

## Year 5 Million

*In the East where the sun rises, Ahmyyahha, the All-Spirit, removed clay from the Earth and made Yokomaht and Tuchipah, the first man and woman. Then He looked deep into the heart of the father-man and foresaw the essence of all coming people striving for mastery. After that, this place was called Weelamee—the place of the All-Spirit.*

*Then, Ahmyyahha taught Yokomaht to use the bow and arrow, the twirling sticks to make fire, and to hunt deer, rabbit, and squirrel.*

*It was here that Ahmyyahha taught Tuchipah the use of the matate to grind oak nuts, break the thick-skinned seeds, and cook weewish. He schooled her in the use of the digging stick and how to detach spines from cactus fruit. Then the Wind Spirit blew Yokomaht and Tuchipah to the fruitful valley the Spanish raiders would one day call San Pasqual.*



## Escondido, California

Year 1913

### 1

Becky Cliver caught sight of something odd: a sort of glow in the air. Her bright, blue eyes hunted for one of the large cats that lurk in San Elijo Canyon, but she knew if she saw one, she was already dead.

Becky hesitated. Was it only a gurgle of marsh gas? Most likely, but the minute fuzz on the inside of her collar stood up like prickly pear needles and goose pimples ran the length of her arms. Something was out there. She was sure of it.

Steeling her nerves, she resumed her regular stride along the dusty road that linked the farms and ranches of Harmony Grove to the greater community of Escondido. Nicknamed the *Sunkist Vale*, Escondido was the home of the two largest citrus packinghouses in the world and one hundred acres of Muscat grapes. But Harmony Grove was a world apart and had been Becky's home for as long as she could remember. It was a safe, comfortable place, yet its serenity seemed to have been disturbed this afternoon.

The sun sets early in Harmony Grove with its abrupt canyon walls and rich oak trees. Becky knew there were at least two hours of daylight left, but by now shadows had fallen across her path. Her trepidation painted mysterious threats behind each rock and flowering shrub.

She took herself to task for being so childish, frightened of her own shadow. But it wasn't only her. The buzzing of insects and

the twitters and chirps of the birds that frequented this drought-burdened arroyo had been stilled. The silence increased her unease. Becky's heart pounded her ribcage.

She caught a glimpse of that abnormal twinkle again, this time nearer. She slowed her pace and shortly stopped. There it was again, barely perceptible but definitely present. She fancied it was accompanied by a thundering, distant but growing louder.

When she finally saw something definite, it was a dust devil moving toward her. She dashed across the dirt road, jumped over a ditch, and landed in an adjoining weed patch, her bare feet collecting stickers on the way. She entered a eucalyptus wood, sidestepping boughs and springing over logs before dropping to her stomach behind a heap of cut firewood. Holding her breath, she peeped between logs and saw something that first baffled her and then made her snicker.

Coming to a halt was a black carriage, the kind that seats just two, pulled by a glorious black stallion. A stunning woman wearing a streaming white dress grasped the reins in her graceful hands. She examined the woods with her brown eyes, her long, black hair winding about her lacy bodice.

Becky knew she'd been seen. She considered standing and introducing herself, but she couldn't have it said that she, Becky Cliver, had been frightened by a beautiful woman driving a buggy.

The woman sat still, her gaze fixed on Becky's hiding place. Stillness transfixed the valley. Becky squirmed in her not-so-secret spot as the sable mount rutted the earth with its right front hoof as though reckoning the minutes to some terrible event. Then the lady

snapped the reins and said, “Git!”

The horse snorted, taking off at a trot. Quiet reigned until a dove cooed carefully in the distance. Then one by one, the animals of the woods chimed in, giving the impression the woman had been nothing more than a daydream.

Becky stood up, sweeping leaves and dirt from her dress, and walked into the open. As she resumed her walk home, a smear of ink-colored feathers whipped past her head, and she heard the piercing call of a crow.