

## Chapter XXXVII

### Family Ties

May 12, 1944 – May 15, 1944

On the morning of Friday the 12<sup>th</sup> of May, Ramona and Sheffield met Harvey and Marcella at the Washington National Airport in Arlington, Virginia just across the Potomac from Washington D.C.. He had a Cessna Bobcat, a five seat light transport aircraft, serviced and waiting for take off. Their luggage was already on board, and soon so were the Brasons' bags. Harvey had Marcella and Ramona sit in back and Sheffield up front with him in the co-pilots seat. In just a few minutes they were in the air and settled in for the long flight.

Three hours later they landed in Nashville, Tennessee, the half way point. While the plane was refueled, they had lunch. After only an hour on the ground, they were in the air again. It was mid afternoon when they came in low over the Red River and swooped down past a two story ranch house and lined up with a smooth, grassy pasture with a few horses near by. The plane touched down in a cloud of dust and rolled to a stop. Harv swung the plane around and taxied up to an out building and shutoff the engine. Once the dust settled he opened the hatch that lead out onto the wing. Harv and Sheffield exited the plane first and helped their wives out onto the wing and onto the ground.

Two women were waiting on the porch of the ranch house. One seated in a rocking chair. As Ramona drew near, her heart raced with anticipation. As she neared, the older woman stood up, her once tall, slender frame stooped from age and years of hard work, walked toward the steps that lead to the ground. Her footsteps were sure and steady. Her long gray hair was done up in twin braids that came down over her shoulders in front of her almost to her waist. Her facial features looked vaguely familiar, her long pointed nose, her high cheekbones. Ramona searched her memory to match the features to a familiar face. Her searching brought up the face of her father, the way he looked the last time she saw him.

Only steps away from the woman she had talked to only once and had never met, Ramona's pace quickened, her heart pounded. The two had exchanged letters once since that phone call. She felt as if there was already a connection. Two steps away with tears running down her cheeks, she threw open her arms. Two heartbeats later they were embraced in each others arms.

“Oh Ramona, finally.”

“Grandmother.” Ramona sobbed.

The hugs and tears lasted until Sheffield was at her side. She let go, keeping a hold of her hands, she said, “Grandmother, this is husband, Sheffield Brason.”

She let go of Ramona and took Sheffield into her arms. “I'm so pleased to meet you, Sheffield, I'm Anna Marie. I look forward to getting to know you.”

While the greetings were exchanged, Harvey and Marcella were greeting his mother. Harvey

introduced Ramona to her Aunt Susannah. With tears still streaming down her face, Ramona received an embrace from her aunt. Then Sheffield was introduced to Harvey's mother. At sixty four years old, Susannah was a more robust version of Anna Marie with the same features.

"Aren't you kind of young to be walking with a cane?" Susannah asked.

"War injury." Sheffield answered.

"Well come on in." Susannah invited. Seated around a large rock fireplace, she asked, "I'll bet y'all are thirsty. We've got some cold beer."

"That would be great." Harvey accepted on behalf of himself and Marcella.

"Do you have any Coke?" Sheffield asked on behalf of himself and Ramona. There would have been a time than she would have gladly accepted a cold beer.

"I'm afraid not." Susannah answered. "Would you settle for ice tea?"

"That will do just fine."

"There is so much to talk about." Grandma Erhart said. "So much lost time to make up for in such a short time. Where to begin?"

"Start at the beginning." Ramona suggested.

Ann Marie began, "That's as good of a place as any. Well I was born in Richardson Texas in 1859. My mother's family, the Johnsons, came from Tennessee and settled there in the the 1840s. Now on the other hand, my father's family, the Villanuevas were Spaniards who had been in Mexico for generations. They were an independent lot who favored and fought for Mexico's independence from Spain. Having settled in Texas, they favored and fought for Texas' independence from Mexico. My grandfather, Victor Villanueva was with Sam Houston at San Jacinto.

