

A black and white photograph of a vintage car driving on a rocky, unpaved coastal road. The road is on the left, leading towards the ocean on the right. The background shows a steep cliffside and a rocky beach with waves crashing against the shore. The sky is overcast.

THE  
KING AND QUEEN  
OF  
MALIBU

THE TRUE STORY  
OF THE  
BATTLE  
FOR PARADISE

DAVID K. RANDALL

NEW YORK TIMES BEST-SELLING  
AUTHOR OF DREAMLAND

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# THE KING AND QUEEN OF MALIBU

*The True Story of  
the Battle for Paradise*

David K. Randall



W. W. NORTON & COMPANY

*Independent Publishers Since 1923*

NEW YORK LONDON

*To Megan, Henry, and Isla*

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## *Introduction*

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# THE BEACH

**O**N A ROCK-STREWN BEACH TWENTY MILES OUTSIDE of Los Angeles, three men drenched in sweat and grease worked quickly by the light of the sun fading over the Pacific. They prodded three hulking Model T's into a line across a barren road and began threading chains between their axles, forging a barricade out of glass and steel. The waves crashing a few feet away covered everything with a cool mist and silenced any small talk.

It was July 29, 1917, and time was running short. As the chains jangled into place, each man stole glances at the shadows stretching across the beach and into the mountains. Somewhere out there among the dark canyons were guards patrolling on horseback, each armed with a shotgun and instructions to use it. That the spot the trio had staked out was technically public land might matter in the eyes of God and the law, but it wouldn't bring much consolation to a dead man. Everyone knew that Rindge's men didn't fire warning shots.

A pair of headlights glimmered in the distance. Seconds later, the men could see a car speeding toward them, throwing up a black cloud of dust that hung in the air like an omen. It wouldn't be long now. Rindge was on her way.

**DURING THE FIRST PART** of the twentieth century, the perfect beaches of Malibu were the last place you could expect to find a celebrity. All of it—the sheer bluffs, the deep canyons, the south-facing shoreline that let you lie on the beach all day long without ever having to squint directly into the sun—was one private ranch, a wild kingdom hugging the edge of the continent. Running nearly twenty-five miles along the coast and stretching only two miles across at its widest point, it owed its borders to a time when Southern California was a half-forgotten outpost on the far side of the Spanish Empire. The crown, faced with colonizing a place where land was so plentiful as to render it nearly worthless, offered vast tracts, known as ranchos, to military officers and noblemen in an effort to put a Spanish

stamp on the dry valleys surrounding the tiny settlement known as Los Angeles.

The Rancho Topanga Malibu Sequit, which in time would become the city of Malibu, was one of the first created, and even in a region widely thought of as inhospitable, it seemed the least fit for human enjoyment. The sharp peaks of the Santa Monica Mountains nearly sealed it off from the rest of Southern California, while bears and mountain lions roamed its seventeen steep canyons. Great boulders lay scattered across its beaches like marbles discarded by a wanton giant. Anyone who wanted to reach the Malibu, as the rancho was often called, had to first consult a tide chart and set out on horseback at the right time along the beach. A late start would result in finding yourself marooned on the coastline, the path forward and back flooded by the drift of the ocean. Attempting to cross the mountains, meanwhile, meant fending off rattlesnakes and bandits, both of which were in ample supply.

That this unwelcoming place would in time become known as a paradise filled with movie stars and billionaires was the result of one of the longest and most bitter battles over land in American history. It was a clash that pitted one of the wealthiest families in the country against the encroaching modern world, all set against a backdrop in which Los Angeles seemed to morph overnight from a dusty coastal town into a global metropolis. Their fight would go all the way to the Supreme Court, and would culminate in a landmark decision that continues to shape the public's right to access beautiful places. In the process, the battle for Malibu would create the Pacific Coast Highway, a road that has since become a symbol of the good life in California.

At the center of it all were Frederick and May Rindge, a pair who would have needed no introduction in Los Angeles at the turn of the century. Newspapers tracked nearly every aspect of their lives, going so far as to once report that Frederick had stayed home from work with a cold. The couple arrived in the city as newlyweds in 1887, just a few months after a bidding war between the railroads in Los Angeles sparked one of the most frenzied housing bubbles the country had ever seen. It was a marriage of opposites: he was a Harvard-trained confidant of presidents and senators, the rare dreamer who knew what he was doing; she was a midwestern farmer's daughter, raised to be suspicious of the seasons. Resolute where he was romantic, guarded where he was generous, May seemed molded from a different clay than her husband. Yet the bond between them would prove to shape history in ways that no one would have expected.

In their first days in the city, Frederick, the only surviving heir of an immense Boston fortune, could barely contain his desire to make a mark in a place that seemed only one step removed from the frontier. Within a decade, he owned more businesses than perhaps any other single person in California, putting the Rindges atop the booming city's hierarchy. He soon purchased the thirteen-thousand-acre Malibu rancho as a country home for his growing family. It was a day's ride on horseback from Santa Monica and contained not much more than cattle and fallow fields of lima beans, but he had no need for the ranch to produce income. Frederick, a deeply religious man, saw its pristine beauty the work of God, and resolved to keep it untouched while Southern California boomed all around.

He would have little time to fulfill his wish, however. With Frederick's sudden death in 1905, May Rindge took control of a fortune that would be worth nearly \$700 million in today's money. She vowed to keep Malibu, the place where she had spent the best days of her life with Frederick and their three children, as an unbroken reminder of her husband's love. Her resolve would be challenged within days of his funeral, beginning the struggle that would mark the rest of her life. Over the next decades, May fended off attacks from aggressors ranging from the most powerful railroad bosses in the state, to a mob of armed homesteaders, to fractures within her own family, all in effort to preserve

Malibu as she had first glimpsed it while riding in a horse-drawn carriage with Frederick at her side. This is the story of how the Rindge family came to own and ultimately lose their grasp on Malibu, eventually turning a rugged ranch in the middle of nowhere into a global symbol of fame and fortune. It is a tale of creation and destruction, of triumph and heartbreak, all of which takes place along a stretch of coastline of unparalleled majesty. And, strangely, it is a tale that has largely been forgotten despite its impact. After the news of May Rindge's death was splashed across the front pages of Los Angeles' newspapers in 1941, her story was largely pushed aside and replaced with a new mythology of surfers and sunshine that better suited the times. Gidget's arrival on a surfboard in the 1950s beamed a different, happier version of Malibu across the world, enriching the name with a romance that has helped sell everything from Barbie dolls to family sedans. Few driving up and down the Pacific Coast Highway today know anything about the epic fight that created the road, even as the highway itself continues to draw millions of tourists from across the globe.

