AFFAIR

His place was a real metropolis, more of a gambling mecca than White Horse by far. White Horse was more of a hunter's retreat as far as tourists were concerned. In White Horse the locals were what kept the doors open, and that required old-world mystique mixed in with a little glitz and glamour of its own. Just on a much smaller scale. The people in Wendover lived in the county seat, whereas the larger tourist towns mostly occupied the state line, right up against another state. There was another border town just east of Las Vegas called Mesquite, another travelers' hotspot. Not like Wendover, though, with its large truck stops as Interstate 80 ran right through it. The fact that it was just a two-hour drive from Salt Lake City meant there was a lot more action and the stakes were much higher. But, unlike Las Vegas, this place was pretty reasonable when it came to price. He still had a thousand dollars to gamble with by the time Tabitha arrived at their suite.

He even asked Big Jim to send her a limousine and a driver to pick up and drive her and a few friends several hours north, where he had the perfect spot picked out on the casino floor. There was a two-to-five-dollar, three-raise-limit Texas Hold'em poker table where he was sure to please his new bride. He was actually very excited about the proposition. He had never been with Tabitha, and he had never thought about her like that before. Mainly because of being so attached to the Butte's shirt tails for so long. He began to feel a sense of a certain amount of freedom. One that he had never really felt before! After this night out on the town they would drive back home to White Horse, and he would get busy running his life back there. He was loving his new circumstances.

He felt free and alive and there was no way that a rotten magical Well was going to ruin his life just when it started to get interesting after all those years. Now he had a family that would appreciate him and accept him for who he was. Plus, she had a great little boy, Sanford. He was finally going to get to be a father whether Big Jim or the Butte liked it or not! They had taken up enough of his time, and he now realized that he'd had enough. And that was it! Period. In the meantime, Alvin walked up to the counter in the coffee shop, sat down, and ordered a cup of coffee. The cream and sugar was already there, waiting for him to come up and start using them. A waitress, who was dressed more like a cheerleader with a playboy bunny bow tie, walked over from behind the counter, smiled, and asked “

“What might you want to order?”

She batted her eyelids as she spoke. He smiled and ordered a bacon, lettuce, and tomato sandwich toasted on white. To go along with his cup of coffee, he lit up a cigarette and began to smoke. It wasn't too much longer than fifteen minutes that he'd finished his sandwich. He left the coffee shop for a seat in the hotel lobby where he was supposed to meet his party. When they arrived, he was surprised to see that Jeremiah and Cameron were also in attendance. Right along with Mr. Chin, Big Jim Dailey, the Butte, Light Foot, and of course Tabitha—with the two kids in tow. Cameron said that,

“She would take the children upstairs to the room they'd rented and let all the adult Time Walkers go out and play!”

It wasn't long before they were all settled in with their single-suitcase baggage check at the Valley Station, just outside the revolving front doors that automatically started to rotate once you stepped inside. They'd packed light, choosing to purchase their toiletries from the casino gift shop and only bringing a single change of clothes. The limo and the driver were both parked across the street where he could be reached by telephone when the night was over. They weren't allowed to park their own car in the Valley parking garage, and besides that, the driver needed a place to hang out. So they put him in the back with the satellite television, soft drinks, a few snacks of the sweet and tangy variety. This was going to be a night to remember for the Dixon family. The Dailey family? Not so much. The Butte, who had started off cool, calm, and under control, was no longer in control and the whole thing was infuriating her!

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

They each had a couple thousand dollars to spend, (from their own sources). Jeremiah handed out two grand to Cameron and Tabitha and only a thousand to the groom who was supposed to have a cool grand to start with. Tonight was going to be a night that they were all going to enjoy together. They had decided against the divide-and-conquer method, yet discovered that miracles could take place at craps tables. There they were, all lined up, starting with Jeremiah on the left-hand side of the stick man with Mr. Chin betting on the right. One customer over on the hook—the rounded corner of the table—was Tabitha on one side and the Beauty of the Lake at the opposite end of the layout, standing next to Big Jim, who was also on the hook on the right-hand side of the table.

The hook position is the one who, when wagering on any certain number, could possibly be the point. So, either six or eight with a payoff of seven chips for every six bet. Followed by numbers five and nine at a five-dollar check would bring a payoff of seven chips, and the last two numbers were four and ten which had an almost two-to-one payoff. In that case, they would place the bet of the person on the hook, or the person who was standing at the corner of the rail and the box on the layout where the point for that particular roll would be placed. Complicated or not, playing craps was a lot of fun and these guys were having a blast. Of course, Jeremiah and Mr. Chin had to teach Tabitha how to bet her money. Her job was mostly to stand at the opposite side of the table to the Butte, where they could most effectively roll the dice for the entire table. None of the boys were going to touch those dice, and these two chicks were hot! Screaming and yelling and carrying on like they were at some amusement park riding the roller coaster for the first time.