"Consequently, they also favored and fought for the South's independence from the Untied Sates during the Civil War. My father, Joseph Villanueva was a captain in the 4<sup>th</sup> Texas Cavalry. To listen to him talk, I though the South won the war until I was old enough to know better."

Harvey interjected, "He was part of the reason that I went into the Calvary. I'm sorry Grandma, go on."

"Then when I was seventeen, I meet a young cowboy by the name of Marshall Erhart from Little Rock, Arkansas. He had signed on as cattle drover and had brought a heard down from Nebraska to Fort Worth. When the drive was over, he stayed around and stumbled into Richardson and into my heart. He was wild, rugged, and just nineteen.

I'll never forget it. I was walking along the boardwalk on Main Street. Just as I passed the Trail's End Saloon, he literally came flying through the swinging doors, knocking me into mud puddle in the street with him landing on top of me. He had tried to pick a fight with someone who turned out to be rougher and

tougher than him. Anyway, he got off of me all apologetically and helped me up. We were both covered with mud, but when I looked into his blue eyes, I knew that I had found my man. You have those same blue eyes, Ramona, and his blond hair. I don't know what he saw in me, but three weeks later were married. That was on June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1878.

“Young and full of life and energy, we heard of land up this way and homesteaded this place the next spring. I got pregnant right away but that didn't stop us. I'll never forget the day that Susannah was born. Marsh and I were out stringing barbwire fence on the south forty and I went into labor. Yes sir, she was born in the shade of a black walnut tree. That tree is still there to this very day.

“Your father didn't come along for nearly four more years. I reckon that I worked to dang hard to make any more babies, not to say that we didn't try. We worked hard raising our kids and cattle. There were good years and not so good years. Any more they all blend together.

“I do remember the lightning storm one night in August of oh two. The wind blew so hard that evening and we knew a bad one was coming. Marsh, me, Cy, and Susannah's husband, Winston, mounted up and brought the cattle into the coral for safe keeping. It was raining so hard, we were all drenched to the bone by the time we come back in the house. During the night the lightning and thunder moved right over the top of us, my land I'd never seen it like that in all of my life. Lightning hit a tree that crashed down on the fence busting it to pieces, letting the cattle out.

“Well they scattered about the ranch, but about fifteen head managed to get away. The next morning we rounded them all up but them that had got away. Marsh sent Cy to follow their trail and round them up and bring them home. At nineteen, Cy was just like his father, tough and confident. He was the spittin' image of that young cowboy that I was smitten by. If anyone could find them and bring them it, it was Cy.

“Two weeks went by and we never heard nothing from him and I began to worry. Marsh figured the cattle had made their way all the way to Kansas and to give him a couple more weeks.

“By then we still hadn't heard nothing. Then one day one of the elders from the Choctaw Reservation came to the ranch. He told us that Cy had been injured and that he was being taken care of. He said that fifteen steers with the Flying E brand had found their way into their heard and that when Cy was ready to ride again he would bring them home.

“I was relieved at the word that my boy was alright. Then a while later we got a letter from Cy telling us that he had fallen in love with a halfbreed Choctaw girl. Come to find out latter, he had knocked her up.

“Marsh was furious and sent word back that he not bother coming come and to keep the cows. That was the last time I saw him for about four years, even though he was just across the river a few miles way. I wrote back to him and we exchanged letters, but I hid'em from Marsh. Come to find out that he married the girl and they had them a baby girl.

“After about three years and a letter or two more, I couldn't bear it no more. While Marsh and Winston had gone to Wichita Falls with a train load of cattle, I loaded up Susannah and her young'uns and went to see them. That was the first and only time I ever laid eyes on you until this afternoon.

“Well after about another year went by, I never heard from them no more. I didn't know what happened to them. Not long after that, Marsh found the photograph of us together. He took one look at his lovely wife and an adorable little girl and baby boy, his heart melted and he regretted what he done. Until the day he died he tried to find them with no luck.

