

**Sarah Hawkins  
Contemplates A Fourth Marriage:  
The Saga of a Pioneer Woman**

Written by Lee and Connie Stetson  
Performed by Connie Stetson

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ACT ONE

*( Sarah enters from the rear of the auditorium, energetically chatting to audience members as she slowly wends her to the stage.)*

Well here I am at last! I am sorry to have been so long, but, Eureka! I have finally found it! I have finally found my heart! Apple Abbott, bless him, must have put it at the bottom of my trunk when he was helping me pack.

Now I am a sorry excuse of a hostess to keep you waiting so, but I promised to show it to you ladies this evening, and to tell you all the stories of my life, and a promise made should always be a promise kept. I am surprised to see so many men-folk among you. And getting men interested in my heart nowadays is about as easy as putting socks on a rooster. Excepting for Apple Abbot, who seems interested in nothing but. And speaking of that darling, he's wandered down to the Merced to see if he can't catch us up some trout for supper, and he'll soon be back.

Now I know that you know that Apple has proposed to me - and well you should - he's been shouting it out from Glacier Point, babbling about it even before I got here to every mouse in the meadow. And I know that you know that I haven't said yes and I haven't said no. And it seems everybody knows that I've been thrice married and thrice widowed, - and some people have been telling Apple he might save time, money and misery by getting out his spade and digging his grave right next to the church.

And of course since everybody knows I have not yet said 'yes' or 'no' to Apple's never-ending proposals of marriage, the rumor has been spreading that I could not possibly have a heart. Well, I now have proof, rock-hard proof!! My very own Yosemite heart! Isn't it a caution?

We were at the Mirror Lake dance last night, sitting on the water's edge, resting for a spell when Apple pulled this out of his pocket and placed it in my hand. "I was out

fishing, just down river there” he said in that molasses voice of his, “and was casting out my line, when a pretty brown trout suddenly winked up at me, flapped one of her fins at this peculiar rock laying in the water and when I picked it up, didn’t that trout speak out as clear as a Sunday preacher and say , Apple, you might be blessed if you should give that heart to someone special.”

I ask you, who else but Apple Abbot would serve up such a story. A talking trout-- And female at that! Where does he get his notions? I don’t know a man more quaint, or homely as a mud fence. It makes me giggle just to think on him. Just look at this thing!

It’ll make a decent paperweight back in Sonora, I suppose. It’s a small and silly thing, but I am glad not to have lost it, for it’s a gift, and I have learned to treasure gifts that have good memories stored up in them. Every time I look on it, I’ll think the happy thought of waltzing on the waters of that lake under a magic moon.

Wasn’t that a shindig, though?!! Every resident and tourist in this entire Valley must have been there, more than a hundred people, don’t you think? All those bonfires casting their reflections around the shore, they looked like water fairies playing. Fiddles flying, everybody swinging their partners on that big old floating platform, the row boats sliding on by, and all with Half Dome smiling down upon us in the moonlight.

And hearing Apple sing again. To hear that still splendid tenor voice cast out over the waters of the lake, filling up all Teneya Canyon with his song. Him singing Home Sweet Home almost made me cry, reminding me of when I heard him sing it last, nearly twenty five years ago, when we were all camped out on the prairie, just before my family began our trek west.

I first met Apple '48, at an Oregon Society meeting near Council Bluff, Iowa. He became a good friend of John, my first husband, the only one of the three I ever learned to love. I was in the Elliot's kitchen, baking biscuits for a supper after the meeting, when John dragged in this tall, skinny, homely man, and said "Sarah, this here is Abraham Abbot, and he's joining up, to help us drive the teams." Well, Abraham

Abbot never said a word, just grinned and shuffled about, all shy, shoved a half bushel of apples at me, hoping I'd make him pie, and run off quick, as if I might throw them at him. I called him 'Apple' then, and he's been 'Apple' ever since.

He was strong and handy and even then had a fine tenor voice, and everyone thought him a worthy addition to our train. He wasn't of a mind to settle like the rest of us - it was just the general wanderlust that had stricken him, not a true case of Oregon Fever like the men folk in my family.

John just come home one day with a little itch of the idea in the back of his head; it then rashed up all over, causing an epidemic, infecting my father and my Uncle Emmett, adjectives swelling up their tongues so fast they could hardly eat. The land of milk and honey, it was, clover up to their chins, big fat pigs running around stuffing themselves with acorns the size of watermelons, gentle winters, no ague or pox, and 320 acres of free land for the squatting, the soil so rich that when you tossed feed to the chickens they had to catch it on the fly or eat it off the stalk.

Now we women, we saw this Oregon nincompoopery a little different. Where the men saw all that milk and honey, we saw all that mud and heartache. The men lolled about, planning and gassing, reading all them guide books like every word was Gospel.

Well, them guide books didn't tell a woman a blessed thing she had to know. I mean here I was, with the two kids, Amy, just four, running around like a crazed cat, just out of diapers, and Priscilla, not yet two, still firmly in hers. How was I to drag them those 2400 miles or more those guide books talked about, right through the Great American Desert and up and over them ding-dang mountains? Callie, my brother Tom's wife, she had the prettiest farm in the county, why did she need milk-and-honey Oregon? And my mother - she'd buried two of her darlings on our farm, and those guide books never informed her how she could just up and leave them. And show me that guide book that tells you how to cook for twenty plus people over an open fire, squatting in the mud in a rainstorm. Those guide books were the devil's work, and the devil is a man - make no mistake. Turned out that every word was a pack of lies and it

didn't make a bit of difference what they said anyways, 'cause at every cut-off, and there were hundreds of cut-offs tried by previous emigrants, well, the men would just beat themselves silly proving that their way was the right way, though none had a clue. And they wouldn't even ask for directions. Now I know why Moses wandered 40 years in the desert.

But I'm ahead of myself.