That's when it happened! The lights started to flicker and the ground started to rumble. And just like Cameron had seen in her vision, there was a small amount of sand or dust that fell from ceiling, right onto the table's layout. The box man and dealers alike started to look up. Then the room went completely black, and the only sound was a slow rumble of voices as the people in the room started to chat and hold on to their loved ones. All was quiet for a few seconds and then somebody shouted “

“Turn on the lights!”

People began holding their cigarette lighters in the air so they could see, but the casino lights flickered all over again and the lighters

were extinguished by a foul-smelling wind. That's when everybody began to panic. Dull and then bright, the lights flickered in a random fashion. Then the energy— or whatever it was—encircled the entire room, like the transparent body of Chinese dragon, circling. And as it began to slow down, the time passing through the room did, too, causing everything to look like a brown haze. The same way it looks when you're in a dream, and you can't run fast enough to escape whatever it is that you're running from!"

Amazingly, the layout on the table began turning into a shimmering bowl of water with golden ripples that matched the decor of the casino floor. The electricity started to fly, with lightning bolts shooting across the room, providing shards of light, followed by electrical sparks. And as everybody started to scream and scramble to exit the building, the sounds of the screams coming from within were only matched by the dark entity which was now exiting the pool of water inside the craps table itself! As these spirits began to circle the room, people began to go crazy, falling to their knees and screaming while holding their ears as these spirits of the dead passed through their bodies.

Cameron once again woke up to the sounds of screaming. Luckily it was only her father, who had no idea of his presence in this lifetime. The veil had been drawn and the boy would remember nothing. Which he didn't have to. Once you've been a part of the Well it will always find a way to drag you back in! She woke up to the baby's cry, and she fixed him a bottle of warm formula. She put a little bourbon on the inside of his mouth and gums to help him through the pain of teething for the first time. He was such an energetic little guy, and as he gazed up at Cameron his little body made gentle sounds as he began to steadily suck his warm bottle, almost as if he was starving. Once the boy had a fresh diaper and settled in for a little more nap time, Cameron promptly got on the cell and called Jeremiah.

This thing was about to get out of control—and soon! This was their third and final warning! She was also having a hard time distinguishing fantasy from reality. All she knew was that she had to continue dealing with every situation as it arose and put the rest of what may or may not be reality behind her for right now! All she knew for sure was that whatever this thing was, it was destroying her from within, whether it was real to somebody else or not. She wanted to get started on this journey before things started to happen to other

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

people and this thing became something that it was not yet: real! So she rallied the gang together and explained that time was short and they needed to get this operation started. The first thing they had to do was reconcile their differences and come together as a team.

They had to put everything that had happened in the past away and keep it from happening again. The ancient civilizations had made sure to do their part to assume control of and dominance over the Well, but they'd been a little too late to save their civilization. Luckily, not late enough to destroy the whole world like it was now threatening to do. There can only be so many generations before the souls of the dead, who have not moved on, are entitled to rule the Earth. So far, life of all sorts, including that of mankind, had prospered here on Earth. But this time they were falling behind in getting the job done! If they didn't act fast enough, the whole world would be turned over to the dead, allowing them dominion over this spiritual plane and leaving only darkness. That would leave Earth with the inability to regenerate itself and heal and once again be covered in plant, animal, and human life.

Now they needed the scrolls. And according to Light Foot, in order for the sages of the Hopi Tribe to consecrate and translate the document properly, they needed to have sacred roots of certain strains of flowers. Three, altogether. Flowers that only grew up and down the Colorado River in the late fall and early spring when the weather was temperate like it is in the Southwest that time of year. They needed to hurry, if it wasn't already too late.

There was one that was only found up in the higher country of Grand Junction, Colorado, and the other two were farther downstream. They had to bring these commodities down the river to where the Hopi sages would perform an ancient ritual that would rid the forests of fears of their demon seed. But, the powerful spirits of protection could only stave off the negative forces that were currently guarding the Well for a short period of time, and both entrances to the Well had been sealed over once again. The first time by Alvin back in 1921, and the second time by the Dixon family after officially closing down their gold mine. They, of course, wanted to keep it only for themselves, but as they had recently found out, that was an impossibility. The Well had a life all its own, which nobody could really possess.