“Then one day in nineteen twenty, me and Marsh were rounding up some steers and he just fell off his horse, dead. He had a heart attack right there in the saddle. He was sixty six. At least he died with his boots on doing what he loved. After that the ranch fell to me with Winston as my main ranch hand. Then three years later Winston died too, he was only forty six. He got bucked off his horse and hit his head on a rock, splitting his skull open.

“With Morris off in the Army with a career of his own, Susannah and me have run the ranch ever since. We have had a lot of good ranch hands over the years. Charlie, that brung your bags in form the plane, has been with us goin on pert near fifteen years now.

“Now Ramona, I'm going to tell ya something that I don't want you to forget. A few years before Marsh died, he went into town and had a lawyer write up a will. In it he said that if Cy or any of his family were found before the ranch was sold, half of it was to go to them. What I'm saying is half of all of this is yours. The other half is Harvey's since you're the only surviving grandchildren.”

“But,” Ramona protested. “I didn't come here today looking for anything. I simply wanted to meet you and find my heritage. To finally have a family, I just want to know you, I don't want anything.”

“I didn't ask you if you wanted it, did I. I'm telling you that half of its yours. But me and Susannah are pretty tough old birds, we ain't dying any time soon, so don't go counting on it just yet. Do you understand?”

“Yes, grandmother, thank you. And thank you for telling me the story. It means a lot to me.”

“Its getting late. Breakfast will be at sun up, then Susannah will take y'all on a tour of the ranch. Do you and Sheffield ride horses?”

“I haven't been on one since I was about fifteen, but I think I still remember.”

“Good. What about you Sheffield?”

Harvey answered for him, “Not only can he ride a horse, but he and I rode camels in North Africa, didn't we Pal.”

For the first time all evening, Sheffield spoke up. “Yes ma'am. I can ride.”

“What about you Marcella, do you ride?”

“I've never been on a horse in my life.”

“Really, I can’t imagine no such thing. You can stay at the house with me and we’ll visit. I haven’t got to know y’all that good any how. Okay, so after breakfast Charlie will have some horses saddled up and waiting for y’all. We best turn in, the sun comes up early. I’m and an old woman now and I can’t stay up as late as I used too. Tomorrow when you come back from your ride, I want you to tell me what happened to your pa and all about you, okay Ramona.”

After bidding goodnight, Grandma Erhart and Aunt Susannah went upstairs and went to bed. When Sheffield and Ramona went to bed, she couldn’t stop thinking about the story that Grandmother Erhart had told her. Not only did she have a family, but she had a heritage too. It got her to thinking, “Maybe my Grandma Lula is still alive. What if she is just across the river in Oklahoma. I have to see if I can find her too.”

Sheffield had long since been asleep when she finally began to wind down, only to be kept awake by the squeaking of bed springs in the next room where Harvey and Marcella were sleeping, or whatever it was they were doing. “Honestly,” she thought, “can’t they be more discrete?”

Again she was about to doze off when she heard a familiar but frightening sound from her childhood. The coyotes used to scare her to death at night, she was sure that they were after her. The bed of her parents was always a safe place as she climbed in between them for protection. She snuggled up as close to Sheffield as she could get and she was safe. Finally she drifted off to sleep.

The next thing Ramona knew, it was getting light outside and the rooster was crowing. Next she smelled the aroma of fresh brewed coffee coming from downstairs. Rolling over, she found that Sheffield was not there. She got out of bed and got dressed and went downstairs. She found Sheffield and Harvey sitting at the kitchen table, drinking coffee. “Good morning she yawned.

“Here have a cup of this, it will wake you up in no time.” Sheffield said.

“I don’t mind if I do.” She said as she sat down.

Susannah pulled down a cup from the cupboard and said as she poured her a cup, “This is genuine cowboy coffee. It’s strong enough to put hair on your chest.”

The image that flashed into her mind made Ramona blush. She didn’t have much on her chest as it was, but to have a hairy chest almost made her laugh out loud. “Thanks Aunt Susannah.” she said

Turning to Sheffield she asked, “And who do you think you are, John Wayne?”