I remember that winter setting in my Mother's cozy kitchen, preparing for the trip, dipping candles, curing the ham - Lord, we cured enough ham to throw a scare into every hog in Iowa - doing the general packing up, choosing this over that - hard to figure which parts of your life to leave forever behind you - anyways, I remember my Mother would sometimes just suddenly quit working, and sit down heavy in that big rocking chair she loved so much, look out across the field to our little family graveyard, and weep without a sound.

Our men-folk spent those winter months in the barn overhauling the old farm wagon, and building three new ones, sturdy enough to carry a couple of tons of family trash and treasure.

I spent many a day in that barn, slowly stuffing those wagons with our trunks, furniture and food - food enough I thought to take Hannibal and all his men to Rome. Six hundred pounds of flour, a hundred or more of sugar, well, it goes on and on, all stingily packed and tightly tied - leaving just enough flat space to sleep everybody in case of storm.

Doing that meant leaving things behind, and I remember that my father and mother had their first knock-down hollering fight I ever heard over her rocking chair. Mother declared that she would sleep in a tornado, but that rocker was going west if she had to hog-tie herself to it. Well, the rocker went west, but it came to a sorry end, like some of the rest of us.

We were nineteen people, just family, me and John and the two kids, my brother Tom, his wife Callie and their two kids and another about to pop out of the oven, my Uncle Emmett, who had three strong boys and two younger daughters, old enough to

be of some help with the chores; then, my father and mother, a younger brother and two sisters.

In mid-April 1848, we crossed the Missouri river at Council Bluffs in a drizzle, on a flat boat, the winter ice still floating in the water. Then we drove on west to camp where Colonel Elliot told us to meet up with the rest of the train. Took four days to gather up the 65 wagons and the 150 people or so, and a couple more days till the scouts told us the prairie west had dried out enough to support the wagons.

Those first few days waiting was kind of fun, really. Oh we had some rollicking times finding out each other, swapping lies around the campfire, getting out the fiddles and kicking up our heels till the East was gray with dawn. My John was a regular jumping jack of a dancer, and I don't mind saying that back then I use to sling the nastiest ankle in the barn. And Apple would lay into his harmonica, and he'd sing - Lord, what a voice! He'd sing "Around her neck she wore a yellow ribbon,, she wore it in the Springtime, the Summer and the Fall... and "There's No Place Like Home" - had every eyeball wet before he was done with that one.

Day before we left Apple came to tell us he couldn't go with us, as his sister and her family were planning on going west a few weeks on and asked him to go with them. Everyone did hate to see him go.

The next morning, we just lashed tents, bedding, and bundles of horse feed to the sides, hitched up the wagons and set off. Only the men driving and a few mothers like Callie and I with babies rode, the rest walked. Some brought lots of cattle and hogs, and together with the horses, mules and oxen, we looked like a regular Noah's ark plunging through the sea-prairie. Truth to tell, right after that sunny beginning, we could have used Noah's ark, for after that first week of crossing the prairie, we had four days - seemed like forty - of steady soaking rain.

Lord, what a misery! We could not roll back the wagon cover for the rain would wash in. But tents and bedclothes were soon damp and saturated anyway, causing a nauseating close and musty smell, add to that the natural bumps of the trail together with lurching in and out of those mud sucks, toss in a couple of bawling cranky

babies and my next just beginning his little annoyances - only four days out, and already I felt so wronged, so illy treated that I could hardly restrain my feeling and the effort to say nothing depressed my spirit greatly.

By the evening of the fourth day we had muck up to our hubs, the men and boys were all just weary, sodden, blobs of moving mud, and weak, so weak from pulling wagon after wagon through that gruel - especially my father's wagon, heavy as Half Dome - and at night crowding into the wagons to sleep in wet beds with our wet clothes on, and without a proper supper, as no fire could be mustered up.

Well, that night, when all agreed that Job himself could not have suffered another indignity, well, didn't that storm just pitch itself into a major fit. It turned colder and began to hail, and sharp lightning split the sky savage as a meat ax. The hail lasted only ten minutes or so, but many of our wagon covers and tents were shredded. One man lost two oxen from the lightning, and the rest of our terrorized animals were instantly out of sight, all gone before the storm like so many wild beasts.

Some of the men tried to gather them up, wearing pots on their head to guard against the hail, but they had to give them up for the dark. And as soon as that hail was ended, the rain commenced harder than ever, and, not to be forgotten or outdone, didn't Mr. Wind decide to contribute to the general celebration. I never saw such a storm - anything loose was blown away, some of it never to be seen again. I lost a heavy Dutch oven I had hung over the wagon side, and forever after had to bake my biscuits in a frying pan. In less than two hours the water was a foot deep all over our camp, and we all just lay there, - shivering, miserable, damp lumps.

Along about midnight, while I was dreaming of how much more comfy my Aunt Abigail hogs must be, all cozy in their pen, I suddenly heard a calling of my name. I thought in my fitful sleep it must be Lord Jesus calling me home, and was nearly grateful for it, but it was only my brother Tom asking if I could help his wife, as her time had come. That baby had picked this soggy moment to come. Now we had tried to persuade our men-folk to delay leaving for two weeks or so, so Callie could have had her

baby in her own sweet home, but those guide books never said anything about waiting on a woman.

Well, I raised up my mother - no need to have only myself miserable if I could get my mother - and together we slogged back to their wagon to find the missus sprawled out, on a bedside placed on chairs to keep her out of the wet, all covered over with India rubber blankets. And you know, in my condition, her condition didn't look too bad.

Tom and the kids made themselves uncomfortable under the wagon, while my Mother and I waded and slogged and splurged about her bedside until early morning, when we finally presented to Tom a fine squalling baby boy. Tom beamed like a lighthouse and promptly called that boy Storm. Lord have mercy! I expect that if I had made any connection between that baby boy and that storm, I'd have drowned him in the nearest mud puddle.

