

RISE TO RICHES

www.thevictoriawoodhullsaga.com

Complete listing of Awards Won – *Outrageous, The Victoria Woodhull Saga, Volume 1: Rise to Riches* (to date, April 16, 2017)

Outrageous has won 9 major National Awards for Independent Publishing, and 1 International Award in a field of all published books. Individual awards listed below.



IBPA Benjamin Franklin – Bill Fisher Award for Best First Book by a Publisher, Gold Medal

<http://ibpabenjaminfranklinawards.com/2016-ibpa-bfa-finalists/#bill1>

Video interview: <https://youtu.be/2HQJ8tF1niI?list=PL0j72lr-3hZEAu91MJ9IVwLYFuaPFPUZ4>



Independent Publisher Book Awards, IPPY – Gold Medal for Best Historical Fiction

<http://www.independentpublisher.com/article.php?page=2045>



Reader's Favorite – Gold Medal for Best Historical Fiction / Personage

<https://readersfavorite.com/book-review/outrageous>



International Book Awards – Winner, Best New Fiction

<http://www.internationalbookawards.com/2016awardannouncement.html>



Indie Reader Discovery Award – Second Place Winner in Fiction

<http://indiereader.com/indiereader-discovery-awards/past-winners/>



Next Generation Indie Book Award – Finalist Historical Fiction

<http://www.indiebookawards.com/winners/2016>



Independent Author Network (IAN) Book of the Year Awards – Finalist in Two Categories: Historical Fiction, First Novel

<http://www.independentauthornetwork.com/2016-book-of-the-year-winners.html>



Chanticleer Book Reviews and Writing Contest: Goethe Award Finalist

(Winners will be announced April 2017)

<http://www.chantireviews.com/2016/11/03/goethe-awards-for-post-1750-historical-fiction-the-2016-finalists/>



Shelf Unbound - Selected as Notable 100!

https://issuu.com/shelfunbound/docs/shelf_unbound_december-january_2017



IndieReader Best Indie Books of 2016

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/indiereader/the-best-self-published-b_b_13512048.html

Top Reviews

"Neal Katz weaves a compelling page-turning story that cleverly unfolds history while providing a wonderfully entertaining ride. ... Impressively well written and exceptionally entertaining from beginning to end, "Outrageous" is very highly recommended for both community and academic library American Historical Fiction collections."

Susan Bethany
Midwest Book Review

"Victoria Woodhull is one of the most fascinating but forgotten characters in American history. She deserves to be better known by anyone who cares about gender equality and the ongoing fight to make America a more tolerant and just country— kudos to Neal Katz for bringing her story to life for a new generation of readers."

Debby Applegate, author *The Most Famous Man in America: The Biography of Henry Ward Beecher*

"In smoothly-written and compulsively readable chapters, Katz takes his readers through the young women's difficult early years and entrance into the broader stage of adult life. His research is obviously extensive, but his novel's exposition is very naturally woven into the internal dramatics of his narrative, and his large cast of characters includes plenty of historical figures, all well-realized. ... This is a very promising opening chapter to a series that feels long overdue."

Fiona Ness, Historical Novel Society

"I can't believe this is Neal's first book. Incredibly well written, this is an important work. I see literary accolades and a long running series."

Victor Villaseñor, National bestselling author of *Rain of Gold*, Three time Pulitzer Prize nominee, and author of *Revenge of a Catholic Schoolboy*

"This is a very well written historical fiction novel that immediately draws you in with believable dialogue and a subject matter that makes you want to know more. ... Every step along the way, Katz does a wonderful job of making you feel like you were really there."

Thomas Lopinski, author of *The Art of Raising Hell*

"I am impressed with the personality profiles. You clearly grasp the long term, psychological impact of the fugue coping mechanism, or taking flight, the identity disappearing, or creating an alternate, safer reality in response to trauma. Well done."

Mojgan Jahan, Psy.D., Clinical Psychologist

"Intense and mind gripping from page 1 to the bitter end of this volume 1, leaving the reader ready and enthusiastic for volume 2 to appear in print! Totally captivating, Neal and Victoria are definitely spiritually connected, he writes this for her, through her, and with her. The writer has got to be a man of deep, true love, and compassion for all humanity with a will to see the end of all suffering."

Carol Beatson, Amazon Customer

"Well written with great character development. The author takes women and children of that era and raises them up ... a masterpiece that should be read and re-read many times."

Gayle Pace, Amazon Customer

NEAL KATZ

SPEAKER | AUTHOR | FEMINIST | ENTREPRENEUR

“Neal Katz is one of the most original, innovative and constructive financial minds I have had the pleasure to meet. I have witnessed uncanny solutions to limiting problems, which I have shared nationwide in training seminars. When Neal says he has figured something out, I listen very closely. Best of all, this is a wonderful human being, gracious and generous with his time, always giving and helping people with Love. I am honored to call Neal Katz a business associate and close friend.”

—DAN VOGELZANG, CHFC, CFP, AIF. PRESIDENT AT M ADVISORY GROUP, TORRANCE, CA

“Neal, from the moment I met you, I knew you were a very special and beautiful soul. Thank you for sharing your incredible gifts with the world and for protecting, empowering and uplifting women. You are an incredible man and I would be honored to help your foundation to empower single mothers.”

—AYESHA SUNEJA, PH.D. IN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY, ADJUNCT PROFESSOR AT SOUTHWESTERN COLLEGE

“Victoria Woodhull is one of the most fascinating but forgotten characters in American history. She deserves to be better known by anyone who cares about gender equality and the ongoing fight to make America a more tolerant and just country—kudos to Neal Katz for bringing her story to life for a new generation of readers.”

—DEBBY APPELGATE, PULITZER PRIZE WINNING AUTHOR *THE MOST FAMOUS MAN IN AMERICA: THE BIOGRAPHY OF HENRY WARD BEECHER*

TOPICS INCLUDE:

- **Women empowerment, overcoming adversity, and hope** is the combined message and historical lesson from an outrageous suffragette—Victoria Claflin Woodhull, whose story is documented in Neal’s book, *Outrageous: The Victoria Woodhull Saga, Volume 1: Rise to Riches*.
- Helping women usher in a new era of liberation and progress, modern **male feminism** supports the **gender equality solidarity movement** to stand against the domination, objectification, and dehumanization of women.
- **Credit Funding**—a new \$1 trillion financial paradigm developed by Neal to transform funding of charities from donations to using credit, without \$1 given away. This will create sustainable and renewable funding for charities such as, micro-finance, low income housing, job training, education, infrastructure renewal and the building a national smart energy grid.

www.thevictoriawoodhullsaga.com

OUTRAGEOUS

ABOUT NEAL KATZ

Neal Katz is a semi-retired, successful, serial entrepreneur, CEO with a passion for women rights. His skill as a public speaker and raconteur enables him to engage diverse audiences from feminists, to financial experts, book experts, and spiritual seekers.