Until not long ago, I was one of them. I grew up in a suburb about fifty miles outside Los Angeles and as soon as I could drive, I spent most of my time rolling up and down PCH, looking for waves. It was only after I moved across the country and found myself stuck in a small apartment during one of the worst blizzards to hit New York City that homesickness compelled me to seek out the origins of the road that played a starring role in my childhood. As I read through old issues of the *Los Angeles Times* and other newspapers from the turn of the century, I kept finding mentions of a long-simmering standoff at the gates of Malibu. I soon found myself immersed in a Los Angeles before freeways, before surfers, and before celebrities. In a place famous for reinventing itself with every passing fad, I had stumbled on the story that underpinned it all.

The book that follows is a result of several years of research, in archives both public and private. It traces the path of one family over a roughly seventy-year span as the country swept off the last vestiges of the Civil War and transitioned into what we recognize as the modern age. The story of Malibu stretches from the halls of Harvard to the Old West in New Mexico, from a cult tucked among the hills north of San Francisco to a gold mine near the Oregon border, and culminates in the glamour of early Hollywood. It is a tale that could have happened only during the brief sliver of history in which the advent of railroads and the automobile meshed with the limitless American frontier and anything seemed possible. At its heart is the story of a marriage between two people whose temperaments and backgrounds could not have been more different, and yet each filled in what the other was missing. Without him, May would have never left a dreary Michigan farm, where she was lost among a jumble of siblings, and entered a world of wealth beyond her imagination. And without her grit, Frederick's dream of preserving the beauty of Malibu would have never been realized because only she was willing to shoulder the cost.

But all of that would come years in the future. The story of Malibu starts with a young man just outside Boston, walking out his family's front door and into the great world beyond his window.

# THE KING AND QUEEN OF MALIBU

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## *Chapter One*

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# **A GREAT BEAST AWAKENING**

**N**O ONE THOUGHT THE BOY WOULD LIVE THIS LONG. Death seemed to hang in the air at the Rindge estate, a towering brick mansion perched at the corner of Dana and Harvard Streets in Cambridge. Already, Samuel Rindge had buried two of his children before they reached the age of six. Now he had to write another one of the letters that were becoming a painful constant in his life.

“Dear Aunt Margret,” he scrawled in his pristine, looped script, a skill born from tending the books of his growing business empire. “Little Henry died this afternoon and we now calculate to have the funeral Sunday afternoon early. Mary still continues very sick. Frederick is doing well. Yours affectionately, Samuel B. Rindge.”

As he wrote the letter, Samuel began the grim calculation of which child he would have to bury next. Even with Mary’s current condition, he assumed that Frederick would be the one to not survive the winter. Though the boy was in stable health at the moment, the doctors had discovered that, like his brothers and sisters already gone, he had contracted rheumatic fever, a deadly disease that in 1860 seemed to have no cure. As an infant, Frederick spent the first months of life gasping for air while his chest fluttered, his heartbeat so weak that you could barely feel it one minute and pounding so hard he seemed ready to burst out of his chest the next. His joints were often swollen and hot to the touch, and he could barely move his arms or legs without howling in pain. On the worst nights, his body quaked in spasms, followed by hours of uncontrollable crying. Growing into a toddler did little to quell his suffering. While other boys spent the humid New England summer exploring the nearby Boston Common or wading in the banks of the Charles River, Frederick was often stuck looking out his window at life in full bloom, betrayed by his body. Every time he seemed like he was finally close to full recovery, the disease returned with a renewed vengeance, as if determined to finish the job.

Mary died unexpectedly three days after Henry’s funeral, again forcing Samuel to carry a coffin that was much too light. Frederick was soon the only child left out of the six siblings who had one

roamed the halls of the Rindge mansion. Samuel and his wife prayed that God would spare their only remaining son, all the while chasing away thoughts of the inevitable. A year passed, and then two, and then three. In the constant fight between Frederick's body and his spirit, the will to live continued to win, though just barely. The simple act of breathing turned into a demonstration of defiance, evidence that he would not succumb to a disease he did not understand. With his chance of survival uncertain, Frederick found comfort in the Bible, devouring the tales of men defeating long odds because they had God on their side. With each example of the power of faith, the boy felt less alone. He reasoned that he was no longer just a child fighting off a disease he couldn't comprehend; he was a young man God had decided to test, and he was determined to pass. In a house that seemed marked by death, the Bible pointed a way to eternal life.

The daily study sessions started to frame his life in ways that his parents had never anticipated. The family could trace its lineage to the arrival of the English on the Massachusetts shore. Daniel Rindge had wielded a sword in the first skirmishes between Puritans and the native Wampanoag and Narragansett tribes in the seventeenth century, while his nephew, John Rindge, marked out the boundary between the colonies of New Hampshire and Massachusetts on foot at request of the king. A hundred years later, their grandsons aimed bullets at the British in the Battles of Lexington and Concord, the first action in what became the Revolutionary War. Religion was a part of the family identity, but only a fraction of the whole. New England pragmatism ruled their daily life.

Frederick, however, set about on a different course. He began wearing his faith openly, eager to share the tales of triumph that buoyed his spirits when he was close to sinking. He sought out maxims and proverbs, reveling in the structure and certainty they offered when doctors could not tell his parents whether he would survive long enough to see another summer. Even as his body continued to disappoint him, Frederick kept an eye on the horizon, hewing as closely as he could to Christ's teachings out of hope that his faith would be rewarded. Each new day seemed like a promise that would be. His very presence continued to confound doctors, who saw no reason why this particular boy was still living when so many others with rheumatic fever quickly fell to the disease. Yet there he was, slowly growing into a man before their eyes.

**ON A BRISK FALL DAY** in 1875, Frederick Hastings Rindge began his adulthood by walking out the family's front door and heading off in the direction of Harvard. He was eighteen, handsome, and, to the eternal joy of his mother, Clarissa, who continued to worry about his health, had recently developed a full belly, which only made him look more like the wealthy heir he was. Following the fashion of the day, he wore a long black overcoat over his triple-pleated shirt, which he topped with a patterned silk ascot and crowned with a black top hat. He sported a bushy black beard that covered his face almost to the nose, the effect of which was lessened by the fact that his round cheeks and large brown eyes made it seem as if he were always on the verge of smiling. If his clothes weren't enough to identify him as a young gentleman, then the walking stick would have tipped the balance. Long and slender, and culminating in a gold ball, its every strike on the pavement ticked off another one of the dwindling number of steps remaining between his childhood and the rest of his life.

The countless hours spent cooped up in his room as a child now gave him a certain air of restless energy, a sense of motion that could be felt in his presence even when he was still. Some of it was simple ambition. As he took his first steps toward the Harvard campus, Frederick was eager to prove that he could not only beat the disease that still lingered in his body but defeat whatever lay next. Yet there was something else, something left unsaid after every grin and laugh and greeting that

drew people into his orbit and made them want to stay there. For all of his physical weakness and the number of funerals he had already been to in his short life, his spirit remained unblemished, emanating a sense of optimism that made it seem inevitable that better days lay ahead.