The plan was this: Big Jim and Tabitha would retrieve the scrolls from the Carson City Bank. Mr. Chin, Alvin, and the Butte would look for the canteen, which was hidden in one of the original windowpanes before renovations. So it was only a matter of time in which they would check every windowpane on the second floor on a certain side of the building—somewhere in the middle, they were sure. Once they had that, they would give the contents to Big Jim, and whatever was left over would belong to Cameron. The crew would stick together through it all, never separating from one another and always keeping an eye out, making sure nothing was left to chance.

Locating the canteen proved to be a process of elimination once they arrived at the Intrepid Star. As it turned out, Big Jim knew right where to go: the janitor's closet that was now on the third floor. Back in the 1950's during one of several renovations that were done to the hotel, they needed to strengthen the foundation of the building. It had been hastily overlooked when they added the brick façade to the outside of the building and put in giant rock and mortar pillars to hold up the new flat ceiling and the extra three stories above that. They put in an elevator system and jacked the entire building up on small yet effective building jacks.

When they were finished, only eight weeks later, there was a new basement and a brand new second floor, which was originally at ground level. That meant that the two-story ceiling was now on the third floor, marked by an amazing courtyard on the second one. The main casino floor, hotel lobby, and access to the basement were now covered in high ceilings with enough room left over for a false ceiling and what was now a catwalk above the casino floor.

Alvin had been gone so long he wasn't around for the renovations and had only been in the hotel once. He knew the building had been refurbished, but he was unaware the entire building had been moved skyward a whole story! It was a good thing he had the crew, because he would've been tearing that hotel apart at the seams trying to find it. The reason Big Jim knew it was in either the janitor's closet or the hotel employees' wardrobe (where they kept all the vests, polo's, bow ties, tuxedo shirts, and aprons for the waitresses and casino dealers) was because the window frames had been replaced in the hotel rooms during renovation for security purposes. But this window was now the third floor of the hotel and nowhere near the fire escape. Besides, it was nailed and then painted shut, so nobody could open it

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

from the inside. It would only cost more for a window that had an expensive windowpane and locking mechanism when they could just as easily replace the window with security glass.

Nobody would've ever suspected that it was in that particular window for all of those reasons. And because the two sides of the wooden walls that used to be outside the load-bearing walls made of wood had now been bricked in. Of course, where there was a window, there was a wooden frame preventing them from looking down inside. But there was no reason to here because when they were running the electrical, they ran the wiring through the hotel vertically—not horizontally like they do in most modern buildings. They did that for the simple reason that if a circuit went out, it wouldn't affect the entire level but only one side or even just one column of rooms— not the entire floor. As it turned out, Big Jim was right. He put a hole in the wall below the window sill in the wardrobe and pulled loose the dry wall, exposing the wood façade that had been there since the building's construction. It was covered in wallboard in order to be compliant with the town's fire code. The hardwood planks that rested behind this wallboard looked as new as the day they had constructed it! It was just beautiful to behold. These solid, hardwood, oak planks imported all the way from California by trail were stained in the old turpentine fashion, allowing it to be sealed up and encased in a protective shell.

They turned out looking the same way as when they installed them. Since they were an inside wall, they were never exposed to the weather, and because there was no layer of insulation put between the walls during construction, they'd had to start at the top of the wall to spray in the liquid foam insulation. Now that they had the wallboard removed from the wall, they began dismantling the vertical planks one by one. They started at the joint where the wood was nailed to the framing above and below the window sill, next to the windowpane and against the baseboard. They found it easier to remove the bottom portion of the window sill, which left the window propped open for the first time in over half a century. Once removed, it was encased there in the insulated foam used to finish the hotel's renovations back in 1955.

The Butte had known about this all along, but wasn't able to put together the pieces. She would have known had it been hidden in any other room in the hotel. The janitor's closet had a horizontal

power line fed through to an outlet below the window because of the width of the room. It was just a janitor's closet, for goodness sake. Yet there it was. Everybody just stood there, looking at it for a second, and then Big Jim began to shimmy it loose. It came out of its cradle and he immediately unscrewed the metal top that was still intact. He let the cap fall to the side of the canteen and hang by the small chain. He began to drink without any hesitation. When he felt the Well sweep over him, he lost his grip on the canteen and dropped on the floor.