Next morning the sky broke out into a big sunshiny day as if it had never heard of rain, and while we faced a long dry-out and a day-long round-up of the animals, and enough mud to suck down China, I remember that while I was trying to stir up breakfast over some damp chips I heard the lusty cry of that newborn baby rip out across the prairie. And despite a strong need to wallow in my misery, I could not help but feel my heart pump up. Whatever this trail might weaken, or take from us, I thought, and to wherever this trail may lead, that place would be made strong by the hardy who could make it there.

We let Callie and the baby rest that day, but pulled out early next morning, to wander through endless prairies and cross those ding-dang rivers.

Oh, those rivers! In those first few months, before the Wind River Mountains up in the Wyoming Territories, I don't know how many rivers we crossed, some of them a dozen times or more, shallow, deep, fast, slow, rocky, sandy, muddy, clear, all different, but all bitter cold from the melting snows and all dangerous. Where they were deep and there were no ferries, and that was most times, we had to haul everything out of the wagons, take them apart stick by stick, attach a strong rope to the

middle of the water-tight wagon bed, long enough to reach both sides of the river, then with men, women and children yanking against the current, we'd cross everything over a little at a time, then reassemble the wagons, and stuff everything back in. We all learned to dread the next river.

For it was at the rivers, where we began to chuck out our goods. Everybody did, had to. Folks began tossing out trunks, furniture—I even threw out an iron stove, thank you very much.

Well, this lead to grief. A choice had to be made between my father's plow and my mother's rocker. The plow won.

I remember she sat in the rocker, down by the river, rocking furiously in a cold rain, face set hard as Yosemite Granite, water welling up in her eyes, looking East as if she could draw the farm back to her. When Father sent me to tell her it was time, she stared at me a long while, as if I were a stranger, and then with one great choking sob, she stood, strode off to the wagon, grabbed the ax, and marched back to where I still stood trembling by the chair, heaved up the ax, and in 20 or 30 whacks reduced that rocker to splinters. She shook the ax at the storm, still wild and grim, and marched off to the river, ax in hand as if she would part the waters and clear-cut all the way west to Oregon. Mother never spoke a word for the next two days.

That rocker told her who she was, you see. Come from her folks up in Massachusetts. She'd been nursed, and in turn nursed all her babies, those now dead and those alive, in that rocker. All her dreams for them had been rocked up in it. Weren't no Indian gonna sit in my Mother's chair.

Now my mother had a prodigious fear of Indians, like most people back then, and we had Injun-haters by the dozen in our train, most of whom had never laid an eyeball on anything more savage than a turkey before we took trail.

They weren't much real trouble, those Indians, though once, up in the Wind River country, where I spent the worse winter of my life, I had a visit from a young Ute and his squaw, who came into my shanty like they do without so much as a howdy, and he looks around and into everything and takes special note of a cured ham I'd been slicing up.

Well, they left. And later, while I was stirring a kettle of cornmeal mush, didn't I see out of the corner of my eye that buck's big rear end quietly sliding its way through my canvas window. Well, I didn't think, I just snatched up the big wooden spoon from the hot yellow meal and applied it with vigor to that Indian's bare behind. He did not linger and he left the ham.

Next day, his Chief turned up to apologize for this man, and he then signified his admiration for my defense of home and ham by offering John eight good ponies - in trade for me. If I had known then what still lay ahead on that trail next spring, I expect I'd urged him to make the bargain.

You know, looking back, the Indians were more help than hindrance, and many an emigrant would be bones in the dust without them. They showed us good water, pointed out the better ways of the trail, helped us across the rivers for they could all swim and we could not, and sometimes brought us game to brighten up our supper. My mother would spin her grave all the way back to Iowa to hear me say it, but we got from them more good than bad, and now we've grabbed up most of their land we once only traveled across, and seem to be in the business of killing them all off, I for one don't want to forget the goodness of them.

The ding-dang buffalo was more trouble than the Indian - and six or seven times I saw the great herds sweeping across their country. Oh, to see them run! It thrilled me to the corset - excuse my French.

I keep hearing that the buffalo are nearly all killed off - shame on us if true. Hard to believe though - so many critters! Maybe they're just hiding out somewhere on those endless, endless prairies.

They were a useful critter to us, make no mistake, and some would not have survived the plains without their sacrifice. Both meat and blankets they gave to us - and chips, too, the only fuel to be found on that treeless prairie.

Now I have to admit I didn't exactly cozy up to the chip idea when first presented. Picking up those buffalo chips and cooking with the things made me a bit squeamish, but there was nothing for it, and they weren't nearly as revolting as raw

food and goose-bumpy nights. And so like every other woman on the train, I soon added to my chores trudging along in the dust with the children stuffing chips in a grain sack. Took three bushel or so good size chips for one family meal, and a few more of the things for inside the wagons to smoke out the mosquitoes. Oh, those 'squitoses - so big and mean they were they carried stones under their wings to sharpen their beaks. I do not exaggerate. But the smoking chips repelled them - we could stand long than they could.

We learned to stand most everything - though the one thing we could not stand was the cholera.

This next I'll tell quick; it isn't pleasant, but it is the way it was. Of all the dreads we had to face, cholera was the worse. We weren't two days out on our journey before we found the first graves - the first of hundreds I saw along that trail. It was a woman and child and, Lord, the chill I felt seeing them in that weird lonely spot on God's footstool so far away from everywhere and everybody, never to be visited by their kinfolk.

Often those graves could not be dug deep enough in the sun-baked earth, or amongst the rocks. And so wolves dug up their bones and scattered them, or Indians dug them up for their clothes, not knowing they were digging up the cholera, digging up their death.

Amy, my youngest, was the first of the family to go, sometime after passing Fort Laramie. We buried her up on this little hill...The wagon train moved on ahead unwilling to stay anywhere near the cholera, even my brother Tom moved his wagon a mile or more away, because of the baby he said, and they came back only for funerals.