He had plenty of reasons to be confident. Over the last decade, his father had built a prosperous business loading glassware, popcorn, and other small items onto the packed clipper ships venturing around the horn of South America en route to California, where the discovery of gold twenty-six years earlier still continued to draw dreamers ready for a fresh start on the West Coast. While never a warrior, Samuel showed his affection for Frederick by schooling him in the dismal science of bookkeeping, illustrating how a rigid appreciation of even the smallest transaction could snowball into a larger fortune. He demonstrated how to use an account ledger, how to record each and every purchase a person made, and how and when it was appropriate to dip into your reserves to keep the books balanced. It wasn't exciting by itself, he counseled his son, but these skills often meant the difference between success and ruin.

That comfort with numbers had one day changed Samuel's life. At fifteen, with a loop of curly dark hair ringing his ears, he had started working as a gofer, a job that at the time went by the decidedly unglamorous term of "boy," in the counting room of the firm Parker & Blanchard, one of several importer-exporters nestled near the city harbor. He did a lot of everything—opening the office doors in the morning, sweeping floors, carrying bundles of merchandise taller than his own head—all for a salary of fifty dollars a year and a hot lunch, an attractive combination to a young man who had no family money to speak of. From the beginning, Samuel seemed to have an innate understanding of the art of trading. Within a few years he had his own desk, and by his twenty-fifth birthday he had become a partner, making deals to buy and sell merchandise all over the world.

His material success readily transferred into a jump in the family's social standing. Invitations to charity balls and fund-raising teas began flooding into the Rindge home, each organization hoping that some of the family's billowing wealth would make it their way. Soon Rindge's comings and goings became a regular feature in Boston's newspapers. For a man with deep roots in Massachusetts, though nothing compared to the opportunity to represent the city of Cambridge at the centennial celebration of the Battles of Lexington and Concord. Samuel stood beaming on stage throughout the parade, listening to the marching bands and long-winded politicians, all the while secure in the knowledge that he had at long last joined the city's elite. As the power of the Rindge name grew, Samuel understood that his son would have a job waiting for him at any firm in Boston after graduation.

Even if given a choice in the matter, Frederick couldn't have picked a better time to be young. Already there were whispers that, after years of depression, the country was on the brink of an explosion of wealth like nothing the world had ever seen. For this, it could thank the locomotive. Railroads opened up the landscape, uncorking a restless population that was still recovering from the damages wrought by the Civil War and linking the riches of the two coasts. Train cars full of men and women ready for a new life headed west, replaced by those carrying gold, silver, and other riches from the frontier chugging their way back east. America soon had more than half of the total length of train tracks laid around the world, and the country couldn't wait for more. The railroads became so important to the national economy that they would soon change time itself. On November 18, 1883, the U.S. Naval Observatory in Washington, the nation's official timekeeper, introduced the concept of time zones across the country, ending the patchwork system of local times, which was driving schedule makers mad. From now on, clocks in places as far apart as Chicago and West Texas would strike noon at the same instant, regardless of where the sun happened to be in the sky.

Money became the sum total of American ambition, even if it meant stealing or swindling a little

bit in the process. As Mark Twain, who gave this new Gilded Age its name, put it, “What is the chief end of man? To get rich. In what way? Dishonestly if we can; honestly if we must.”

Boston in particular was a place where a man blessed with desire and the right connections could go far and enjoy every minute of it. Opportunity seemed to waft through the city like an early morning fog. The drum of hammers announced the arrival of buildings sprouting up in the heart of downtown, which just three years earlier had been the site of the city’s worst man-made disaster. A fire that began in the basement of a five-story warehouse shortly after seven in the evening sent embers flying across the city’s narrow streets and onto the nearby roofs of wooden buildings that dated to before the revolution. The fire department wasn’t of much help. A particularly nasty equine flu had lodged itself in the city’s stables, incapacitating the horses required to pull the department’s fire trucks and ladders. Ad hoc teams of men banded together to lug each piece of equipment to the fire, in a slow and disorganized process that allowed the blaze to widen further. A group of property owners, fearful that the flames would spread beyond the financial district, took it upon themselves to load kegs of gunpowder into a block of buildings and blow them sky-high, hoping that the rubble would form a firebreak. Instead, the uncontrolled explosion simply egged the fire on. When it was finally contained the next morning, more than seven hundred buildings downtown had been demolished and thirty lives lost.

A new city was now emerging from the ashes of its colonial past, stretching and growing like a great beast awakening. It was a place where the old ways of doing things—and the people who did them—seemed to change overnight. Immigrants steamed into Boston Harbor and made their way into the city to find their fortunes, elbowing past men from the countryside drawn by the lure of a job in an office or a factory instead of the field. By the end of the decade, more than one in five men and women walking on the streets of Boston would hail from Ireland, and the number of Germans and Italians they passed each day steadily increased as well. With a job readily available for anyone who asked, the number of people moving to cities topped the number of those staying on farms for the first time in the nation’s history, and the ratio would never again favor rural life. With its swelling population, Boston had to expand out of its tightly packed seaport or else start building on top of itself. The first horse-drawn streetcars soon began running from Central Square in Cambridge to Bowdoin Square in Boston, drawing residents out of the city proper with the promise that they could easily get back into town. By the end of the century, Greater Boston would encompass a new ring of thirty-one suburbs sprawling over a ten-mile radius.

It was an age of expansion, when for the first time in history it was possible to cross a continent in about a week’s time and refashion your life in any way you chose. Genius, too, seemed to be found behind every door. Two miles away, a Scottish professor at Boston University named Alexander Graham Bell had just a few months before lined a mass of wires between two rooms of his fifth-floor workshop and gone to work coaxing sound out of them. When his assistant heard the command “Mr. Watson, come here, I want to see you” bleating from the receiver, the telephone was born. As Frederick walked the Harvard campus, he could find himself in the wake of Richard Henry Dana Jr., whose memoir of his journey to the then-barren shores of California, *Two Years Before the Mast*, was already considered an American classic, and who had now settled into private practice and regularly attended meetings at Harvard Law School.

Frederick could see that his restlessness was neatly suited for the times. Like many young men living on the East Coast, he thrilled to the chance of adventure and the unimaginable wealth that seemed to beckon from the frontier. Yet unlike most of them, he was already firmly nestled in luxury. A life of privilege in Boston was all but assured, Harvard degree or no. Still, Frederick couldn’t quite

keep his eyes off of the horizon, still pulled by an urge to discover what was far beyond his window. He had been west once before. When he was twelve, he had sat next to his parents in a swaying cabin on the first train to travel the length of the transcontinental railroad, a colossal feat of engineering that carved a path across the country and suddenly made the empty spots on the map see within easy reach of the cities of the East Coast. His parents had booked the journey in hopes that the fresh air of California, already believed to be magical, could finally cure their son. Frederick spent the entire trip with his face pressed against the window, watching the growing nation unfurl in front of his eyes. The wonders began as soon as the train passed Chicago and entered a west that was still wild. Great herds of buffalo spanned the prairie and seemed to move with one brain, their numbers so endless that Frederick gave up trying to count them. Oceans of grass, each stalk nearly as tall as his head, suddenly gave way to snow-capped mountains, their peaks cutting into the sky. Smoke from native villages hung in the air, the only sign of human habitation on the limitless landscape. Chugging westward underneath brilliant blue skies, the train in which the young boy sat was the first link between the coasts, and with each mile, it propelled the nation further into a new era.