Then he bent quickly down and began to pour the rest out onto the carpeted floor, smiling while he said, and "You can never drink from this Well. Jeremiah reacted on instinct and pushed Big Jim up against the wall where they began to struggle. The fight was on! Pinned up against the wall next to the window, Big Jim seemed to be getting the best of Jeremiah with his newly found strength. Jeremiah had his forearm up against Big Jim's throat, pinning him against the wall, grabbing his right arm and smashing it against the edge of the window sill, and freeing up Big Jim's left arm that he began to use as a club. Now that his other arm was free, Big Jim managed to pull Jeremiah off to one side and stumble out into the open area of the room, right in front of the open window. The open window that the canteen had just flown out of!"

Big Jim began to swing on Jeremiah, both arms charging him like a wild beast. Ducking down, Jeremiah missed his first two blows which sent Big Jim off balance and Jeremiah had the chance to plant one. He planted one right on the end of Big Jim's nose, which exploded in a vile mess of blood, spraying the entire group with the instant backlash of Big Jim's smashed sinus cavities. Broken bone and cartridge instantly filled his mouth with blood, which he promptly began to spit out. A shocked look came over his face as he stumbled back two feet, stopping against the upper portion of the open window. He extended both arms, saving himself from falling from the third story.

But before he could completely regain his balance, Mr. Chin finished him off, landing a sideways forward power kick that sent Big Jim screaming out the window. He fell to the sidewalk below. The rest of them all piled out the door, down the fire escape, and onto the second-story gravel roof of the main floor's outward construction. After running to where the canteen lay wide open, they picked it up

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

and noticed that it was completely empty. Not a drop had been left inside.

“It’s empty!”

They all said. Jeremiah said in a panicked voice.

“No it isn’t.”

Alvin said softly and calmly.

“There was a reserve in that canteen so that you knew when it was time to fill it up again!”

Alvin twisted a metal lever resting up against the outer part of the circular wall, at the base of the bottle’s neck, which released the lower reservoir of the canteen. It provided Cameron with plenty of water to drink. But they had to restrain the Butte from attacking her as she drank. The Butte was shouting, and reaching for the canteen, screaming!

“That canteen belongs to me and mine!”

“Call an ambulance.”

“Somebody said as Jeremiah reached into Big Jim’s shirt pocket and pulled out the key to the safety deposit box in Carson City. Tabitha and Mr. Chin headed on over to Carson City. From White Horse, the rest of the Sacred Clan of the Time Walkers would take the next flight to Grand Junction, Colorado, to surf the rapids down the valleys of The Grand Canyon. They’d attain the roots of the Matela Parlithious flower, better known as The Sleeping Lady, or to some as The Lady Killer. All three verities grew in abundance starting in Grand Junction. There was the pink and white, then the yellow and green, and finally the purple and red, which grew farther down. Now they just had to find them and locate the place where the scrolls were being held. Hopefully, the place where Cameron’s scrolls were being held for safekeeping by the elders of the Hopi tribe. But before they left, Mr. Chin turned to Jeremiah and said,

“How did you know to look in his pocket for the key?”

“I didn’t, Mr. Chin.”

Jeremiah said.

“Cameron told them.”

Alvin knew everything there was to know about the Rio Grande, but his father was the one who understood the Hopi language and nature and variety of the root they were looking for as well as how to find them and how to package them for safekeeping. After disembarking the plane from the airport at Grand Junction’s regional

airport, Alvin had a surprise waiting for the whole clan. It was his father, who was still alive after all these years, and not an old man either. He was also a Time Walker. A Time Walker with a boat—and all the equipment they could need to make a run down the river.

Tabitha and Mr. Chin were going to sit this one out. They would retrieve their section of the scrolls and meet the family at The Lonely River Pass where Tabitha and Jeremiah would defend their section of the scrolls with some of the firepower that Mr. Chin had collected during his time at The Holiday Park River Bend Horse Track. He had plenty of guns and ammunition to take on an entire assault force. Not to mention a few tricks he learned from Jeremiah during the Vietnam War—like how to dig in and lay low. They would spend their time behind the building about a thousand yards away in a tent with a sniper rifle and other surprises for any would-be treasure-hunter who might come snooping around. They would keep their food and clothing supplies inside the bar and only visit the location once a day for security purposes.

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

HIGH DESERT SAGES

It wasn't hard for the Clan to begin their trip down the river, even by moonlight. They were going to have to work fast if they wanted to get all the way down to the southern end of the Rio Grande, which was a three-day trip. If there was frost over the river valley then it could kill off the flowers they needed until they'd come to a blossom once again, which wasn't until the following spring. And the following spring would never come if they were unsuccessful this time around!"