Writing the saga of Victoria Woodhull appeals to Neal as an author, because it serves three purposes:

- First, the story provokes public awareness of the historical and continuing degradation and subjugation of gender prejudice.
- Second, the tale exposes the historical basis for the manipulation of the “free markets” of stocks, bonds and commodities.
- Third, the story shows how existing financial and political power structures used prison and seizure of assets to prevent innovation and social change.

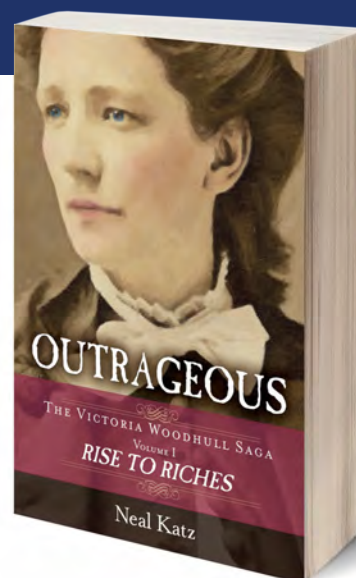
Victoria Woodhull overcame all these obstacles in a remarkable life.

Similarly, Neal has had to overcome many of the same trials and tribulations that confronted the sisters, Victoria and Tennessee. He believes in their motto: “Upward & Onward” and personally transforms challenges into positive manifestations. Neal often says, “We have so much more power than we allow ourselves to think. Create the life you want!” Neal chose to write in first person using Victoria’s words, thoughts, and point of view to tell the tale, inviting the reader to see through her eyes. He was directly inspired by Victoria.

Neal has pledged fifty percent (50%) of his author’s royalties from book sales and all ancillary revenues, to a foundation formed in tribute to Victoria Woodhull and her passion for woman rights, or fund a like-minded existing program. The foundation will promote and prove programs based on the Credit Funding concept for the empowerment and sustainable economic improvement of women, especially single mothers. The Foundation’s mission:

Woman Empowerment, Overcoming Adversity, and Hope.

Using his knowledge and skill from the financial markets as a former licensed securities broker, as a business developer, and as an advisor to start-ups, IPOs, and Fortune 100 companies, Neal has conceived and defined a new financial paradigm to create jobs while providing continuous and renewable funding for many charitable endeavors, such as micro-finance, low income housing, vocational training, and infrastructure renewal.



Find
Neal's
Book
HERE

OUTRAGEOUS, The VICTORIA WOODHULL SAGA, VOLUME 1: RISE TO RICHES

Victoria Claflin Woodhull (1838-1927) became the first woman to run for President. Tennessee Celeste Claflin (1845-1923) beguiled the richest man in America, Cornelius Vanderbilt, who fell completely in love with her. Learn how they ruthlessly manipulated Wall Street and the Gold Exchange endangering the entire US economy.

Volume One of *The Victoria Woodhull Saga*, *OUTRAGEOUS: Rise to Riches* tells the poignant, lascivious, and compelling inside story from Victoria’s personal point of view.

BOOK NEAL KATZ TODAY

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The Victoria Woodhull Saga Quartet

by Neal Katz

Synopsis

The book is a fictionalized account of Victoria Woodhull's rise to wealth, influence and presidential candidate, coming from poverty and a broken family. Author, Neal Katz, calls it *herstorical faction* written as magical realism.

The Outrageous woman everyone should know
... and why nobody does

What compels a woman and her youngest sister to overcome abject poverty and violent abuse to grow up to defy convention and obliterate every barrier and then become the first women to own and operate a Wall Street brokerage firm and publish their own newspaper?

How did Victoria Claflin Woodhull (1838–1927) become the first woman invited to speak to the United State Congress, and then the first female to run for President, in 1872? What made Tennessee Celeste Claflin (1845–1923) so beguiling that the richest man in America, Cornelius Vanderbilt, fell completely in love with her, despite being over thrice her tender age?

What caused the sisters to live out their long lives as royalty and peerage in Europe, Victoria living as a Lady, landed gentry outside of London, and Tennessee as a Viscountess in a huge castle like a queen?

Why aren't these empowered and independent women iconic symbols of the potential of all women?

Volume One, *OUTRAGEOUS: Rise to Riches*, of The Victoria Woodhull Saga tells the poignant, lascivious, and compelling inside story of how the sisters worked closely with Cornelius Vanderbilt, who at age 74 fell in love with the beguiling 24-year old Tennessee. Victoria provided the titan of industry "Inside Her Information" gathered through the soiled sisterhood, the ladies of the evening working at the top seven brothels servicing the rich and famous of New York City.

This relationship resulted in the great lion of industry having his last public roar as together they manipulated the financial markets and orchestrated the impending collapse of the U.S. economy in the gold scandal of 1869. To avert the crash, President Ulysses S. Grant provides the richest man in America insider information on the gold market and telegrams Vanderbilt that his railroad company, the largest company in America, is "Too Big To Fail!" Vanderbilt was proclaimed "The Savior of the American Economy" for intervening in a crisis he manipulated.

View Victorian America through the eyes and thoughts of one of the leading heroines, Victoria Woodhull. Watch as the infighting and elitism of the earliest suffrage women denigrating, castigating, and denouncing other equally passionate suffrage rights women threw the entire movement into a deep chasm, which delayed woman suffrage and equal legal standing for five decades. Learn wonderful anecdotes of the origins of products and phrases used today.

In Volume Two, *SCANDALOUS: Fame, Infamy, and Paradise Lost*, learn the story of the sisters' meteoric rise in popularity and influence and the equal velocity of their fall. The reader watches the sisters accomplish all their groundbreaking firsts. Witness the battle with Reverend Henry Ward Beecher, the most popular man in America, who transformed Christianity from his father's "fire and brimstone" theology to one of a compassionate and loving Jesus, who will redeem all who turn to salvation by confession of their sins. The reverend's personal life did not imitate his lofty and popular theology of his weekly sermons at Plymouth Church in Brooklyn Heights. He was a notorious womanizer, often bedding, and sometimes impregnating the wives, sisters, and daughters of his most ardent trackers and deacons of the church.

Volumes Three and Four will detail the restoration to wealth and fame of the sisters as they live out their long lives in Europe. They continue to champion the Women's Rights Movement and advise Emmeline Pankhurst on the philosophy of the British Suffragette movement.

Victoria becomes Lady Martin (peerage), and Tennessee becomes Lady Cook, marrying one of the wealthiest men in Europe, whom Queen Victoria appoints the Baron of Portugal due to her fascination with the young Tennie. She lived out her days in a palatial arabesque style castle restored by Lord Francis Cook to honor his Viscountess of Monserrate, Baronet of Portugal.