**THE WEST WAS SURELY** on Frederick's mind as he walked the final steps across Harvard Square and into his new life as a university student. Yet once there, he directed all of his efforts to what was then considered the chief reason for a college education. He began forging connections with other young men who hailed from prestigious families, effectively cementing his father's efforts to move the Rindge name into a higher social register. Harvard's student life at the time was rigid and competitive; making the right friends or joining a certain club could—and did—have an outsized effect on a young man's future.

The sorting process began early in freshman year. Frederick quickly joined the Art Club, the Glee Club, and the Hasty Pudding Club, each one a building block in his plan to be recognized as one of the chosen of the chosen. He squeezed into a train car packed with men wearing bowler hats and silk ties to travel down to Hamilton Park in New Haven, where, along with two thousand other spectators, he paid fifty cents to watch Harvard line up against Yale in the first ever football game between the two schools. In another first for the fledgling sport, each team took the field in matching uniforms rather than a mishmash of gear. The men from Harvard sported crimson knee breeches, shirts, and stockings while the team from Yale wore dark pants, blue jerseys, and yellow hats. Despite constant bickering between players, spectators, and even referees over the rules, Harvard won 4–0 in a game that was closer to rugby than anything that could be called football today.

In his sophomore year, Frederick was tapped to join the Institute of 1770, then one of the most important social honors on campus. The purpose of the grandly titled club was to identify the one hundred members of each class most fit to join society, all by a process of cascading election. Members of the previous year's class would choose the first ten members of the next. These ten members would then tap the next ten of their class, and so on until there were a new one hundred ready to take their place atop the school's hierarchy. With membership a prerequisite to join the Porcellian, the Fly, or another one of the prestigious and secretive final clubs that counted multiple congressmen and senators in their alumni rolls, the names of those admitted to the Institute of 1770 were printed in Harvard's own *Crimson* newspaper and in Boston's broadsheets every year, listed in the precise order in which the young men were chosen.

His status secured, Frederick opted to become a member of the A.D. Club, one of the oldest and most exclusive final clubs on campus. He spent long hours in the club's two-room headquarters

Brattle Street, just off Harvard Square, drinking beer and wine and playing hands of whist with his classmates. Frederick soon began spending more and more of his time with a wild New Yorker who could also understand the dark irony of passing one's childhood trapped in a mansion. Like Frederick, Theodore Roosevelt knew what it was like to feel cheated by his body. Yet where Frederick had turned to religion as a salve for his wounds, Teddy had resolved to overcome his asthma and weak frame through sheer brawn. As a teenager, he had decided to "make his body," as he would later call it, by convincing his father to install a gymnasium in the family home on East Twentieth Street in Manhattan. There, he spent nearly every available hour of his late adolescence lifting weights and practicing gymnastics. He was soon well enough to travel with his family on a tour through Europe and the Middle East. That success did little to deter him from continuing the punishment of his body in order to refashion it more to his liking. He hurled stones, hiked mountains, pursued game through forests. Once enrolled at Harvard, he began boxing and wrestling, as if determined to beat away lingering specks of physical weakness into submission.

As it would for countless others, Teddy's lust for life stirred something inside Frederick. He could not match Roosevelt's seemingly inexhaustible physical energy; nor could he even try to: defeating his rheumatic fever was on another scale entirely from Teddy's single-minded conquest of asthma. Yet while he would never be an athlete, Frederick realized that he, too, was strong enough to travel the world and seek out the experiences that would give him the sense of making up for lost time. His tale of traveling the West by railroad car and the sights and sounds of San Francisco already enthralled Teddy; now he was determined to add to his stable of stories so as to keep pace with his friend.

**THE QUESTION OF WHERE** to go was easy. As millions of immigrants steamed toward the United States from Europe, Americans of means headed in the opposite direction. Despite its wealth, the young United States was widely considered to be sorely lacking in culture. Its few museums could not compete with the glories of the Louvre; its wooden churches were nothing in contrast to the immensity of St. Peter's Basilica; it had no Shakespeare or Milton to call its own. In his infamous list of the things the United States was lacking compared with what he called "the denser, richer, warmer European spectacle," Henry James included "no sovereign, no court, no personal loyalty, no aristocracy ... no castles, nor manors, no old country-houses ... no cathedrals, nor abbeys ... no great universities nor public schools."

Traveling abroad offered a clear way to demonstrate one's refinement and taste at a time when it seemed like just about anyone could strike it rich. The docks of New York became stuffed with steamships, heading off to all parts of the globe. "The American is a migratory animal," wrote Robert Tomes in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in 1865. "He walks the streets of London, Paris, St. Petersburg, Berlin, Vienna, Naples, Rome, Constantinople, Canton and even the causeways of Japan with as confident a step as he treads the pavements of Broadway." Firsthand tales of tasting exotic foods and touring ancient sites became a standard feature in newspapers, written largely by tourists sending flowery dispatches back home. Professionals, too, realized that travel would sell. Nearly every notable American writer published an account of their voyage abroad, from Nathaniel Hawthorne, who wrote *Our Old Home*, to Frederick Douglass in *My Bondage and My Freedom*.

With the world open to them, Americans opted for the Continent most of all. "Europe is the biggest show I ever went to," one writer at the time noted. The newly rich, unsure of where to go and how to act, turned the guidebook industry into a can't-fail proposition. Nearly two thousand travel books were published in the United States between the Civil War and 1900, and nearly all of them did well. Even

unedited collections of letters and outdated newspaper articles sold by the tens of thousands. The sights Americans were expected to see, and the feelings they were supposed to have when they saw them, were all prescribed by George P. Putnam's *The Tourist in Europe*, the most popular guidebook at the time. Itineraries listed what was mandatory and what could be skipped, which hotels to stay at and which to avoid, and even the prejudices one should follow. "Verily, the lower classes of the French are a filthy people," Putnam advised. With his guidebook in their hand, the "American who conducts himself as a patriotic and gentlemanly American should do, has no reason to be ashamed of his name or nation," Putnam counseled. Rather, he "belongs to nature's nobility."