We stayed to tend the sick, and it was nearly three weeks before it ended. Uncle Emmett's two oldest boys had it but survived; and they became our only backtrackers, going home to Aunt Abigail's hog farm. Tom's family never did get sick, but excepting them and John and I and Priscilla, the rest all died. Ten in all, up on that little hill, one-half of my whole family, my mother going last. Forty-two years old she was. No coffin,

without so much as a headstone, knowing we'd never get back to see their graves. Forty-one people in all died from our original train.

And then I lost my John. It started while we were climbing up the South Pass through the Rockies.

John had been gone all morning - not like him to be out so long, with the fear of Indian attack so thick on us. He rode off on Mindy, to hunt. About noon, while we were trying to heave the wagons over some boulders, I spied Mindy poking up over a ridge behind us - alone. Tom set off to find John, and somehow Callie and I got the wagons to the top of the nearest hill, and then we waited. I thought I'd fossilize waiting.

Along toward dusk, the wagon train behind us caught up. They had John with them. The Indians had not gotten him. A rattlesnake had.

John had found a spring with wild berries growing on the banks. He stopped to brim up his hat with them - a treat for us, you see, - and was thrashing through the bushes gathering, when the rattler struck him in the calf - right leg. Mindy spooked - ran off.

When they found him nearly the whole leg had swelled up purple. He had slashed two deep cuts in an X across the pinpricks and tried to squeeze out the poison and the blood ran down thick, clotting into his boots. He tied a piece of his shirt high up on this leg and then limped and crawled across the hot hills for more than two mile back to the trail, where the train behind us found him, sitting on the carcass of a dead ox, still squeezing. He still had the berries in his hat, crushed to juice.

We tried every remedy. Two trains passed by that day, no help offered except whiskey. Next morning, John said that either he or that leg had to go, and he was voting on the leg. We laid him out on a flat rock and Tom used a common hacksaw to get through the leg bone well above the knee. John did not cry out or shed a tear. I held hard to his hand and held hard to his fierce eyes until he passed out and I know he did not cry out nor shed a tear.

I can't tell you half the trouble I had getting him up over that South Pass, me now heavy with child. One of our oxen died in harness, just keeled over, and two of Tom's died from bad water or bad grass.

John was feverish every day, his face all milk-porridge, and where the leg had been removed it would all puff up and down like someone stuck a bellows in it.

Beyond Fort Bridger I knew he would die if we didn't stop. Tom and Callie begged us to keep on going, but I told them I'd catch a later train and meet them in their milk-and-honey Oregon. By now, I could not say the word Oregon without the bile rising in my throat.

Where we stopped was a pretty little valley. A half breed named Jacques - a trapper, a loathsome looker, but he was quiet and respectful, - well, he had a young squaw, said it was his valley. Well, Jacques had built himself a summer shanty half mile up from the creek, and said I could have it till John got well.

John rallied now and then, even got up on crutches for a day, and once I even packed up the wagon to go, but he always fell back again into pain and fever.

Then came that day when the last train that season was passing through, and I was standing by the road, swapping my last three oxen for some good grub and praying for a doctor, when I heard a tenor voice sing out, "Sarah Edwards! I do declare!" It was none other than our good Apple.

Lord, how my heart pumped up to see him - homely as ever, worse with the grit of the trail on him, and he smelled stronger than a sheepman's socks, but he was a rose in winter to me then.

He stayed a week, chopping wood, rigged up an abandoned stove, wind-proofed the shanty, drew up water from the creek, even bought me a cow from his train - did a hundred things. But mostly he just talked to us of common things in that strong tender voice, which seemed to sprighten up John considerably.

But his sister had gone ahead, and he had to catch up - it was his promise. Said he might see us in Willamette Valley next Spring, but that he didn't intend to stay long, he was going to wander for a spell until he found the most beautiful spot in the

country in which to settle. Which I see he did. The day he left us in the mountains I sat down by the creek and bawled like a new-born babe for maybe two hours straight, not for Apple exactly, but knowing that he was the last of everybody I knew, knowing the winter I would face.

So, except for Jacques, his woman and a few visiting Indians like the one I left a glob of cornmeal on, there was no one to be seen till Spring. That shanty became my entire world for more than five months, and I went out only for wood or to crack the ice off the water barrel or to milk the cow, but the cow, having no shelter and no proper feed died soon thereafter. I felt real bad for that cow.

Well, I can't mince the words. John worsened in mid-winter and early one snowy morning I woke to find him gone. I got him out into a snow bank, and Jacques help me bury him in the Spring. Five years I had of John, the most decent man I ever knew. He never raised his voice, and he always let me be the person I had to be.

So then it was just me and Priscilla for a while till John Junior come along in January.

I don't much remember that winter. John Junior was a sickly child, but he pulled through somehow. Priscilla, just now three, didn't know how miserable she was, but was bored to a stump. I went crazy, I expect. I just don't much remember.

In late April, one full year since I left my farm in Iowa, men started coming down over the pass, on foot or mule, a trickle first, then the flood. It was the gold, you see, 49er's, and California, not milk-and-honey Oregon was the goal for most.

It was then I met Horace Gump. His mule had died coming over the pass, and he was trudging by on foot carrying a heavy load. Well, what was I to do? Only my brother Tom and his family had gone on to Oregon, and might be dead too for all I knew, and anyways I was peeved at Tom for staying away from the family dying of cholera and for leaving us in the mountains, though I know he did what he thought he had to do. And Horace promised on my family bible that he'd take me to Oregon to homestead as soon as he made his pile.

Horace was a curious looking man, had a mustache you could have plugged into both ears. And he was always sucking the ends of them, sucked the color right out of them. Now I think on it, he sucked the color out of everything, every living thing. But Horace was a smooth talker, and with me ricocheting from trouble to trouble, I was plumb spent, and so I wound up in his lap. A passing preacher said the words and I became his wife. With old Horace I got burned on the backside, and I sat on that blister for three long years. Horace Gump didn't really want a wife, he wanted a pack mule, and that's exactly what I became, carrying his load until he finally passed on to his reward in the mud of a Nevada City street. My, I do go on, don't I?