“What?” Sheffield asked.

“Where’d you get these duds?”

“I came downstairs wearing a pair of light khakis and my oxford loafers. Aunt Susannah took one look at me and said, ‘that will never do for horseback riding’ and sent me out to the bunkhouse where

Charlie fixed me up. What do you think? I've got the boots, the wrangler jeans, a snap up long-sleeve shirt, a bandanna, and this." he said pulling a felt cowboy hat out from under his chair. "What do you think?"

"I think Charlie had better worry about his job." Ramona laughed. "What a bout me?"

Aunt Susannah put down the metal fork that she was using to turn the bacon, "Annie Oakley, you ain't. Lets see what we can do. That long skirt will work, it is full enough and covers your legs. Those sneakers will never do. Do you have a long-shelve shirt and some better shoes?"

"I do have a long-shelve blouse but not any shoes I'd want to get messed up. That's why I wore these."

"Are those sneakers canvas?"

"Uh huh."

"I guess they'll do, but you'll want to change that shirt."

"But I thought it would be cool."

"Maybe so, but if I can piratically see right through it, do you know what the sun will do to y'all? I think I can find a hat for you."

That is when Grandma Erhart came in from outside with a basket of eggs. "Well good morning Ramona. How'd y'all sleep?"

"Fine, except for the Coyotes."

"I hope you're hungry." she said as she set the eggs on the counter.

"Can I help, Grandma?"

"Sure, the skillet is down there." she said pointing the cabinet door.

Just as breakfast came off the stove, Charlie, who had just tied four saddled horses to the hitching post out in the yard, came in and set down at the table. Charlie was real cowboy. He was about fifty years old with broad shoulders, a long handle bar mustache and his exposed skin was brown and leathered.

Breakfast was about half gone when Marcella came stumbling down in her robe and her long, thick hair all in a tangle. She certainly didn't look her normal pretty self. Marcella was about twelve years younger than Harvey, making her about thirty two. Marcella was a sweet girl but the kind of woman that required a lot of attention and pampering. It was a good thing that Harvey's assignments kept him close to home. The week or two at a time that he was gone was about all that she could stand. She sure loved the gifts that he brought home to her.

They had only been married for about year and three months. It was her first marriage as she had enjoyed the single life until she felt her time running out and decided to settle down and start a family. She was wanting to have a baby and Harvey was doing all that could to give her one. It wasn't as easy at his age.

After breakfast, Ramona went up stairs and took off the short-sleeve chiffon blouse that she had on and changed into a long-sleeved shirt. When she came back downstairs, Aunt Susannah said, "That's much better. Here's a hat for you." handing her a rather stained white wide brimmed straw hat.

Aunt Susannah looked like a cowboy in the way she carried herself, in her walk, and her clothes. She had on a long leather split riding skirt, a pair of boots with spurs, a man's western shirt, a bandanna around her neck, and big felt hat with her hair braided, oh and a pair of leather gloves. She even wore a big iron on her hip.

The four of them went out to where the horses were tied up and Aunt Susannah introduced Sheffield and Ramona to their mounts. Ramona's horse was a small four year old mare named Roxy. Sheffield's was three year old gelding named Red.

Just as they were about to mount up, Grandma Erhart came out of the house with the four sack lunches that had sat unnoticed on the counter and put one in a saddle bag on each horse.

Aunt Susannah held Roxy's reins and Sheffield gave Ramona a boost so she could swing her leg over the saddle. She tucked the loose skirt around her legs and reached for the reins. Handing them to her, Aunt Susannah said, before we leave the yard, I need to see what you can do."

Ramona gave Roxy a nudge and started out across the barnyard. She reigned her right and then left before bringing her to a stop.

"Not bad, that'll do."

Then Aunt Susannah turned to Sheffield, "Alright camel jockey, let's see what you can do."

Sheffield put Red through some paces and returned to the hitching post.

"I see that you know your stuff, Sheffield." she acknowledged. Looking at her son, she said, "I already know what you can do."