On June 20, 1878, at the age of twenty, Frederick hustled across the docks in New York Harbor alongside a classmate from Harvard by the name of Washington Butcher Thomas, carrying Putnam's guidebook in his satchel. Once they found the right pier, Frederick pushed forward down the gangplank toward the long black hull of the *SS Baltic*, then one of the largest, fastest, and most luxurious ships in the world. A brilliant red flag sporting two tails flew high above its deck, with a star in its center that identified the ship as part of the White Star Line. Built in 1871, the ship sported four towering masts and a stout steam funnel looming above its deck. The ship was one of the first to cut the travel time between New York and Liverpool to under ten days, and it still regularly made the voyage across the Atlantic at a rate seven hours faster than any of its competitors.

Yet speed alone was not the main draw. It was luxury. The ship had more than a hundred first-class cabins, each adorned with deep polished wood and Italian marble. Its public rooms, meanwhile, were "rich enough for a nobleman's villa," wrote Benjamin Silliman, a professor at Yale who made a trip across the Atlantic on the *Baltic*. More than fifty mirrors lined the halls of the various saloons, making it possible for Silliman to look up from reading and count six replicas of himself reflecting back. The food, too, was opulent. A gong announced the arrival of each serving, and seemed to ring continuously from eight in the morning until nearly midnight over the nine days that Frederick was at sea. A typical first-class menu offered, in the words of a historian of the competing Cunard line of ships, which tried to match the White Star's level of luxury, "two soups, six varieties of boiled meat, three fish dishes, nine kinds of roasted meat, nine entrees with elaborate French names, two vegetables, two salads, eight choices for dessert, fruits and nuts, and coffee and frozen lemonade." Wine and spirits cost extra but flowed abundantly, leaving many passengers stumbling bleary-eyed to breakfast the next morning with a request for the strongest coffee the cook could muster.

The ship docked at Liverpool on June 29, and the two young men immediately got to work enjoying themselves. On their first day, they bought silk cravats and white gloves, gold-plated opera glasses, and strong beer, and roamed the city of London. They spent their first night on the town in pit seats at a production of *Our Boys* at the Vaudeville Theatre, a comedy that was the longest-running play in the world at the time and dealt chiefly with the theme of wayward sons and their responsibilities to their fathers. With his own father's voice no doubt in his head, Frederick dutifully entered every transaction of his journey in his diary that night. He spent three pounds, six shillings on a haircut in the morning, six pounds for dinner at the London immediately before the production, and one pound on the account book in which he kept track of everything.

It was a habit he would keep for the next eight weeks, maintaining a running tally of his adventures as the pair traced a path through the Continent laid out by their guidebooks. He noted the ten pounds he spent for a suit on Savile Row, the two francs he spent on beer and champagne at lunch after touring the World's Fair in Paris, the two *décimes* he paid for a beach chair in the seaside resort town of Cabourg, on the Normandy coast. In Cologne he spent three German marks on a carved head of Christ; the next day, he paid fifteen for an enamel snuffbox engraved with the face of Frederick the

Great. Alongside Thomas, Frederick gawked at the giraffes at the London Zoo (six pence), bowled with coconuts on the lawn of Hyde Park (three pounds), and watched a dog show on the Isle of Jersey (six pounds). In his final weeks alone, he spent one franc to secure a ride on a donkey to the remote town of seaside village of Dives-sur-Mer, ten pounds on a tour of Shakespeare's house and tomb, and one German mark to tour three ruined castles perched above the Rhine.

Returning to Harvard and the confines of a class schedule was the last thing Frederick wanted to do. He had kept his illness at bay and survived longer than anyone had ever thought possible—including himself if he had to admit it, himself. Until now, that had been enough. He had trained himself into greeting each new day as an unexpected gift, and his ability to enjoy each one had fueled his optimism that there would be more to come. But while he continued to give thanks to God for the air in his lungs and readily shared his faith with anyone who asked, Frederick had tasted an unstructured life for the first time and didn't want to return to his pen, no matter how gilded.

There would be hardly any time for him to grow bored, however. With little warning, his illness reasserted itself with an unrestrained rage. He was soon too weak to attend classes, and then found that he could barely walk without assistance. The act of drawing a new breath into his lungs took every last bit of energy he could summon. Exploring the world was no longer on his mind; all of his thoughts once again narrowed to survival. His father moved him back into the family mansion on Dana Street where Frederick again passed his days and nights in his cramped childhood bed. After the worst of an attack would pass, Frederick would spend the dark hours of the night staring out his window into the skies, wondering where to go next. He busied his mind imagining the ways he could make a mark with his life, never knowing how short that life might be.

As winter approached, Frederick's doctor warned that the chill might be too much for his body to handle and suggested that he head south. With the discovery of the antibiotics and other drugs that would cure rheumatic fever still a generation away, science at the time believed that fresh, balmy air far from the stench of overcrowded cities had an unseen ability to heal the body that drugs or exercise alone could not match. It was a theory barely removed from the medieval belief that so-called bad air, or miasma, was the root of all disease. Frederick lived on the doorstep of the modern age, yet the distance remaining could often be deadly.

With no other options, Frederick soon found himself on a train heading south from Boston, with a nurse at his side. His life's true adventure had finally begun.

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## Chapter Two

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# OH, THE HAPPY VAQUERO!

**A**NYONE LOOKING FOR EXCITEMENT IN JANUARY 1879 would have steered far past St. Augustine's shores. Everything that seemingly could happen on this patch of Florida coast had already happened and all of it a very long time ago. The small city owed its existence to Juan Ponce de León, a Spanish explorer who landed there in 1512 and claimed it, and all of the land he called Florida, for the Spanish crown. A settlement established at the spot in 1565 took the name of St. Augustine. For the next three hundred years, the town would shuffle between the great powers of Spain, Great Britain, and France before coming into the hands of the young United States. Massacres, shipwrecks, and pirates had each played starring roles in its history, but by the latter half of the nineteenth century all of that seemed to belong to a different world. The so-called Ancient City, the oldest surviving European outpost in the United States, had become little more than a balmy beach town that shuffled to the rhythm of the tides.

It was here that Frederick Rindge escaped to heal himself. The town was "dilapidated in its appearance, with the stillness of desolation hanging over it, the waters undisturbed except by the passing canoe of a fisherman, its streets unlivened by busy traffic, and at mid-day it might be supposed to have sunk under the enchanter's wand into an almost eternal sleep," noted a visitor who spent a winter there. Yet what it had going for it was that it was far removed, both physically and socially, from the bustling cities of the Northeast. Out went the relentless efforts to acquire wealth and shimmy up the social ladder, and in their place came an unruffled pace of life.