Anyway, here comes Apple, swinging through the meadow - and with a fine string of trout. Doesn't he cut a fine figure, though? You know, when he came shuffling and grinning into my boarding house down in Sonora two years ago, I was amazed to see the same old Apple, sound to the core, nary a worm in him. Oh, his hair had fallen out; he said he thought it off. And later when he wrote, begging me to visit his Yosemite, he said he'd gone bald thinking of me.

But I don't know what I'd do with another man in my life - sit him by the stove and crack bark over his head for kindling, I guess.

Well, anyway, he does hate to hear my Gump stories, so I'll get him to clean the trout, and fetch some wood. You stay put; I've got Gump and gold field stories galore I've love to tell you; we got another whole husband to get through. I'll be right back.

## **ACT TWO**

All right, good folks, I meant to be back quicker, but Apple spent yet another ten minutes trying to persuade me to stay here with him in his Yosemite.

I've been telling him for *days* that I'm going back to my boarding house in Sonora, back to my home, sweet home. I traveled many a hard road, as he well knows, to make it my home, sweet, home, and I simply cannot abandon it, not even for good Apple. Not even for this glorious Valley. Though I do dread the thought of

leaving here tomorrow morning. Oh, I'll miss the beauty of the place and all you good folks. It's the travel, you see, I do hate the travel.

In fact, the only reason I came up here in the first place is that Apple's been pestering me for months to come up here and bid on that Cosmopolitan Hotel that's up for lease; says the Valley will be booming now they've finally got a good road in here. And I've been telling him for months I was not going down any 4000 foot mountain on a horse trail no matter how beautiful his Yosemite might be, or how lucrative the trade. But with the kids now grown up and gone off, and with Apple being so insistent, and the road supposedly finished, I thought I'd take a look.

But if that that Big Oak Flat Road is finished, I'm a duck. Coming up here by stage has to be one of the worst tortures that can be inflicted upon persons guilty of no crime. To think that I paid for the privilege! I was jiggled, and tossed, bounced to the ceiling, tumbled on the floor, wedged against the window, thrown into the corner, pitched into the lap of a perfect stranger - I felt like a sardine in a can having a violent case of hiccups.

And Lord, the dust! The heavy teams have pulverized so much of the upper road the stage sank in up to its hubs. And the wind followed us, churning up big clouds of the stuff. Bouncing around chewing dust - I tell you, if I owned half the real estate I ate getting here, I'd be the richest woman in California.

Then comes the worst of it - zigzagging down from the top of these mountains, skittery horses whizzing around tight turns of the road, with dizzying cliffs just outside your door, so sheer I thought any minute we'd be flipping off that mountain like hot cakes off a griddle.

Twice we were stopped by rigs coming up as we were coming down with no room to pass. One was a light buggy and they just tied ropes to it and dangled it over the side. The other was a freight wagon and we met it in so tight a place they were obliged to take it all apart, and pass all the pieces by hand over the top of the stagecoach while we passengers sat like road apples baking in the hot sun.

Why anybody would spend good money - and so much of it - to make themselves so miserable, I don't know.

Well.... just before the stagecoach reaches a spot where it overlooks this Valley for the first time - at Oh My! Point, Apple bound my kerchief around my eyes, pointed my head toward the Valley view, took off the kerchief and Oh My! Indeed! At such a sight something just grabs your soul and shakes you happy. And with good Apple just standing there grinning at me enjoying the Valley view, all my road worries just fell away.

It's the travel, you see, I do hate the travel. All my life I've hardly known a person who died in bed - travel did in almost everyone I ever knew.

Speaking of travels we'd best get on with my travails with Gump. He was low-grade oar, make no mistake - I couldn't have jumped a worse claim! So now, where were we? Oh Yes, the gold. Well, rumors of gold strikes were as thick as the mud when we finally came over the backside of these Sierra Nevadas, Gump latched on to one firmly, and early in August we lurched into ravine over near Hangtown, which soon became known as Poverty Hill. This camp was just a row of tents along the ravine, and Gump spent most of the little cash we had to buy a vile smelling canvas tent from a miner moving on and we added one to that row.

Some friendly miners came crowding up - my babies seemed to enchant them, being the only children in that camp, and they all so far from home - and they kindly helped Gump set up my first home, sweet, home, in California.

When I finally walked into this itty-bitty place, nothing but canvas and rags, something seemed to give away inside me. I just sank to the ground, buried my face in my hands and sat like a stone for hours without moving or speaking.

I sat there staring at this - this pigpen. No furniture, just a barrel and a few boxes, no stove, not even a fireplace. Just tin pans for washbowls and one towel for eight hands. Our clothes were in tatters, we had no money, and of course nearly every luxury I had brought had been cast aside on our journey. A floor of native soil, and so uneven that when I finally got chairs and a table they always reminded me of a dog

with a sore foot. So small a place that if I wore a hoop skirt I could not have turned around.

I just could not imagine a future. So I sat and sat. Gump didn't know what to do with me. But after a while Priscilla came in lugging John Junior, who came crawling onto my lap, giggling. He started pinching at my face, like babies do--pinched my cheeks and ears and nose. There was my future, sitting there pinching me. Telling me that I could worry all I wanted to, but worry never cooked a meal.

So I got up, got a knife out from our little sack of belongings, cut out a big gaping hole in the tent for my window, and went to work. Which is more than I can say for Mr. Gump, who was too lazy to even crack a smile, and he soon became ugly and depressing company in an ugly and depressing country.

I soon learned that wherever miners dug in everything became ugly and depressing, and noisy. There must have been a thousand men or more strung out down that canyon, pick axes and shovels banging on the rocks, pans clattering, shouting and cursing all day long, with more noisy men piling in every hour. And most of the night the roaring from the saloon, the bellowing that passed for conversation and the howling they assumed was singing, had my head clanging like a dinner bell all the time. Even asleep I had no peace; all the tents were packed close together, and I'd be just settling in when a nasal serenade would commence, a solo here, a duet there and then the mighty choir. It sounded like a revival meeting for bullfrogs. Even on the Sabbath the miners drank all day long, galloped in and out of the saloon on their Mustangs, played billiards by firing at the ball with their pistols, gambled at poker all night long and had a free-for-all fight as a nightcap.