Written in the first person from Victoria's viewpoint, Neal Katz weaves a compelling page-turning story that cleverly unfolds history while providing a wonderfully entertaining ride. Katz has pledged one-half of his book sale proceeds to charities dedicating to the empowerment and sustainable economic improvement of women, especially single mothers.

New Book, ‘Outrageous: The Victoria Woodhull Saga, Volume One: Rise to Riches,’ Illuminates Historical Feminism

SAN DIEGO, Calif. – While feminism becomes more and more of a cause célèbre among young folks and social media users worldwide, charitable entrepreneur Neal Katz worries that we might be missing vital educational opportunities.

“For example, the recently released movie, ‘Suffragette,’ was a missed opportunity,” he says. “For one, rather than featuring the vitality of feminism’s history, it was used instead as background.”

Katz, author of the new historical novel “Outrageous: The Victoria Woodhull Saga, Volume One: Rise to Riches” (thevictoriawoodhullsaga.com), says Victoria Woodhull is one of humanity’s great heroines who has been largely forgotten, despite her long strides in progressing civil society.

Victoria Claflin Woodhull (1838–1927) became the first woman invited to speak to the United State Congress, and then the first female to run for president. The Equal Rights Party nominated her in May 1872, and her running mate was African-American social reformer and abolitionist Frederick Douglass.

“Harvard scholar Laurel Ulrich wrote in 1976 that ‘well-behaved women seldom make history,’” Katz says. “Victoria would not let anything keep her from what she believed was her entitled destiny, notwithstanding social expectations and prevailing morality.”

Woodhull and her sister, Tennessee Celeste Claflin, became the first women both to own and operate a Wall Street brokerage firm and to publish the first women-owned newspaper.

Katz, who says that feminism transcends gender because, ultimately, it improves all of humanity, has pledged 50 percent of his royalties and ancillary revenues to a foundation formed in tribute to Victoria Woodhull and her passion for woman rights. He is working on the development of a new paradigm for charitable funding based on credit rather than donations, called Conscientious Credit Funding Organization (CCFO). Details of the project can be found at ccfoglobal.org.

“Victoria Woodhull is one of the most fascinating but forgotten characters in American history. She deserves to be better known by anyone who cares about gender equality and the ongoing fight to make America a more tolerant and just country – kudos to Neal Katz for bringing her story to life for a new generation of readers.”

— Debby Applegate, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of “The Most Famous Man in America: The Biography of Henry Ward Beecher”

“As we're gearing up for the next election, this book is as timely as possible,” writes Amazon reviewer Meg Mathews, who gave the book five stars. “... Neal Katz’s rendering of Victoria’s rise to riches, told in first person, is a brilliant read. And for those who love Historical Fiction, ‘Outrageous’ is a must.”

About Neal Katz

Neal Katz is a serial entrepreneur. He harbors a passion for women’s rights and his lifestyle is centered on self-awareness and love. His novel “Outrageous: The Victoria Woodhull Saga, Volume One: Rise to Riches” (thevictoriawoodhullsaga.com) spotlights gender prejudice, exposes early manipulation of “free markets” and reveals how political power structures used prison and seizure of assets to prevent innovation and social change. Katz promotes a new financial paradigm to monetize charities through the *Conscientious Credit Funding Organization*, which will provide sustainable and renewable funding for diverse endeavors, such as micro-finance, low-income housing, education, vocational training, and infrastructure renewal, without a single dollar donated. CCFGlobal.org

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What Could A 19th-Century Feminist Teach Us Today About Free Love & Humanity?

Some Of Us Haven't Progressed Much, 'Guy Feminist' Says

"Women and girls have been discriminated against for too long in a twisted interpretation of the word of God," proclaims long time Baptist deacon, and bible teacher, former President Jimmy Carter.

"Feminism goes beyond gender equality, it has the potential to achieve humility, compassion, humanity, and Love," says charitable entrepreneur and "guy feminist" Neal Katz. "Too many people are 150 years behind the times. So much of the rhetoric in the current presidential election cycle has been a denigrating and violent assault on women, trying to reverse the march of progress. Major candidates compete to be more retroactive, by proposing reversing marriage equality for the LGBT community, banning immigration for an entire religion, and severely compromising hard-fought reproductive and social rights for women.

Katz, author of the new historical novel "Outrageous: The Victoria Woodhull Saga, Volume One: Rise to Riches" (thevictoriawoodhullsaga.com), says Woodhull is one of humanity's great heroines who has been largely forgotten, despite her ground breaking efforts to progress civil society. Victoria Claflin Woodhull (1838–1927) became the first woman invited to speak to the United State Congress, and then the first female to run for president. The Equal Rights Party nominated her in May 1872, and her running mate was the African-American social reformer and abolitionist Frederick Douglass.

"Many political types openly wonder what our founding fathers would think about certain constitutional issues; I tend to wonder what Woodhull would think. Luckily we can look to her newspaper, the first owned and published by women, to find answers."

"Undoubtedly, she would have been very pleased on a number of issues that have progressed to open hearts and minds in service of both genders, which have resulted in much deeper and wide-spread humanity," says Katz, who discusses what Woodhull's views have to offer people today:

- **Free love as a means for fairness in marriage:** An important message in her belief in free love was giving women equal legal rights in marriage. In her time the law did not recognize women as persons, corporations yes, women no. Women were chattel—the legal property of husbands. Victoria once wrote, "Let women issue a declaration of independence sexually, and absolutely refuse to cohabit with men until they are acknowledged as equals in everything, and the victory would be won in a single week."
- **Free love as a means for equality:** Woodhull wanted two things: men to own up to their own behaviors and women to have equal rights under the law. "Yes, I am a free lover. I have an inalienable constitutional and natural right to love whom I may, to change that love every day if I please, and neither you nor any law you can frame have any right to interfere."

Katz says, “In one sense, what Victoria meant by ‘free love’ was the legal freedom to marry, divorce, bear children and even pick lover(s) without government interference,” Katz says. “But she also meant freedom from the mental tyranny and constricting morality of the Victorian era.”

- **Feminism as humanism:** A salient feminist point of morality is a collective one – not only do women suffer infantile injustice in a system of misogyny, but so do men and boys.

“Feminism not only calls for the ability for women and girls to flourish, it also gives boys and men the ability to mature as conscious and loving human beings,” Katz says. “Today, more of us want authentic relationships as equals. We—most of us—abhor the concept of women as property. Proudly, I call myself the ‘guy feminist’ because I support my sisters and supporting the rights of *half the population* helps the whole population.”

The way to celebrate and honor President Jimmy Carter at age 91 radically changing his belief system in support of Feminism and Humanity is to accept the challenge to integrate the same change in our own lives.

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Q&A with Neal Katz author of OUTRAGEOUS: The Victoria Woodhull Saga, Volume 1, Rise to Riches. To purchase, visit outrageousthebook.com.