The air alone seemed enough to recharge a broken-down body. "Morning comes, and such a morning does not come anywhere but St. Augustine," noted the author of *Winter Cities in Summer Lands*, a guide to the tourism industry in Florida, which was still in its infancy. Within a decade of Frederick's arrival, Henry Flagler, a founder of the giant Standard Oil company, would make his own trek down the coast and pass through the city's stone gates while on his second honeymoon. Enchant

—and sensing a business opportunity—he bought up as much of it as he could. Flagler constructed luxurious hotels on each of the city’s small squares and set to work building direct rail lines to St. Augustine from the North, all the while envisioning the town as a winter Newport where Gilded Age barons such as himself could escape the cold while maintaining in touch with high society.

At the time, however, Frederick was the lone outpost of East Coast finery. He rented a room at the St. Augustine Hotel, then the grandest place in town, and let himself sink into the dreamy stillness of the city. When he felt well enough, he wandered through its tiny downtown of narrow streets, each one arching beneath a canopy of thick Spanish moss draping the limbs of gnarled live oak trees. He strolled along the seawall, gazing at the ocean, and rested in the shadow of the gray watchtowers of the Castillo de San Marcos, an ancient stone fortress on the lip of the bay that was then known as Fort Marion. Sometimes he made his way to services at a black gospel church, where he sat in a pew riveted by the music. Amused by the novelty of fresh fruit available in January, he bought crates of oranges and sent them, alongside stuffed alligators, to his classmates at Harvard, while keeping a sharkskin belt for himself. Slowly, he allowed his body to recover and felt his sense of purpose returning.

With little else to do as his body continued to mend, he indulged in a curiosity about native life that he had carried with him since he had first spotted Indian villages far across the horizon while on the train to California. Frederick made the acquaintance of Peter Jones, locally famous at the time not only for being an ex-mayor of the nearby port city of Jacksonville but for being an ex-mayor seven times over. He had twice served a term as the head of the city, and by the end of his life he would serve four more, a track record that left the impression that Jacksonville was continually looking for someone better but ended up going with what it knew in the end. Outside of work, however, he liked to explore the evidence scattered around St. Augustine and Jacksonville that mature civilizations had existed long before European sailors waded ashore.

Great earthen mounds, crafted out of a mixture of shells and sand and in some cases standing over sixty feet high, lay untouched along the river and on a few islands just off the coast. Though Jones and Frederick didn’t know it at the time, these grass-covered monuments had once been the centerpiece of native Timucua villages, essentially acting as grand platforms from which temples and meetinghouses overlooked the community. The pair hired a group of African American laborers to go out to a mound on Jones’s property six miles upriver from town, where they planned an amateur excavation of the site.

As the group rowed its way along the river, Jones hailed a passing boat steered by a man who seemed distinctly out of place. To Frederick’s surprise, Jones unearthed a letter from his satchel bearing Russian postmarks and stamps, which he gave to the stranger without ceremony. He went on to tell Frederick that the mysterious man was a Russian of high family and good education who now lived on a small orange plantation. Frederick thought little more of the encounter until two months later, when he again set off on the river to investigate the mounds, only this time without Jones at his side. Once more the quiet Russian appeared on a passing boat, and called over to Frederick. Together they went ashore and walked into a makeshift hut standing alone on the banks of the St. Johns River.

The man then began a haunting tale. He started off slowly, unraveling his story in a heavy accent born on the far side of the world. The man “did not in any way boast of his antecedents or speak as if he were anxious to arouse the sympathy of his listener, but in a quiet manly manner told me his history. The fact of my having been in and seen many places and things on the continent which he had doubtless led to his desire to tell me that he had seen better days,” Frederick remembered in his diary. The Russian, Frederick learned, had been born in St. Petersburg into a good family that was wealthy enough to send him on tours throughout Europe. He enrolled in a university in Berlin, intent on

studying law. As if to answer a question dangling from Frederick's lips, the man proceeded to open a drawer in a dilapidated wooden cabinet, from which he drew his university degree and receipts for his paid tuition bills as evidence to back up his story. After his graduation, the man began working for the government, as was customary for recent law graduates at the time. He was sent to Poland, which was then part of the Russian Empire, to serve as a justice of the peace.

It wasn't until he arrived in the country that he realized what he had gotten himself into. The governor of the province took him aside and told him that in order to keep his job, he would need to decide in the favor of his home country in all cases concerning a Polish citizen and the Russian government. The young Russian took his role as an impartial judge seriously, however, and could not reconcile this order with his own higher moral code. In time, he heard several cases that pitted Polish citizens against the Russian government, and he decided for the Pole in each of them.

Soon a new directive came down from his superior: he was ordered to report to Siberia, where he would fill the same post as he was currently serving in Poland. Even then the cold northern reaches of Russia served as a convenient place to banish anyone who caused too much trouble. Rather than go where it was said that a man could see green grass for only two weeks of the year, the Russian returned home, where he expected to work in the family business. Yet after a falling out with his father over his decisions in Poland, he fled to New York, where he thought his facility with languages would help him find a job in a commercial trading house. His skills in English itself were lacking at the time, and he soon found himself in North Florida, where the only way he could find to support himself was to become a fisherman. He had lived the last three years in a shared wooden shanty, each day hoping for word from across the sea that he could safely return to his home. The last letter he had received, by way of Jones, had been from his stepfather, who'd told him that he had secured work for him in a private law office and that he was free to rejoin his family. His exile would soon be over.

At the time, most men who heard such a globe-spanning tale would leave with a renewed appreciation of their stable, even boring lives. Frederick, however, walked away from the Russian crumbling shack with an ignited yearning for adventure. He couldn't help it. For as much as he envisioned that his time in Florida would be an escape from the restlessness that nagged him to the core, restlessness had once again found a way to intervene—this time in the form of a homesick Russian bearing stories of risk and danger and loss. The combination of thrills was simply undeniable to a man who still felt the pain of having been cooped up in his room as a boy. No matter where he went or whom he encountered, Frederick was often little more than a caged bird, impatient to roar. He marked the Russian's life story in his diary, eager to "fasten it in my memory" as a source of inspiration for the days ahead.

The happiness of a healthy body had always been just out of his reach. These last three months had finally turned that on its head. Frederick was now stronger than he had ever been in his life, yet he was living in the sleepest place he could imagine. It didn't take long for him to start formulating an escape plan. Rather than return to Harvard and face the possibility of reliving the same cycle of sickness that had long plagued him, Frederick resolved to finally indulge the fantasy that had badgered him since he was a twelve-year-old riding along the great ribbon of train tracks spanning the continent. He would go west, where he would prove his strength—and try to make his fortune—on the frontier.

**WITHIN THREE MONTHS**, Frederick found himself on horseback on the outskirts of Denver, tending to a flock of sheep. It wasn't the kind of adventure he'd had in mind when he set out for the West, but

already he could feel himself becoming unburdened by the expectations of life in the Northeast. He began writing nightly in his diaries, filling pages with descriptions of the untouched countryside and jotting poems to capture his moods as he felt himself morph into the cowboy he had always wanted to be. "Oh, the happy vaquero!" he would later write. "Who would be a banker when he could ride the smiling hills and hide himself and horse in the tall mustard! Who would be a slave to desk and electric light darkness in a back room when sunshine is free to all? Aye, a liberal competence is splendid, but slavery is often its price. But then, we cannot all be vaqueros!"