"Alright everyone," she said as she swung up into the saddle, let's move out."

Aunt Susannah led the way, with Ramona behind her, followed by Sheffield, and Harvey bringing up the rear. By the time they left the barnyard the sun was getting higher in the sky and it was heating up. They headed north toward the Red River and then followed it to the east and around the bend to the south. It wasn't long before Ramona got the hang of it after all those years.

As they were passing through some brush, Roxy started to balk. The snorting got Aunt Susannah's attention. She looked over her shoulder to see a rattlesnake crossing the trail. She brought her horse around and even before she was half way through the turn, quick as lightning, she drew her Smith and Wesson forty four with an eight inch barrel and blasted the rattler into vermin heaven. She put it back in the leather and rode over to Ramona and gently calmed Roxy.

"Where'd you learn to shoot like that?" Ramona asked.

Harvey came alongside and replied, "Why Ma, here, is the original 'Pistol Packing Mama.'" referring to the new hit song by Bing Crosby and the Andrews Sisters.

"Show them what you can do, Ma."

"Alright." she said. "Do you see that can a hundred yards up the trail?" Again she she drew and fired, sending the can into the air. She fired twice more while it was still in the air, hitting it both times.

"You should see what she can do with a rifle. Go ahead Ma, show'em. See limb hanging from that lone tree up there on the ridge."

"Yeah, I see it." she said, drawing her thirty ought six from its sheath.

"Thats a good twelve hundred yards." Sheffield commented.

Aunt Susannah took aim and pulled the trigger. A split second later the limb came crashing down.

"That's some mighty impressive shooting." Sheffield complimented.

"Well, when you're at the mercy of nature, you have to be prepared for anything."

"Once," Harvey interjected, "I saw her shoot a cougar off the back of heifer, while at full gallop."

"I was a lot younger then." she replied modestly.

"How about you Sheffield, what kind of a shot are you?"

"Not bad, I am in the military you know. I have an M1911 is a single-action, semi-automatic pistol."

"Lets have a little target practice." she challenged as they dismounted.

She reloaded the cylinder and handed him the pistol while Harvey set up some makeshift targets for him. "Okay, lets see just how good you are."

Sheffield took aim and squeezed off a round, missing the target. "Its been a while he admitted." The next two rounds hit the target, the fourth one missed but he hit the last two.

"Not bad. Nat bad at all. What about you Ramona? Have you ever fired a weapon?"

"Once or twice."

"Would you like to take a shot?"

"Sure, why not."

Again Aunt Susannah reloaded while Harvey set up some more targets. When Ramona was handed the revolver, it was obvious that she didn't really have any experience. Sheffield reached around from behind and showed her how to grip it with both hands. He had her take aim and squeeze the trigger. As small as she was, the recoil knocked her backwards. That was enough for her.

"There is still five rounds in there, let me see if you still have it, Harv."

Ramona gladly handed the pistol over to Harvey. He took aim and fired. He missed.

"I'm disappointed in you son. And you call yourself a soldier."

"I'm a pilot not an infantryman."

“Try it again.”

Again he missed.

“Hell boy, Sheffield here is a sailor, for crying out loud.” she taunted, he hit his on the third shot.

“I’m a pilot too.” Sheffield corrected her.

Taking careful aim, Harvey hit the targets with his next three rounds.

“Now, thats my boy. Done like a real cowboy.” his mother complimented. “Alright, lets mount up.” she instructed.

Aunt Susannah reloaded her pistol before putting it back in its holster and they continued on the tour. She pointed out the various features of the landscape and had a story to go with each place. A little after noon they stopped and had lunch under the very black walnut where she was born. By the time they got back to the ranch house a little after two, they were hot, tired, dirty, and sore.

Over some ice cold lemonade, Ramona told her story. Anna Marie and Susannah were saddened to hear how her Cy was gunned down by a claim jumper. Even though that had been thirty two years earlier, they took the news as if it had just happened that morning. Ramona went on to tell what become of her and he mother after that.