- 1. How were you introduced to the life of Victoria Woodhull and what made you so passionate to share her story?**

I came across Victoria in some readings about Victorian America. Then I read *Other Powers: The Age of Suffrage, Spiritualism, and the Scandalous Victoria Woodhull* by Barbara Goldsmith. I found so many parallels between Victoria's life and my own that I devoured several excellent books about Victoria, her sister Tennessee Celeste Claflin, Cornelius Vanderbilt, and the Reverend Henry Ward Beecher. The histories were informative but none captured the imagination of the American public. I hope The Victoria Woodhull Saga in four volumes will make Victoria Woodhull not only well known, but iconic.

- 2. Victoria knew that a rise to power was through financial and political gain. Did you get a sense through your research that Victoria thought she had a chance to be elected as President of the United States as the first female in the 19th century or was there another motive for her candidacy?**

The audacity of declaring herself a candidate for the Presidency, securing her party's nomination, and running a campaign through the first women-owned (Vickie and Tennessee) newspaper is astonishing. It did not matter if she could win, in fact, she was not printed on any ballots in any states, and she was wrongfully arrested and placed in prison during the voting. Once she became rich, the next logical step was to become well known and influential—the candidacy provided the opportunity. No, she would never think she could win.

- 3. Your thoughts on our free markets come from historical and personal knowledge. How would you describe the current market in the United States or even that of the world?**

I believe we are literally on the brink of catastrophic disaster. There is a debt crisis about to happen that will end any appearance of “the full faith and credit of the U.S. government.” We had an opportunity in 2008, after the bank and investment firm failures to change the mentality, but greed and short-term profits were more desirable than systemic change to establish a solid foundation. This time the U.S. will not be able to prop up the world markets, and we will finally witness a true domino effect—of financial collapses. The biggest danger in this is militarism, typically when things go really bad for a country it turns to war.

4. Would gender equality in America be enough to achieve sustainable economic improvement in the lives of women, especially single mothers, in our country?

If by gender equality you mean a collective mind shift that would end the subjugation, degradation, and objectification of women by men, then to some degree, yes. I have designed a program to prove to America and the world that single mothers are an investment grade asset completely under utilized in our economy.

5. If Victoria were alive today, what passions and injustices do you think she would stand behind?

Today Victoria would stand for what she stood for and wrote about in the 1870's. This was her political platform: *Women suffrage and equal legal standing, regulation of monopolies, nationalization of railroads, an eight hour workday, direct taxation, abolition of the death penalty, welfare and education for the poor, and equal pay for equal work.* Amazingly in 1872!

6. Why do you think you, as a successful businessman, are a good person to be telling Victoria's story in first person?

Many of the determining factors that befell on Victoria have occurred in my life. I recognized early on the psychological profile driving her reactions and imperatives in her life. Add to that the fact that men wrote her out of history, I believe a man should write her back into **her**story!

7. What surprised you the most about your research and knowledge about Victoria when writing this book?

There are so many factors that surprised me. She was dazzlingly smart despite her formal education ending in the third grade (a distinction she shared with Cornelius Vanderbilt). She knew how to gather the right advisors around her. She was an incredible manipulator of the mass media of the day, the press. Most of all, overcoming the adversity of her childhood, Victoria Woodhull would not be constrained by civility, cultural dictates, propriety, nor any form of compliance. She was fearless and a champion for those less fortunate.

For more information and a review of the Suffragette movie, please visit: www.thevictoriawoodhullsaga.com

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Chapter 1

NOT ALONE

Homer, Licking County, Ohio

Summer 1847

I hurt.

I felt like someone had taken an iron wedge the men used to split logs and placed it right where my nine-year-old legs joined together and then drove the iron home with the thunderclap of a sledgehammer.

No one came to help me.

Ma huddled my older sisters under her arms. They turned their backs on me. Ma was sputtering Bible verses. My two older brothers burrowed their way into the farthest corner.

Pa had split the log.

I screamed. The pain felt like Pa ripped me apart, unbearable. I wanted to die. I stumbled barefoot out the back door that led to the outhouse and fell into a dark, black night. I staggered across the hard-packed soil that still should have been warm, but I could not feel it. My legs just weren't working right. I lurched and stumbled. I wanted to get away from the house. Keep going.

I hurt bad.

Why?

What did I do so wrong?

I zigzagged across the yard and made my way through the apple trees toward the sound of the river. The air was still, like a piece of fresh-cut meat. I touched myself gently. I was bleeding down there. My fingers felt fluids on my inner thighs. I smelled my hand. I was pretty sure the thinner one with the coppery smell was blood. I did not know the stickier one, but I wanted to vomit. I didn't. I just dry heaved.

My innards burned and throbbed. I thought maybe I would just burn up like a log. Perhaps, that way, the pain would stop. I had to get to the river. I needed to sit in the cool water. I had to stop the burning.

Trying to see what I could only hear, rushing waters, I tripped on a big rock, fell hard, and scraped my knees. More blood, but it wasn't the same. It didn't hurt like my innards.

Pa hurt me bad. I wanted to drop my head and cry, cry until the pain went away and, if it didn't, I would just cry until I died.

Something made me get up on my bare feet and keep walking toward the waters. I was getting closer and the swirling sounds of the water made me want to get there all the more. The gurgling murmurs filled my emptiness. If only I could wash away the blood and the sticky, caking fluids in the water, the pain might start to drain out of me.

As I came to the water's edge, my toes felt the cool wetness of the riverbed. There were faint shadows from a lantern hanging on top of the small bridge down the bend at the crossing. I raised my hem and saw that parts of my gown were stained with blood. I got scared. What if I didn't stop bleeding? I took a couple more steps and just plopped down into the water, being careful not to let the river bottom or a rock touch me near where I hurt so much.

The water was cool and inviting. I relaxed a little, took a full breath, and thought about what I had to do. I had to wash off the blood, all the blood, keep washing away the blood, until there was no more blood. I started washing my nightshirt. I lifted it above my waist and started gathering sections and then folding them in half, rubbing my hands back and forth as hard as I could to get the stains out. I kept gathering, folding, rubbing, and working to get all the stains out.

When I finished, I dropped my nightshirt and bent forward. As gently as I could, I rubbed those crusted fluids off my calves and thighs and higher.

I stopped. I heard whispering.

Just a few feet away from me the water was talking. I could not make out the words and strained my ears to understand. I didn't move. Right there where the water talked, a shimmering light sparkled under the surface. A circle of glowing, green light emerged and hovered just above the waters. The image got brighter, and, then, it sort of hummed its brightness.

A Majestic Guardian rose out from the waters. He wore a white robe, gathered in a gold clasp and draped from his shoulder across his muscular chest. He was beautiful. A laurel wreath crowned his curly, black hair. His gentle eyes sparkled with tenderness as he spoke to me.