I can't tell you men the loneliness I felt at being so much in your clamorous company.

How I did long for the company of a woman! There was a saloonkeeper's wife in that camp, but she didn't have an ounce of friendly in her, sour as a pickle barrel, hard of face and bitter, and had a mean look that could've made an icicle feel feverish, and anyway I could not bring myself to visit that saloon.

For Gump the saloons were the center of gravity, sucking the little gold he found right out of his pocket. Now he did dash right down to the diggings, and started turning over every rock, but Horace Gump was not the working sort, and he soon decided the bits he found were best invested in a poker game, where he felt sure he'd make his pile.

It's a sorry thing, to abandon work, and depend on luck.

Though gold hunting did seem to be all luck most the time. I met one woman, lived up in Marysville, she was sweeping her kitchen floor, which was nothing but the earth, saw something glittering, and that day alone dug up five hundred dollars and did the same thing for many days thereafter, acquiring a fortune. Pure luck. *And* once a man named Clopton died from fever up near Downeville, and while they were lowering him to his grave, the preacher saying the words noticed a wink of yellow at the bottom, and he bellowed "Hold on, boys!" and a couple of dozen miners tossed Clopton aside like a sack of flour and plunged headlong into his place of eternal. Proved to be rich diggings all around there, and many made their pile. Pure luck. Poor Clopton remained above ground for two more days till they found earth poor enough to put him under.

After a few days of waiting for Gump to get lucky, I got mad and decided to try my hand at gold digging. In one whole day I washed about a million pans of dirt to earn myself exactly three dollars and twenty-five cents in gold dust. I was sorry to have learned the trade, for I wet my feet, tore my dress, nearly froze my fingers, got an awful headache, took cold and lost a precious breast pin that had belonged to my Mother.

We needed money. So I decided I'd have to dig for my gold in the wash pile. Washing was a job nobody wanted to do, especially men, which of course meant that there was money in it.

Well, I was flabbergasted to learn that the men often sent their dirty shirts to the Sandwich Islands and even to China to be laundered their garments were sometimes three to six months upon the sea. And one man told me that he had some shirts

washed by another miner for which he charged six dollars a dozen; and when he got 'em back, they looked so bad, he gave them two dollars to keep them.

So I took my three dollars and 25 cents and bought me an old wooden washboard, cracked but better than none, and a leaky tub and I ran around the diggings and announced that I was prepared to launder any man's clothing. One dollar to wash and iron a boiled shirt and 50 cents to cold-wash woolens.

That first day the saloonkeeper's wife – old pickle-puss - gave me a big washing - took me all of one day to wash it and all of the next day to iron it, but I decided to charge her only five dollars, because I wanted to keep her business, and because Gump - who it turns out had reason to know - told me that she was tight as a wet boot. Well, when I took that washing back to her, she said, "I'll have my husband credit that five dollars I owe you on the bill your husband owes at the saloon." I was humiliated beyond telling, but she was talking about my children's dinner and I told her I and not my husband had done this work and I would have my money. She declared again she would not pay me, but finally, her husband, who had no trouble overhearing our dispute, said, "Pay the woman! She don't have to take in washing to pay her husband's bar bills. I was fool enough to trust him; it's my fault, and not hers." I got my five dollars, though I did not keep her business.

And that night, didn't Gump find that five dollars I had hidden and slunk off to drink it away.

Still, within a few days the miners had me so busy I was able to buy some good tubs and a couple of good flatirons.

I'll never forget the first time I had a great load of miner's wash, I could hardly breathe for the smell of that pile - we're talking miners here folks, the dirtiest humanity in all creation. Some of these boys would have their laundry done, go bathing in the creek, when they came back they were washed off so clean and looked so fresh they looked like somebody else.

I remember one in particular who came back very much transformed - I had hung his mess of clothes over a patch of shrubs to dry - just a convenient clothesline,

you see, and a few days later he came back, his face and arms all red and lumpy and furiously informed me that the rest of his birthday suit looked the same. My clothesline turned out to be poison oak. That was another customer I did not keep.

Washing *was* horrid work. Between the lye soap and the sparks from my fire, the boiling water, and the hot nasty job of ironing, my hands and arms were constantly blistered. Of all the calamities visited upon the human race by the stupidity of Adam and Eve biting on the apple, the worst has to be the need to wear clothes, and then to wash them. Though *Adam* does precious little of the work of washing, I've noticed. How is that you clever men out there can invent a hydraulic cannon to wash gold out of a mountain, but can't rig up a little something to wash dirt out of some clothes?

Anyway, I gave up the washing business at the second diggings Gump dragged us off to.

I was outdoors one night, cooking biscuits for my family, when an old miner - looked like a grizzly bear - came wandering up to me and said, "I'll give you 5 dollars, ma'am, for them biscuit." I just stood there, stunned stupid, thinking I'd misheard him, and I guess he thought me disinclined to make a deal. So he said, "I do crave some bread made by a woman. Would you do it for ten?" And he put a shiny ten-dollar gold piece in my hand. My washings days were forever over; I found better diggings in pie and pastry.

In those early days, I rolled out my pie dough with a whiskey bottle, which the miners would watch me do, then they'd slap down their money and ask for "another shot of that pastry." I baked everything in a Dutch oven up through that first winter.

I could have saved enough to buy a stove, if Gump would have stayed put, but we relocated twice more before winter. For Gump, wherever we *were* a flake of gold could not found, but nuggets the size of cannonballs were always just over the next mountain. But it was always the

same, a canvas shanty set up on the edge of unsightly diggings, a small general store with high priced goods, maybe a mail box, a saloon or three, too many men, and too little gold. And too little effort from Mr. Gump.