Except for its harsh winters, the fledgling city of Denver would have been a natural place for Frederick to settle. Ten years earlier, its population had numbered fewer than five thousand residents, yet it had quickly swollen to nearly forty thousand after the discovery of vast silver deposits across the state. Wealth, and the people who carried it, flowed into the city, where the tracks of the transcontinental railroad ran through its booming downtown and made it an outpost of civilization amid a still-lawless frontier. Just a hundred miles west lay the seemingly inexhaustible silver mines of Leadville; there Oscar Wilde, on an expedition to sample life in the rough-and-tumble mining camp, walked into a bar and saw a sign on the piano asking customers, "Please do not shoot the pianist. He is doing his best." Prospectors such as Horace Tabor, a once-struggling storekeeper whose luck in the mines earned him the sobriquet of "the Bonanza King of Leadville," decided to turn respectable with their millions and build palaces in the capital city of the state that made them rich. At the corner of Sixteenth and Curtis Streets, Tabor began construction of an opulent marble theater, topped by a silver dome, that spanned an entire block and could fit nearly two thousand into its red velvet seats. When the newly christened Tabor Grand Opera House opened in 1881, it was said to be the finest theater west of the Mississippi and instantly sent Denver's stock higher in the eyes of the country.

A man like Frederick, who carried a valuable East Coast pedigree and a letter of introduction that secured him an audience with one of Colorado's sitting U.S. senators, could have easily found work at a respectable position at any bank or insurance company in town. Instead, he chose to roam. He met up with Thomas Webb Preston, a friend from Harvard who was spending his summer away from Cambridge in Denver, and on July 7, they took a pair of mules by the names of Jimmy and Jack, two riding ponies, and a small wagon and set off on a trek across the wilderness of Colorado and New Mexico. It was a trip with no destination or plan other than to experience the wilds of the Rocky Mountains at a time when the country's open spaces were rapidly filling up with people. Their only companion was a cook named Isaac Brown, who prided himself on being a relative of John Brown, the white abolitionist who twenty years earlier had led a raid on a federal armory in Harpers Ferry, Virginia, in hopes of sparking a slave uprising throughout the South. As Frederick sauntered on horseback toward the green foothills with little more than a shotgun on his back and a few days' supply of water, he must have felt that his luxurious jaunt through Europe just one summer before was a false memory from a different life.

Atop a black horse he named Omega, he braved the Berthoud Pass, a doorway through the Rockies two miles above sea level that brought him onto the western side of the Continental Divide. For the first time since he'd been a child visiting San Francisco, the water flowing through the streams and rivers around him eventually wound its way into the Pacific Ocean, an undeniable signal that he had truly left behind the East Coast and all that came with it. The trio soon came upon Castle Rock, an outcropping of sheer rhyolite walls towering above a valley that reminded Frederick of the stone fortresses he'd seen lining the rivers in Germany the summer before. "Nothing more picturesque can be imagined, and they forcibly remind one of such castles as the Rheinstein, the Cat, and the Moulton Castles on the Rhine. We camped near them several times, and in the evening a full moon made

scene never to be forgotten,” he wrote in his diary. Over the next few days, he waded in hot springs, caught and ate trout spawning in the Blue River, and killed porcupines for sport. The party soon wandered onto the ranch of an eccentric by the name of Jack Rand, a former sailor who lived alone on a sprawling estate in the wilderness. Rand, whose long gray hair was said to make him resemble a Greek oracle, gave Frederick an impromptu lesson in the coarse social customs of the West. “His welcome of coffee sans sugar or milk, and his brusque manner of acting the host, together with his disappointment of our not having whiskey, was rather startling,” Frederick would write in his diary that night.

In Leadville, Frederick and Preston met up with Lewis Northey Tappan, a heavy-browed scion of the prominent Tappan family who had left his native Boston to become an abolitionist and politician in Colorado. Together, the three men of eastern privilege journeyed 250 feet down a cramped mine shaft, and later spent an afternoon in the makeshift casino of the mining camp, which Frederick found “not unlike similar ones at Monaco and Baden-Baden, substituting only the peasant for the prince.”

Frederick and Preston then crossed the smaller peaks of the Gore Range, named after an infamous Irish nobleman who had trampled over the same path forty years earlier. With more than forty men and an untold number of barrels of gunpowder at his disposal, Sir George Gore spent three years killing most any animal that moved while on an epic hunting expedition through what is now Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana. Gore himself was said to have shot more than two thousand buffalo, fifteen hundred elk, and more than a hundred bears purely for sport, a massacre that appalled the local tribes, who relied on the animals for sustenance. When Gore finally reached the Upper Missouri River with a massive haul of buffalo hides and antlers, the traders at the American Fur Company offered him a pittance for them as a retaliation for the troubles he had caused with the Indians. Gore did not take the insult well. The Irish nobleman turned “wrathful, effervescent, and reckless and heedless of the consequences” and “burned his wagons and all the Indian goods and supplies not needed, in front of the fort, guarding the flames from the plunder of whites and Indians” according to one of Gore’s stewards who witnessed his rage.

Tensions with the local tribes had hardly improved when Frederick and Thomas Preston stumbled into a Ute village tucked beneath a willow grove, taking the natives—and themselves—by surprise. Perhaps sensing that the pair of young bluebloods were not part of any army expedition, a Ute chief who gave his name as Little Joe, told them to stay awhile. Frederick found himself in the midst of a waking dream, surrounded by the Indians he had puzzled over in his mind since he was a child. He spent about examining the village’s canvas tepees inside and out, marveling at boxes made of elk hide and the children playing card games he could not understand. In return, he brought out a tennis racket and ball from among his supplies, a pairing the Utes had never before seen and found hilarious. “We were much surprised to find them such a well built, clean and intelligent looking race,” Frederick wrote in his diary that night, echoing the casual racism of his age.

Within weeks, that jovial encounter would be shown to be a fluke. As Frederick and Preston left the village, a contingent of nearly two hundred cavalry were on the march from southern Wyoming headed toward the very same spot in order to enforce a recent order that banned the Ute from owning horses. When the Ute warriors refused to give up their animals, the Battle of Milk Creek broke out, killing more than twenty men on both sides. The battlefield, enclosed by steep ridges covered in sagebrush, was less than ten miles from the village where Frederick had spent a lazy afternoon. “The very Utes we invited to breakfast with us would now take our scalps,” a shaken Frederick wrote in his diary.