"You are but a little girl, Victoria, I will protect you. You will rise up from this river, rise up from these poor surroundings and rise up to live in a great house of great wealth in a city far away by the sea, with docks crowded with ships. You will become their leader."

I felt his presence like a tender hug from a loving father. *"All this shall come to pass."*

He started to fade and return to the water. I wept. He stopped, turned around, and spoke to me again, *"I will always be with you, Victoria."* He disappeared.

I knew three things.

My pa was a puny, tiny man.

I would become powerful.

I was not alone.

Chapter 2

SPEAKIN’

*Homer, Licking County, Ohio
Fall, 1849*

“**A**nd then ol’ Abraham drew out his dagger and was about to cut the throat of his baby boy, the little baby Isaac who laid a-cryin’ on the cold stone altar...”

I told the Bible stories the parents wanted to hear. Mothers who had errands to perform would place their young ones in front of my little stage on the grassy knoll by the side of the town square, I called the Mount of Olives. The adults would come back later on to retrieve their kids and carry them off like the other parcels weighing them down. I spoke with a crystal-clear voice. My voice sounded much bigger than my slender, short, eleven-year-old frame. I loved the feeling of power when the other kids stared up at me, caught in the web of my story and happy to be participating in foolin’ and pulling the wool over our parents’ eyes.

As an adult approached, I said, “Ol’ Abraham’s arm started to descend in the death stroke, when there was a flash in the skies.” I used my big, blue eyes to help me tell the stories. I already knew that I could make people listen by changing the tone or volume of my voice.

The children sat in silent rapture, all participating in the deception. I switched the story the moment a child was abandoned to the group of gathered kids and the Ma or Pa was off to do their shopping or work.

“Then the war-painted, red-faced, injun, with long, black hair, leaped off his pony and onto the covered wagon. Trembling with fear, the Li’l Settl’r Girl, with curly blond hair and baby blue eyes, tried hard to be still. She even held her breath, but to no avail. With an evil look in his dark, black eyes, the Injun Warrior Man pulled out his long, sharp, scalpin’ knife, stained with children’s blood.” The sun was bright and warming up the square. I felt a trickle of sweat run down my spine under my hand-me-down, threadbare frock.

I went on. “He was just about to scalp the poor tremblin’ Li’l Settl’r Girl. With a loud ‘Whoop!’ the Injun Warrior Man raised the blade and pulled back the little girl’s blond curls....” The small group of kids cringed and flinched, and let out ‘ooohs’ and ‘ahhs’ as I telled the story.

“Just then, a shot rang out and the Injun Warrior Man fell on top of Li’l Settl’r Girl. She was a-screamin’ and a-cryin’. She couldn’t move under the heavy Injun Warrior Man’s

bleeding body.”

The kids were silent now. I whispered the words slowly. “He was still a-breathin’.” I had them! “Her small, white linen dress turned deep dark red real quick with the Injun Warrior Man’s blood. And then...”

Ma Keller returned to retrieve little Deborah, who was just a year and a half younger than me. Deborah was about a year older than pretty little Utica, my younger sister, but they never played together, ’cause Ma Keller wouldn’t let ’em. Ma Keller paused to listen and then told Deborah to come along. Deborah fought to stay part of the group, and her ma had to tug on her to make her stand up.

I paused, looked right at the adult with a smile spreading across my face and switched back to the Bible tale. “... And suddenly, out from the sky, from behind a cloud, one of the Lord’s Baby Angels, a rosy-cheeked Ser-raph-im, grabbed ol’ Abe-ra-ham’s wrist and took hold. The Baby Angel stopped the dagger from its killin’ stroke.”

Ma Keller nodded her approval of the Bible tellin’ and she had to yank poor, little Deborah up to make her walk away. Deborah fought to stay. Her ma had to swat her behind and tug and drag poor little Deborah all the way down the street.

I spoke softly, but loud enough for Ma Keller to hear if she wanted. The kids leaned forward to hear my words. “The bright smilin’ Baby Angel then spoke the Lord’s Word to Ol’ Abraham...”

Ma Keller turned the corner. The other kids punched each other and laughed and snickered, knowing we had all pulled a good one on that mama and, in fact, all the mas and pas in town. They scooted forward, forming an even tighter circle around me, their “Little Queenie Victoria.” We all enjoyed this rare moment of tricking the older folks. Even more important than the ruse, they wanted to know if that wild, killin’ Injun Warrior Man was still a-breathin’.



One adult wasn’t fooled at all.

My pa, Rueben Buckman “Buck” Claflin, had been watching the entire charade through his single, good eye. He was the town scoundrel. Pa leaned against the side of a building, watching me shift from one tale to the other. He wore his black eye patch and looked like the one-eyed Jack in a deck of gambling cards. He beamed with pride seeing my manipulations and deceptions. He caught my eye and gestured calmly patting the side of his trousers, the signal for me to come immediately to that side.

My pa patting the side of his pants is like someone else screaming in the loudest voice they had. I suddenly felt cold, and it was hard to breathe for a moment. I knew that even the shortest delay in responding to his command would lead to a choice between the walnut rod

and the willow branch. The willow stung and hurt more, but a whippin' with the walnut branch made it real hard to walk.

"I'll finish the tale tomorrow. Y'all just sit 'til your mommas or pas come get yas." I darted across Town Square and stood obediently beside Buck on the side he had patted.

Buck looked down. I think he was pleased to see me respond so quickly. "Little Girl, I need your innocent countenance by my side for my next call. Besides, judgin' by the performance you just gave, you are the only one of the entire Claflin clan that might actually learn something from what I'm a-fixin' to do."

Buck grabbed me by the arm and led the way to the office with tall double doors that opened outward under the long, wooden placard engraved with big gold letters which proclaimed to the street, OHIO INDEMNITY AND ASSURANCE COMPANY. Buck marched me right past the waiting room with its polished walnut benches and pulled me through the swinging partition. He didn't turn to look at the assistant, who was rising from his desk to object and pushing me ahead of him, walked right into the office of Mr. Thaddeus B. Willard.

The office was regal. Behind the oversized, mahogany desk and the wide, green, leather inlaid writing area, an oversized man occupied a massive, tufted, red leather chair with brass tacks. I scrunched up my shoulders and lowered my head, trying to shield myself from all that authority.

Buck put his palms on my shoulders and pressed them downward forcibly while pushing me toward the front of the desk. He leaned over me, pressing me against it. Pa jutted his face directly in front of a startled and disoriented T. B. Willard and spoke in a tone as full of venom as a viper.

"I don't care if you are the mayor of our little town. Hell, I wouldn't care if you were governor of the Territory! The esteemed Ohio Indemnity and Assurance Company," Buck pronounced the words with such sarcasm that the mayor winced and instinctively flinched backwards, "owes me *money*!"