Finding the flowers was one thing, but keeping them alive all the way down the river was going to be a challenge. Mr. Richardson (who refused to give his first name, but his son was Alvin Jr.) had all the answers about how to keep them alive and dry. This particular variety of flower was good for all sorts of things, but mostly it was good for mixing with a cookie dough paste that would attract ants and kill them all the way back to their nests. These flowers were venomous to the touch. If you mishandled them, you could actually die without treatment. The antidote wasn't something that was usually kept on hand—but once again Alvin's father came through with a small dose. That, in and of itself, was amazing because even under the best of conditions the antidote was only good for about forty-eight hours after mixing the powdered formula with goat's milk. It would spoil with the curdling of the milk-like substance. But the flowers root itself, when mixed with a small amount of tobacco and smoked, would produce severe hallucinations and could be fatal if touched.

The very last thing they remembered was falling asleep on the lazy, winding river somewhere south of The Hoover Dam. It was a place Mr. Richardson knew like the back of his hand. But waking up, he had no idea where he was. It was cool and dark, and he could hear

and smell the clean air of the moving river. When he opened his eyes he was almost blinded by the bright lights of a falling star. The end was coming, and it wouldn't be long now before the Earth's life force was turned too far toward the South Pole. That would melt the polar ice caps at the top of the world and strip the planet of its precious ionosphere and ozone layer. Things had to be turned around soon! The meteors that would usually bounce off were actually able to enter the atmosphere. As of right now, they were still burning out before they actually reached the surface of the planet. For now, nobody could figure out what had actually happened to them just yet. Soon the sound of a beating drum was audible from the cave they were in, and there was also a fire. Mr. Richardson could smell that too. As he sat up, he noticed that he was on a cot of some sort. As he came to and began to sit up, he found himself rolled out of the bed and onto the soft dirt floor. An animal-hide hammock was strung from one side of a wooden cradle to the other. He'd been about three feet off the cavern floor up there.

Now that he was awake he began to notice, by the light of the fire, ancient Native American wall carvings and hieroglyphs. It was not a cave he recognized and he suddenly noticed there were men surrounding the fire. And women coming and going with smoking shallow clay bowls that filled the air with a very pungent odor. One that he had never smelled before. Then he noticed Cameron was lying close to the fire, in the center of the circle. This scent that filled the air seemed to be making the room buzz with sound, and he felt like he was on a wavy ride down the Colorado River— only he was inside a cave. A cave with a hole in the roof and what appeared to be bats flying in and out of it. He could tell Jeremiah was part of the group surrounding the fire pit, and he was beating a soft drum with a steady rhythm. It was almost inaudible, yet loud enough to bounce off the walls with the sound of a thousand people beating drums at the same tempo. The sound faded away as it echoed off the walls, and then started again in a dizzying fashion.

The men were singing, but it was a song he could barely make out because of his distance from the fire and the sound of a thousand beating drums sounding off all at once. The group of men appeared to be in the middle of a ceremony with the young lady they knew as Cameron. If he understood them right, they were now calling her Gray Sky. Not Halve Wings, like the Shoshone nation had labeled her. She

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

was really related to the Hopi tribe through her grandmother, who everybody knew as Georgia Dixon. A Hopi Indian from the start, it had become her destiny to fulfill the sacred position of a sleeping prophet. Put under a hypnotic state by the use of The Sleeping Lady, she was reciting something that only seemed to be understood by a few of the men who sat around the fire. They drew symbols, creating a new set of sacred scrolls that needed to be placed back in the cavern of the Well of the Eternal after it was back to its natural state for the next generation of Time Walkers. There was no way to restore the magic well, it had to be relocated entirely. Not only for its security (because everybody knew of the location), but also because once the Well was polluted, it could never again be used to release the souls of the dead into the worlds beyond. To the places they belonged. Out of the land of the living and into the far reaches of the spirit worlds above.

This cave looked a lot like the one Mr. Richardson's son had described to him so many years back, with its flowing river and naturally occurring water well. There was one just between him and the group of chanting men, all dressed in their sacred garb. It looked a lot like the ponchos the Spanish wore starting all the way back in medieval times, before they colonized Central America and made slaves out of the natives that had survived whatever it was that had brought a once mighty civilization grinding to a sudden stop.