In yet another rag-tag tent, we endured a very disagreeable first winter. A cold rain fell more often than not, and everyone grew in the habit of walking bent double with their fingers in their boots straps to keep them from sucking off in the deep sticky mud. After one rainstorm, someone put up a sign, informing one and all that "This road is not passable; not even jackass-able."

I don't want you to thinking that it was all bad out there, or that all the men and boys in those diggings vile and unclean critters, though they seemed vile enough at first glance, with their shaggy hair, untrimmed beards, baggy clothing, and faces carved into by rough weather. But around women, they were almost... embarrassingly respectful. Many were so young - just away from school and home - and of course others had left their wives and children or sweethearts behind, and for almost all of them it had been a year or more since they been in company with a woman, and they seemed as desperate for the presence of one as I did.

The truth is, on arrival in a new camp, I was always something of a sensation. I've never thought myself very handsome, but in those early boom times, men would come from miles around just to take a look at a woman, mouth and eyes wide open, walking by casual nearly breaking their necks off, watching me cook as if they were studying the art of biscuitry. One boy spent most of an afternoon swatting mosquitoes all around me as if he were slaying dragons. They all seemed frenzied to get themselves hitched. More than once I would have a man ride up on a horse, remain in the saddle, knock on the shanty with a stick, and sit there until I appeared, then they'd ask, "Good morning to you, ma'am, are you married?" When I had to answer 'yes, I am.', they'd just tip their hat and went on. Later, when my answer was a happy 'No sir, I am not!', they would immediately propose. One man offered me a small poke of gold to hitch up. I let him know that money might buy a pretty good dog, but it can't buy the wag of

his tail. But mostly the men simply came up polite and respectful to talk, sometimes asking to play with my children for a spell. It was touching and funny and sort of sad.

After my first few months in the camps there were quite a few women showed up, but most were not the sort to join a quilting bee, if you know what I mean. Gold fever had caught them too, and they came in herds, from the eastern cities, from Mexico and Chile, from even from Australia and France! They didn't dig for their gold, but they knew lots of ways to mine the miners, and they got their share. They were a lively bunch, though they had about as much idea of propriety as a cat has of mathematics. Of course, all that was much later, when you could go outdoors in a fancy dress without fear of mud and slum.

Looking back, it was my disgust with the mud most of all that had me brave enough to face up to Gump and settle in a little place called Bird's Valley up north. Every camp was an ocean of mud, a slushy glue mixed with garbage and other articles too distasteful to mention. Bird Valley seemed as bad as the rest of the camps, but some industrious men there soon laid down a boardwalk, went nearly half a mile, from most of the tents and shanties to the general store and then of course over to the saloon. Now a boardwalk may not seem so much to some, but it was the highest mark of civilization I had yet to see in California.

I was only two months away from adding to the family, and Gump came slinking in one day, chewing on his mustache, and announced, "Guess we'll be moving on again." I almost hit him with a pie. "Well, guess again," I said, "I have moved on. I have moved on to your Poverty Hill," I said, "and to your Chile Gulch, to Rough and Ready, Hard Scrabble and to Delirium Tremens - named no doubt in honor of you, - and I and these babies will not move on to sit in yet another mud hole. You go to all the mines you want to," I told him, "but I have seen all the God forsaken country I am going to see, and I am going to stay right here until you make your pile or we all go to Oregon as you promised." The upshot of the whole business was he went and I stayed and that was that.

Next day I bought two boards from a man who was building the first wooden house in town. With my own hands I chopped stakes, drove them into the ground, set up the boards for my table, and dragged stumps and whisky barrels to it for chairs. I bought some good grub at the general store, and that night, I had twenty miners eating at my table. Each man as he rose put a dollar in my hand and said I might count him permanent. I called my hotel "El Dorado."

Gump came back to pester me only one time more; he seemed to think that because we were married he should be entitled to a goodly share of my little enterprise, but I assured him that the boarding house was mine and mine alone and the good laws of California would back me up. I never knew till then the relief of money and land being mine. Mine! I never had any notion of what was mine, unless it sat bawling on my lap.

Three long years I had of Gump, though truth to tell he spent much of it away, chasing the next bonanza. Men like Gump with visions of easy gold in their eye get blinded to smaller wonders of living, - home and children and the vegetable patch and the cows and the barn dance and the easy chatter of folks getting to know themselves and life.

I do hold many a bad memory of the man, but I had been charmed by him once, he made me laugh sometimes, and he gave me a good son to love and be proud of. But a man all wrapped up in himself makes an awfully small bundle. And he died with no one at his side, and with none to mourn. Excepting for Izzy, who happened to be tooting at a dance up at Nevada City when Gump was found dead drunk, drowned there in the mud of the street. Because a weeklong rain made travel impossible, Izzy had him buried up there, and it was he who brought me the news.

Good Izzy Hawkins! I first met Izzy at a dance - up at a camp called Hard Scrabble. My kids were at that too—Priscilla watching John, Jr. and me with the Screecher on my hip. That's the boy I had with Gump - his real name was Gabriel, but ten minutes after his blessed event he was forever after known as The Screecher. Well, I was asked to dance, so I plumped down Old Screech onto the lap of the nearest

bachelor sitting and said, "Hold this youngin' while I dance, and if he hollers just plop a thumb in his mouth.." And when I came back, didn't I find The Screecher still sitting on Izzy's lap just a'gooing and a'gaahing - like he was sitting in a bowl of porridge. All children loved old Izzy, and he loved them right back.

He was almost forty when I met him, but looked younger than he was, because he went beardless, and his big pink head seemed a little odd in the hairy camps. He was on the skinny side, with a tuff of standup hair, - he looked permanently alert, - sort of like those blue jays with those spiky heads you see up around here. Had that kind of energy, too, frantically bouncing around, fussing for no particular reason, and had a squawky voice when he got excited, which was much of the time. Probably why Izzy and The Screecher got along so well; they always seemed to be talking the same language.