Pa kept pushing me into the edge of the desk, until it started to hurt. He raised his voice, "Y'all sure didn't hesitate to take my hard-earned dollars in paid premiums. Now that all my hard sweat and long hours have gone up in smoke in the gristmill fire," Pa shouted, "I will *not* let you cheat this little girl from getting what is rightfully hers! I *demand* my four thousand dollars!"

Mr. Willard stared right into my eyes. I met the mayor's piercing gaze without moving a muscle. Mr. Thaddeus B. Willard gathered himself up to stand, pausing at my pa's height and looked directly into Pa's one good eye.

"Buck Claflin," the mayor spoke in a deep rich voice, "you are a scoundrel, and you will not receive one dollar, not one nickel, not one pen—"

"Beware, sir," Buck yelled, cutting him off, "that I will commence legalities against both

you and your company. I paid my premiums and I will have the value insured delivered to me.”

Mr. Willard started to laugh. It was a booming, resonant laugh that made his oversized belly under the plaid vest bounce up and down. The laughter hit my pa like a hard slap on his face. He stood on his toes to lean in closer, putting his face as close to Thaddeus B. Willard as he could, unaware that he crushed me against the desk.

Mr. Willard leaned forward too, staring straight into Pa’s one good eye. “I want to thank you, Buck. Truly, I do. This time, you have gone too far. First, you get the merchants in town to give you money to refurbish the gristmill to bring commerce to the town. Then, before you can spend a dollar of their money, other than to purchase an insurance policy, the whole place mysteriously goes up in flames.”

I was afraid that the desk was going to break my bones. I somehow squirmed my arms up and pushed against the desk, back against the burden of my pa. No matter how hard I pushed, I was still pinned.

Mr. Willard continued. “The problem is that the fire was not so mysterious, was it, Mr. Rueben Buckman Claflin?” The town mayor and president of the Ohio Indemnity and Assurance Company had now reached his full height, towering almost a full foot over Pa. “Just so happens, that I hold proof that you purchased five gallons of heating oil the day before the fire. Do you remember not taking the receipt? The empty barrels were found discarded a mile from the mill.”

I stopped worrying about being hurt against the edge of the desk. I knew Pa’s terrible temper and his willingness to start swinging. I feared he would attack Mr. Willard. Then, we wouldn’t see him for a long time as he sat in the jail, where I had visited him before. I forced myself around so that my back was against the desk and shoved against my pa as hard as I could, trying to back him away.

“Perhaps it is your single eye, sir, which allows you to view societal norms, specifically *laws*, with your unique perspective of e-las-ti-ci-ty.” He spoke the last word as if each sound were a separate word. The Mayor had summoned all his powers and was now orating to drive his point home. “You often invent interpretations in order to perpetrate every manner of confidence scam or other sordid gambit, with an astonishing lack, approaching a total void of legality and conscience, not to mention morality. Despite your claim to the contrary, you are not a lawyer and have never been one. Why, you even prostitute your girls, after deflowering them yourself. This time the good town of Homer, Ohio, will finally be rid of you, *sir!*”

I knew I was small, but I also knew that I was the only remaining barrier standing between Buck’s anger and his sitting in the jailhouse. I pushed him as hard as I could below the stomach. I balled up my fists and with all the strength I could summon kept pounding with both fists against him until he stumbled backwards.

Shocked, Buck grabbed my wrists and twisted them, almost pulling my arms out of joint.

I cried out in pain. He turned and marched out of the offices of Thaddeus B. Willard.

“This is not over, not by any reckoning!” Pa yelled. He kept hurting me all the way home.

There was no relief when we arrived home, a run-down, thirty-foot-long, fifteen-foot-wide, unpainted clapboard frame house where I lived with Ma and Pa and five brothers and sisters. I often heard the words “poor white trash” when my neighbors walked by. Pa was real mad.

“You’ll get no choice today. It’s the willow switch for you, you little Jezebel traitor.”

I knew why Buck chose the willow switch. The thinness gave more of a whipping action that stung twice as much as the dull thud of the firmer walnut rod. The skin would break and there would be blood. He pulled the switch from the urn where he kept them in water to make them heavier, so they would hurt more.

“This will teach you to hit *me* below the belt!” he growled. He pushed my back so my tummy fell across a chair, pulled up my day frock, exposing my bare backside, and commenced the whippin’.

I never cried out. I didn’t weep. Tears did fill my eyes and trickle down my cheeks, but I would not let him see that. I knew I had kept my pa out of jail. I made my mind leave the room and thought of the pulsating, glowing green light and the talking river. I looked up and saw my Majestic Guardian beckoning me with open arms. I went to him.

I think Buck knew that I didn’t feel the strokes anymore, but he kept whippin’ me until the raised welts gave way to cuts and blood bursts. Ma huddled her other children around her in the far corner. I knew she was hoping to avoid Pa’s anger herself. She fervently quoted Bible passages and mixed in talking, as if in a trance to those spirits that she knew by name. She asked them to protect her other children. Ma didn’t dare mention my name for fear that Buck might hear her.

Buck finally grew tired and stopped whippin’ me. He grabbed the back of my dress, lifting me up off the chair, and threw me like a sack of potatoes across the room toward the huddled clump of my family. I landed hard.

Pa grabbed a half-empty bottle of coarse, corn likker. He drank it all quickly and then bellowed, “Roxanna!”

Ma, fearing for her life, handed little baby Tennessee Celeste, my youngest sister to Utica, and put Utica in Polly’s arms. Ma motioned with a finger to her lips to keep the four and seven-year-olds quiet. Dutifully, Ma marched up to the table, faced it, and grasped it with both hands, arms extended, and bent over. We tried not to watch. We tried not to hear. We heard Ma’s screams and Pa’s cussin’. Buck was not gentle in taking Ma from behind. We all crumpled in the corner.

The next morning when I woke, my frock was stiff with blood from my whipping. Buck was gone, leaving my whole family completely destitute. I walked to the river and washed the blood off... again.



Early in the morning of the fourth day after Buck's argument with the mayor, three women from the Homer Unitarian Church League brought us some small baskets of food. There was a loaf of bread, not fresh, but it wasn't full of mold either. There was a small piece of cheese and a small crock of fresh butter. We were so hungry and grateful that we didn't notice that none of the ladies gave any reason for the sudden charity. They departed so fast we couldn't even express our thanks. I had to fight my older sister and brothers to make sure little Tennessee got to taste the bread and butter. Neither of us got any cheese.

Just after midday, a crowd led by Mayor Thaddeus B. Willard and the reverend assembled in front of our family home, such as it was. Hooting and hollering threats, they held flaming torches high. Some of the women held pitchforks, and some of the men had pistols.

I saw people I knew, except they was changed. I looked out from the porch at the kids I had told my stories to. The rest of my family was hiding just inside the door. Ma yelled to me, "Vickie, come inside!" I froze.