It wasn't long before Mr. Richardson felt very, very tired and decided to mix his antidote into a digestible substance from the ingredients he'd kept in his leather carrying case. He'd worn it all the way down the river, a saddlebag with a strap on it, like a very expensive modern-day lady's purse. Regardless of its appearance, he mixed his antidote together with a small vial of goat's milk that he kept cold in an insulated thermos. Then he lay back down in the animal skin hammock. It wasn't long before the Well had been prepared, and it was time for the Spirit of the Well to be replaced. The final drops remaining in Alvin's canteen were enough to seal the deal. The Well was prepared and a spirit form had to be placed within the confines of the Well, where it would remain entombed and at rest, eternally in an ocean of the life-giving force. The force which we are all a part of, living through the sleeping hours, filling the lives of all man with the dreams and ambitions that occupy the daily events and the sleeping

adventures making up the lives of mankind. A sacred right that is the creative force for the work of all good men.

It also washed clean the wrongdoings of man, always allowing their spirits to reincarnate into a new world, each and every time, providing every soul the opportunity to grow into a positive force in the eyes of God. The sacred scrolls were ready and had been replaced with a new prophecy, and the location of the well changed for the future generations of mankind who would inevitably find the Well and be tested once again against the negative power that continually threatens to trap the souls of all mankind. Lest they be set free by the power of the Well.

When the men were through, Cameron stood and walked over to the new location for the Eternal Well of the Living, where she pricked her thumb, creating a drop of blood that began to form on the end of her finger. She pointed at the Well, creating a white light as bright as a midsummer's day inside the cavern. When the drop of blood finally grew large enough, it left her hand and fell directly into the new Well. When it did, the light went out and Cameron fell down to the floor of the cavern like a rag doll. The water in the once-placid pool started to glow blue with a beautiful, wavy surface that reflected gently off the rock ceiling directly above the shimmering light of the magical Water Well of the Eternal. Although the Well was restored, the final ritual had to be adhered to. The three wishes of the creators of the Well. Only a true Time Walker could make a wish—after dropping a gold coin into the center of the bottomless well.

Alvin made the first wish. It could not conflict with the two wishes that would follow. So he wished for the many riches of the Well constructing the inner glory and the indestructible nature of the granite arch that protected the Well itself with its golden brick inlay and the many riches that occupied the outer chamber of the Well next to the underground river that had flowed through this cavern since the beginning of time. The next wish was Mr. Richardson, who had to make a wish that didn't interfere with the free will of another person. So he wished for the release of all the spirits of the dead that were now polluting the four elements: Earth, Wind, Fire, and Water. This cleansed them, blessing all of mankind with the gift of life everlasting.

Jeremiah made the final wish. One that had to be on someone else's behalf. So he wished that the Well's location be hidden from

JOURNEY THROUGH DESTINY

the eyes of man in an attempt to save the planet from its evil demise by the next generation of greedy Time Walkers. Now that the curse of the Well had been replaced, the lives of all men, including The Time Walkers, were no longer on hold and were free to pass on at any time they wished, with the guarantee of a new beginning. It was a new incarnation with the veil that guard's man's eyes from the secrets of life and death so that one may start clean with a new slate without having to remember the loss of others. Without having to remember the never-ending loneliness and fight for anonymity that allowed some a period of peace in this world. Without the fear and disheartening effect that makes up the life of an immortal woman or man, and their struggle against the natural forces that threaten to drain the sanity of anyone of their kind.

They all left the Well from the opening of a cavern next to the indestructible solid rock valley of The Grand Canyon and the mighty Rio Grande. Guarded by the elders of the Hopi Indian tribe, the Time Walkers were removed from the cave and placed in a safe environment, where they could sleep off the effects of the potent hallucinogen, The Sleeping Lady. They were soon reunited with their families back in Nevada, where Big Jim Dailey was still alive. He made a full recovery after only a few days in the hospital.

From now on, they would all function as a family, eventually outliving the confinements of a mortal life. All the Time Walkers and their families would be reunited with each other and guaranteed a long, happy life—while still having the wisdom to know there was no reason to miss the loved ones they had once lost. They knew full well they would be reunited with their loved ones in the end. It gave them the freedom to continue on teaching the ways of a worry-free life. Which is this: know how to give without expecting anything in return.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in Ely, Nevada, Kurt Burnum grew up in a small town not far from Salt Lake City, Utah. Graduating from White Pin High School in 2002 he led the life of a blackjack dealer in the northeastern Nevada Casino's such as the Hotel Nevada and Gambling Hall in downtown Ely, Nevada. He's currently living in the high deserts of southern California he resides with his newly wed wife and life-long partner, Celeste with their ten-year-old cat, Gabriel.