Izzy Hawkins *was* an enthusiastic talker, never heard of a subject in this life he couldn't hold forth on for a day or two, and the less he knew of the facts the more he liked it - said it gave him room for opinion. When I used to rib him about his never-ending chatter, he'd say, "Yep, that's why I hauled off and married you, 'cause we got so many faults in common."

His real name was Isaiah but everyone called him Izzy. I had seen him bumping around the mining camps at every festive occasion tooting on his horn or cranking on his fiddle. He was the most musical man I ever met, old Izzy - could play the violin, banjo, piano and accordion, all of them pretty well, but he loved the horn the best, though he played it the worst. He took to boarding at my first place in Sonora when he was playing piano in the local fandango hall. He soon became my prize boarder, for he had a peculiar passion for those crazy theater folks, and since they needed boarding when touring the camps, he brought me a lot of their business. They were a queer and lively bunch; the house was always full of noise, confusion and of course the kids thought it was more fun than a box full of puppies. Well, Izzy loved them all, and would yak of nothing else whenever they were in town. I never did mind his yakking though.

Really his only bad habits were tooting and tinkering. Tooting on that horn of his, he was always practicing, rendering day and night hideous with the thing. And he was always tinkering and fussing, fixing things. Now I like busy people, but if there was nothing else to do, he'd try to fix a good day. I finally banned the tooting from the house when he began teaching The Screecher how to play, - it tickled Izzy to think he was teaching Gabriel to blow - but I never could get the Old Boy to stop tinkering. A small fault, though.

Truth was that for a long while after my time with Gump, I found men in general so dull and stupid that I thought it a calamity to the race that they were able to reproduce their kind. But one day I suddenly looked up to notice that Izzy had lived in my house for years, had looked after my children when I was busiest, was doing most of a man's work around the place I never asked him to do, and all without reward or thought of one. Noticed too that he was a person who knew just who he was, there was no posturing about the man. And then noticed that he was sweet on me. Hard not to notice, he was always underfoot. Well, Izzy and I got hitched up just before the war between the states broke out and were married for a bit more than a year before he passed.

I was telling you of Izzy's passion for the theater. One day he saw advertising pictures of a play in San Francisco featuring the great Edwin Forrest, according to Izzy the country's finest actor. So he rode off to Knight's Landing, and boarded a steamboat called the J.A. MacClelland to cross the delta. He asked me to go with him, but I told him I didn't want to go so far simply to see a show, and I had no interest at all of riding on a tea-kettle. The captain of the J.A. McClelland, like all steamboat captains, always wanted to clock out faster runs to beat out the competition, and would sooner blow his passengers to Kingdom Come than see his boat left behind. Izzy was one of 14 people blown up and all over the Delta, his remains never found. I expect he was tinkering with the boiler when it happened.

It's the travel, you see, I do hate the travel.

I mean I had left my first husband John buried in a lonely grave in the Wyoming territory which I will never in this lifetime have a chance to visit, and Gump's remains are in some mud hole up in Nevada City which I will never have a *desire* to visit, and Izzy - well, he never even made it to his grave. Even when they're dead, I have a hard time hanging onto husbands.

It's been 11 years now since Izzy's passing. I remember him fondly. But it's never been in my nature to be a calamity howler, or a complainer. Sunshine has always appealed to me more than gray clouds or weeping skies.

And anyway, California doesn't allow a woman very long to wallow in her grief. I've been busy, making a life for myself and my kids. I've had no time to sit around and feel sorry for myself and indulge in nerves or tantrums like so many young women nowadays. Have you noticed them? Getting up late, dawdling about and doing forever a long string of nothings. Well, they'll still need some starch in their corset here in California. For this great West is still making and breaking people. There'll be no end of frontiers for women; we'll always need to be pioneers.

Well, I've had a fine time jawing with you good folks, but I've simply got to go in and pack my things, - Apple wants to catch that stage heading out at the cock's first crow.

Oh, yes, he's going with me. You surprised? Now it's not like I haven't tried to warn him off, mind you. Ever since first started pestering me about getting married and coming up here to Yosemite to work and live, I been telling him, "You know that John died of snakebite after five years of me, it took Gump only three years to suffocate himself in a muddy street, and old Izzy was blown to smithereens in about a year. Marry me, and I calculate you'd be due for a gruesome death in about six months!"

Well, I guess I didn't really tell you *all* about that heart rock he gave me. Now I was tickled pink, of course, when he placed it in my hands, telling me his little fish story. But I thought to tease him a bit by saying that "Well, I'm mighty glad to get this

*hard* heart of yours, for it's the only one I ever got that has a chance of staying constant."

Apple just grinned and went quiet for a time, while we watched the moon playing on Half Dome's face, and listened to the music drifting across the lake "Oh, that rock is not so hard as you might think." he said, quiet and low. "That pretty brown trout? She told me this little rock was once the heart of Half Dome up there, till earthquakes shook it out and the river washed it down to just where I was fishing. But it's just a *rock* heart. And every rock, heart or Half Dome, as it bounces down life's stream, will one day become but grains of sand. Rock is not so hard, and so cannot be constant. But," he said, looking me full in the eye, "if you want a truly *constant* heart, I have another I can offer, and it will endure forever."

I told him then I had to return to my Sonora. boarding house.

And when he asked again just now, and I said, "I cannot stay in your Yosemite," he replied, "Well, then I must be Sonora bound, for I won't stay where you can't be found."

So that's it then. Sarah Hawkins, much to my amazement, is going to try out a fourth husband!

Thanks to all of you for listening to all my stories. Now if there is a lesson in them, maybe it is this: much of my life I was dragged into good times and bad by holding onto the coattails of a man. It's taken a while to learn to hold onto his hand, being sure he was holding onto mine. So that our stories can be told together.

Good bye, Yosemite! We'll be in Sonora. Come to our wedding – it should be around apple blossom time. (*Off singing*)

**THE END**