Something was wrong, way wrong. All the townsfolk's eyes looked like either cold, black coals or bright red flames. All I could see was their hatred and disgust glowering at my family. I didn't believe they saw us as human beings. To them, we were something evil. They pulled up an old, rickety wagon with a sad, old mare in front of it and then Ma Keller climbed the step to our house, shouldered her way into the door, grabbed our cookin' kettle, took it outside, and tossed it onto the wagon. Mrs. Scribner, our next door neighbor, who wouldn't let anyone else but me play with her frail nineteen-year-old daughter Rachel, and who would shout at us for taking a few apples from her big old apple tree, surged in and took all our eatin' plates, knives, forks and mugs, walked out and tossed them up into the back of the buckboard. Then, most of the others rushed in and took what little belongings we had and tossed them carelessly up onto the wagon.

Next a couple of men stepped forward. These men had come to our home before and gave Pa some money, which caused Ma to make Utica and me to take baby Tennessee outside, even when it was raining or too cold. These same men now barged into our home, men I had watched climb onto my older sisters, Margaret or Polly, and had heard them when they grunted and bounced on top of them. A couple of them had done the same to me, but it never hurt like that first time with Pa.

Now, these men had those judging eyes, cold, black and full of hatred. They grabbed and carried my older sister, Polly, out of our home, just like she was a piece of furniture, and dumped her onto the wagon. The men's wives looked on with red flames burnin' in their eyes. They looked like they wanted to tear the arms and legs off of my older sister, or use their pitchforks to run her through. Terrified, Hebern, my second oldest brother, grabbed little Utica and climbed up onto the wagon.

My oldest brother, Maldon, ran up with his hands clenched into fists and started hitting one of the men. Another man came up behind and hit him on top of the head with the butt of his pistol. Maldon fell like a dropped sack of flour. They dragged him outside and tossed him onto the wagon. Ma screamed, calling on her spirits to protect us, as she ran out of our home and climbed onto the back of the wagon to revive her oldest son.

I looked across the faces of the crowd to find one friend or one kind person. Even little Deborah looked back at me with a flushed face and red flames in her eyes. Everywhere was hatred. I looked away.

I thought that this must be because of what I let Pa do to me when he drove his splittin' wedge home between my legs. I got confused and felt dizzy. I thought that somehow I had caused all this to happen to my family. All of this must be because they knew what I did with Pa. I felt so bad!

Then, all of a sudden, everything got calm. I saw Rachel Scribner, my next-door neighbor, walking to me from behind the crowd, and she was shimmering and smiling at me with her kind, green eyes. I couldn't hear the shouting anymore, and all the others seemed to draw back and fade away. Rachel came right up to me. She put her hand on my shoulder, and bent down to talk to me.

"Let's go get Tennessee and get you two up onto the wagon," she said softly. "I will help you."

Bewildered, I did what she said. The last time I saw Rachel was the day after she had died, and she sat me down by the big apple tree in her backyard and told me she would never leave me. Rachel climbed up on the wagon first, sat on the bench next to Polly, and then helped me climb up with my baby sister in my arms. I sat on Rachel's lap, and she bounced me as I held baby Tennie C. on my knees. Rachel sang us a soft lullaby. Tennessee looked up at Rachel, cooed, laughed, and was having fun. Holding my laughing baby sister, with the wagon moving away from the crowd, listening to Rachel's sweet song, and bouncing on top of her knees, I felt safe.

As the rickety wagon rolled away, the respectable townsfolk of Homer, Ohio tossed their torches into our home. Flames burst through the roof as the only home I ever knew blazed. Turning away, I nestled into Rachel's safe arms and calmly listened to her song, a farewell to my childhood.

Chapter 3

SPIRITS

Mt. Gilead, Ohio, 1851

Roxanna took us to Mount Gilead, Morrow County, Ohio, and we fell like a disease upon my oldest sister, Margaret Ann, and her husband, Mr. Enos Miles, the town's druggist.

We all lived in The American House, a hotel that Mr. Miles owned. I worked hard taking care of five young ones, since Maggie had three children herself. Then there were my sisters, Tennessee and Utica. Members of my family were leaving and rejoining the family all too often. We weren't sure when we would have enough to eat, as most of the rooms normally used for rent were filled with Claflins. Ma sent little Tennessee to live far away in Pennsylvania with one of my aunts. I cried for days, feeling that I had lost the only person who loved me.

Despite an almost unbearable hardship for all of us, somehow that harsh reality worked for a long time. Then Pa rode into town. Mr. Rueben Buckman Claflin sat atop a healthy horse, his pockets stuffed with money. Despite everything else, I was happy to see my pa, but I felt afraid at the same time. No one, not even Ma, asked any questions and no explanations were given. Pa let Ma buy some food and share a little with our hosts, but I knew that no money was offered to thank, let alone repay, Mr. Miles for keeping us alive.

Life changed after Buck returned. Men we did not know started visiting my sisters, Meg and Polly, and another girl my pa hired, not much older than me. Pa had her stay with us and kept her busy with men upstairs. She never talked and was always sad and crying. I would hear shouting between Pa and Mr. Miles about the men visitors.

Pa saw a way to put me to work and get some money. I would enter a trance, see angels and demons, and call out their names. Then, after a while, I would faint. After I woke up, Pa would let people ask me a question for a dime.

One cold night, with snow flakes falling outside weaving a white down blanket to cover the ground, one of our cousins came to visit. He told us that everyone was talking about my little sister, Tennessee. We all gathered around him.

"One night, five-year-old Tennessee Celeste woke up screaming and crying about a big fire that destroyed a large building." He sat on a chair with his back to the smoky fireplace. "Tennessee described many details about the fire. We believed she had a vision into the future." We all sat silent, spellbound by his story.

"Go on!" Buck commanded, when our cousin paused to sip some whiskey.

“We took little Tennie to the sheriff, and she told the same exact details to him. Cute as a button and innocent as an angel, Tennie told the sheriff how there wasn’t any water near the burning building, that the flames got so hot, the fire brigade couldn’t get close.” When he paused, Pa started thumping his thigh and my cousin knew well enough to get on with his tale. “Word got out and the local newspaper printed a story about what a strange little girl Tennessee was.”

Pa refilled the cousin’s glass when he paused, he took a sip and then continued, “A week later the seminary building burnt to the ground and all the details of the fire were exactly as little Tennessee had told them.” Pa started to get up, but my cousin finished up his tellin’. “The sheriff wanted to arrest little Tennie C., even though she was too small and young to start a fire. We proved that she had been at home with guests visiting the family the night the seminary burnt down.”

Buck left us the next morning to go and fetch Tennessee. Ma told us Pa took his time making his way back, touring around the countryside in a little buckboard covered with a red sheet and placards proclaiming, “Wonder Child” and “Two Bits a Question.” Folks lined up to ask little Tennie for her insight and advice. She gave it easily, and Buck collected the money.