The pair made a hasty retreat down to the New Mexico Territory in order to escape any further

bloodshed and, in that same spirit, declined an invitation from their stagecoach driver to watch the lynching of three men who had robbed a train. The offer wasn't out of the ordinary. On the map, the territory formed an almost perfect square tucked into the nook of Texas. Within that square, however, the U.S. government held a tenuous grasp of order, and gangs of well-armed men readily filled the gaps with their own notions of the law. The summer before Frederick rode a stagecoach down to New Mexico from Denver, a shootout between rival factions in remote Lincoln County had turned a young Irish gunslinger by the name of William Henry McCarty Jr. into the outlaw known as Billy the Kid.

Frederick, who considered New Mexico "the most foreign part of our country, with its Spanish-speaking people, its Santa Fe, and its Pueblos," stayed long enough to meet Lew Wallace, the governor of the territory, but didn't think much of the place. He had found himself in the wildest part of the West and wanted no part of it. The reliance on a bumpy stagecoach in place of trains for long-distance travel was "tiresome," he felt, and the mix of Mexicans and Indians in the territory combined to form "a most unintelligent looking race." After attending a Mexican wedding, he scoffed that the faces of the dancers were "so solemn that one would think that the dance was a punishment rather than pleasure." Frederick returned to Denver two weeks later, where he holed up in a room in Charriot's Denver's most luxurious hotel, and put all of his energy towards forgetting what he'd seen.

"Why could we leave the comforts of Charriot's for the bad beds and worse meals of New Mexico?" he wondered in his diary.

**FROM THEN ON**, Frederick Rindge hewed closer to the boundaries of what he knew as civilization. Again with Thomas Webb Preston at his side, Frederick rode to the ranch of Barney Day, a Civil War veteran who had left his native Ohio and settled in the high basin of Middle Park, underneath the southwest shadow of the Rockies. Day, now one of the county's first elected officials, thought of himself as a man whose mission in life was to bring order to chaos. His son, also named Barney, was said to be the first white child born in the Colorado Basin. The Day Ranch in time became known as prime hunting ground where Denver's elite—and well-to-do tourists simply passing through—could sample the untamed fringes surrounding the city without fear of falling into anarchy. Frederick found himself in the company of Sir Charles Watson, an unhinged minor English aristocrat who, Frederick soon learned, had "been in Colorado for his health or rather to keep himself from the use of brandy, and he is more or less insane," as he succinctly put it in his diary. Watson's doctor, who had traveled with him from England, kept up a daily deception by giving him swigs from a bottle of colored water that Watson believed to be alcohol, and the rest of the hunting party joined together and kept up the ruse.

Months passed. Frederick spent his days hunting elk along the Gore Range and his nights in the company of Preston, Day, and whatever band of well-bred travelers happened to be visiting the ranch. In the nomadic world of the frontier, he had finally found a place where he felt comfortable enough to stay awhile. He drew up a financial plan, spent four hundred dollars to buy a flock of sheep, and got himself into the wool trade. It was the first time in his life that Frederick had started a business of any kind, and he found that a facility with numbers and a drive for profit flowed innately through his blood. He soon began making other long-range plans for the future, which for so long had seemed like an unkept promise, started to become real. "I have made arrangements with a Mr. Henry Harris to live in a cabin to be built by myself on his ranch and to take my meals with them the coming summer." Frederick wrote in his diary that fall, the pride of his newfound skills in self-reliance obvious on the page.

He continued to explore the small towns surrounding the Day Ranch, often heading out along

despite the coming chill of winter. Frederick spent Christmas Day of 1879 alone atop his black horse Omega, cutting a path across drifting snow on his way back to Denver. He never fully explained to Preston why he opted for these trips of solitude, preferring to keep his reflections on the future to himself. Over six short months, he had transformed himself into the kind of man he had always wanted to be: physically strong, resourceful, and at ease with a gun on the open range. If not for the freezing weather, it would have been easy to grow comfortable and expect that his body would not fail him again.

As Frederick sat in his stately hotel room in Denver, he began sketching out his plans for the year ahead. "After much uncertainty and doubt, I have finally decided that it would be better for me to remain away from home some time longer; that I had much rather spend a few months in Southern California than to go home for that length of time only to return again in the spring. And with this determination and in fulfilling these plans, I am confident that, *deo volente*, I shall be surely strong enough to return to Boston by October and undertake with strength and pluck whatever business fate may place in my hands," he wrote in his diary.

The next morning, Frederick stood outside of Charpiot's, flanked by a stagecoach. Preston was on his way down. The two planned to share a train up to Cheyenne and celebrate the first day of 1880 together amid the prosperous company of men flittering through the city's mansions, each one built from the sales of supplies or beef to miners searching for gold in the Black Hills. From there, Preston would make his way back east; Frederick would continue going west to begin his new year in California. Frederick held a ticket to San Francisco and, as the railroads had yet to extend to Los Angeles, planned to reach Southern California by horseback.

Before that, however, he promised Preston that he would stop by a rural ranch outside San Francisco owned by one of Preston's relatives. It wasn't much, Preston allowed, but it would offer Frederick a chance to explore the Sonoma County foothills for a few days before continuing his journey.

It was an invitation that would change Frederick's life.

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## *Chapter Three*

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# THE PROPHET OF PRESTON

**W**HATEVER FREDERICK RINDGE HAD THOUGHT HE would find when he stepped out of a stagecoach the rolling green hills some eighty miles north of San Francisco, it surely wasn't this. In front of him stood what was clearly a two-story hospital, albeit one that had seemingly been dropped out of the sky and onto a hilltop overlooking the slender Russian River, miles away from anywhere. No doctors or nurses appeared to be tending to the motley collection of patients milling about the building. Men wearing silk hats and full suits sat next to those in dirt-encrusted denim wafting with the pungent smell of the nearby mining camps, where the only ones still trying to find gold were those too desperate to give up. Older women in bonnets laced with flowers paced next to young mothers shushing children covered by little more than rags. The only similarity that could be found among the men and women assembled in the wilderness was the sad fact that they amounted to "a lot of human wrecks," as one visitor to the place would later say.

It would have never occurred to anyone on earth that this place could be considered heaven. Anywhere except for the hundred-odd men and women who had traveled from as far as the Washington Territory to seek treatment by a woman known to all as Madam Preston. She was the unquestioned leader of the colony where Frederick now found himself, and she would alter the course of his life in ways that he could have never foretold.

By the time Frederick met her, Emily Preston had already lived one of those lives that seemed possible only in America in the second half of the nineteenth century. Born in 1819 on a farm in upstate New York, the then Emily Lathrop spent her childhood marinating among itinerant preachers and self-described prophets, all of whom claimed to speak directly with God. In time, the region would be seen as the center of what was called the Second Great Awakening, a burst of religious excitement spurred by men and women uneasy in a changing world of factories and technology. Not far away from her home in rural Schoharie County lived a commune of Shakers, a celibate sect named

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