Tennessee Claflin was delivered back to us like a Christmas package. I was so happy to have her home. I asked her about the voices and visions and shared that I often had a lot of trouble with mine.

“They come and go as they please,” she said, no burden in her sweet angelic smile framed by luminous, red curling hair. She hugged me and I hugged her back.



I heard other things about my family members and their reputations. Mr. Enos Miles walked in on his wife, my oldest sister, Margaret Ann, sharing a bed with the owner of another local hotel. Enos chased Meg’s half-naked body down Main Street, swinging a butcher’s cleaver. Polly got herself married to a lawyer, and Pa got paid. Polly had a baby boy, but the lawyer found out that the baby probably was not his blood and could have been the child of any number of the local townsmen, so he left my sister. The baby soon died of a fever. Polly carried the little corpse of her baby around town, pursuing her husband, to show him what evil his abandonment of them had reaped. Polly returned to live with us, but she always seemed to be far away.

Pa moved the expanding family to Mrs. Webb’s boarding house. There was a shed out back where Ma and little Utica, age ten, mixed and brewed the “life elixir” Pa sold. They both smelled from the resins, laudanum, and corn whiskey that they mixed with boiled water.

When she wasn't boiling the recipe or preparing the bottles, pretty little Utica would sit in a corner for hours barely moving and never saying a word. I feared for her.

Buck was brimming with new schemes formed from reading newspaper accounts about two young girls, the Fox sisters, who talked with spirits. He told me that a great man, Mr. P. T. Barnum, presented the sisters in a big show in New York City and he made lots of money doing it. Buck proceeded to make arrangements at Mrs. Webb's boarding house. He nailed a placard in the front yard announcing to all passers,

TALKING WITH SPIRITS
GIRLS 13 AND 6 - ASK ANY QUESTIONS
ADMISSION - \$1.00

By the fall of 1851, we was packing twenty-five men and a couple of women into the small, main sitting room that normally held about fifteen people. The price of admittance was a lot of money for our neighbors. Seated on two chairs that rested on the top of a dining table, Tennessee Celeste, age six and dressed in purest white, looked angelic. I dressed my thirteen-year-old body all in black.

"Remember what I told you girls," I saw Buck grab the back of the necks of each of my two older sisters and heard Pa's forceful whisper cut through all the other noises. "I sell your body, but not your soul!" Meg and Polly fidgeted, but did not try to get away. "Make sure the men I send up to you are happy. No talkin'. Just do anything they want." Polly stared up at our pa, wide-eyed and terrified. "Do it quickly as you can, and don't you dare let them go for seconds." My sisters did not resist, but looked as still as planks of wood about to be nailed. They were completely obedient. "And make damn sure I git all the money."

Buck signaled me with one of his hidden hand signals when he had sold enough dollar bottles of his Life Elixir cure-all to the customers and plied them with his rotgut whiskey at five cents a glass. He had already begun rotating men upstairs.

I slumped in my chair as Tennie C. cast an enchanted gaze to a point beyond the walls and ceiling. I jolted upright wide-eyed.

"I was just six years old, the age of Tennie C., this little angel sitting next to me," I began. Tennessee did not stir or move, apparently witnessing events in some far-off sphere. "I would go early every morning to our next door neighbors, the Scribners, to spend time with their nineteen-year-old daughter." I made my voice quiet and then sank to a barely audible whisper and said, "Rachel."

My eyes welled with tears and a few dripped down my cheeks to run onto my gown. I continued in a soft monotone.

"I visited Rachel every day for two years. She always fed me something. She taught me to read and write. We read poetry, speeches in the papers and the Bible. Then, one night,

she clung me close to her chest, smothering me with a hug, which she had never done before and she said to me, 'Vee, I do love you so, I will always be with you.'"

The crowd was so silent and T. C. sat so still that Buck could not even circulate to rotate men upstairs, or sell more likker.

"The next morning when I went to knock on the door, it fell open. Inside Rachel's mother and father were crying and rocking themselves back and forth over the still body of my friend and teacher. Her face had lost all its color, her green eyes had lost their shiny luster, and when I touched her face, it felt like a cold stone. I knew she was..."

I stopped, convulsed into sobbing and, even softer than I had first, said the name, Rachel, I barely uttered one other word.

"Dead."

The crowd gasped.

"Suddenly I felt two strong hands lifting me up and away from Rachel's body. I did not resist. I suddenly felt calm and even happy! I felt the way I always did when Rachel would bring me a warm biscuit, oozing with fresh butter. The hands guided me out through the kitchen to the back porch, down the stairs into the Scribner's garden and sat me down on the little bench facing their large apple tree and flower patch."

"When the person guiding me stepped from behind the bench to face me, I almost shouted out her name, but, before any sound escaped from me, she put one hand on the side of my head, turned me to her and placed the index finger of her other hand to my lips to silence me."

I stopped and just stared for a long moment into an empty space. "It was Rachel." I whispered.

"I see her!" shouted the innocent Tennessee Celeste, her far-off stare never wavering. "*There are others!*" She returned to her stillness as if she was a statuette carved out of ivory.

I talked without moving, still staring into the past. "Then, as if emerging from a mist and arising from the ground, there were others. There was a man who wore one of those ancient robes that look like a new bed sheet, a toga, and walked around reading an open book. There was also a king that could have been the young King David. There were all manner of folk and they seemed to be climbing up a stairway to the sky, to Heaven, and some folk were descending that same ladder to come back to visit this earth."

One middle-aged man stood up and shouted out. "Where's my first-born son?"

The outburst startled me. I closed my eyes and my whole body started shaking. When I finally calmed down and turned toward the man with the missing son, I told him what I saw that very moment to be true.

"Kaleb is out west, working on the railroad." People gasped around the room. "He will write to you soon," I said.

Kaleb's pa cried out in shock. "How did you know his name?"

The audience rumbled. My head dropped and, after a moment or two, I quietly finished what I had to say, with my gaze fixed on the father.

“There is going to be an accident, an explosion, and you will never hear from him again.” I collapsed in my chair, my eyes unfocused.

Tennie broke out of her trance and stood by my side, asking me to come back. There was silence for a moment and, then, many voices sought answers.

“My milk goat has run off, and I can’t find her!” One of the few women there shouted out above the others.

This time I did not stir and, after what seemed like a long time, it was Tennessee Celeste who answered, frantically sweeping her hands in front of her as if to clear away something.

“Your milk goat is caught in a thicket in the woods behind your home. Tomorrow morning she will be bleating loudly, because she is hungry.”

The reputation of our Talking with Spirits show grew when news circulated that the milk goat had been found the next morning, trapped in a thicket in the woods, just as T. C. had described. Also, within a few days, a letter arrived from that first-born son, Kaleb, and then he was never heard from again.

Thank you for reading this sample.

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Watch for Volume 2, coming in 2016

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