After telling her story, she said, “I got to thinking last night. Since I found you, I can’t help but wonder if my mother’s mother is still alive. She could be just a few miles away, across the river on the reservation. How would I go about finding out?”

“Well, why don’t we drive over there tomorrow and see.” Grandma Erhart suggested.

The rest of the afternoon was taken up with more visiting and getting acquainted. Sheffield told his story, including Ramona’s friendship with Geannie. They were particularly interested in his war stories and how he came to be injured.

Before going to bed, Ramona couldn’t stand herself any longer and had to have a nice hot bath to get rid of the dirt and sweat and soak her sore muscles. Sheffield had taken a shower earlier while Ramona was visiting.

That night, the chorus of coyotes kept her awake again, as did the squeaky springs coming from the next room. Come to find out their bed springs squeaked too. As they was about to go to sleep, she looked out the window and saw Aunt Susannah sneaking across the yard coming from Charlie’s bunkhouse.

“It looks like Charlie’s getting a little bonus in addition to his salary.” Ramona snickered.

“You don’t know that.” Sheffield challenged.

“From the way her clothes are untucked and mostly undone, I’d bet that he is.” she insisted.

The next morning after breakfast, Aunt Susannah took Sheffield out to the barn. There under a

canvas tarp was a 1932 Packard touring car in mint condition. They uncovered it and drove it out of the barn. They only used it for special occasion. Their vehicle of choice was an old beat up pickup truck. With Aunt Susannah driving and Grandma Erhart riding shotgun, Sheffield and Ramona got in the back seat. Harvey and Marcella stayed behind, after all this trip was all about Ramona.

Not exactly sure were to begin on this journey, Susannah turned out of the driveway onto County Highway 120 that ran right past the house, dividing the ranch in two. With the top down, they drove east through the ranch until they crossed the Red River into Oklahoma and onto the Choctaw Reservation. With only their collective memories of the one time they went to see Cy, they navigated their way onto the main highway heading into Colbert. About five miles east of town they knew they were in the general vicinity, after all, it had been nearly forty years. It was Ramona who recognized the landmark and she was only six when she was last there.

“Turn left at the windmill with the cross on top.” she said, amazed at how the thought came from nowhere, but the memory was very vivid.

After she mentioned it, both her aunt and grandmother remembered it too. Aunt Susannah drove slowly up the road. “Isn't this it up here?” she asked pointing to a tumbled down cabin, the only structure on that road.

“I think so.” Grandma Erhart said.

Susannah pulled over and stopped. They got out of the car and went to investigate. “This is it.” Ramona said. “I remember these scallops around the window. The place looked like it has been abandoned ever since we left here.”

They ventured inside the two room cabin. Dust and cobwebs were everywhere. There were signs of mice and it looked like wild animals had often taken refuge there. All there was inside was a broken down table and a rusted out wood stove. The windows were broken out and a generous amount of sunlight filtered through the holes in the roof.

Ramona stood there in awe as she realized that this was where she was born and had lived for the first six years of her life. It occurred to her how far she had come since those humble beginnings. It was as if it were in another life or from a story that she had read. As she glanced around, fleeting glimpses of long forgotten memories came to her. One was of her mother bent over the stove, another was of her father coming through the door. It was almost haunting.

After a few minutes of snooping around, they got back into the car. “Where to now?” Aunt Susannah asked.

“Do you know if there is an old burial ground or cemetery around here?” Ramona asked.

“No, but I bet we can find some one who does.” Aunt Susannah answered.

They back tracked onto the main road and drove into Colbert. Being a Sunday all of the businesses were closed, but there were people out and about. Seeing an elderly gentleman, obviously Choctaw, Susannah pulled over.

Ramona got out of the car and approached him. "Excuse me sir." she began. My name is Ramona Brason, but my Choctaw name is Anumpa. I was born here and am trying to find my grandmother, her name is Tallula, she was the daughter of Tombi a tribal elder, have you ever heard of her?"

The old man thought for a moment. "Was she once married to the white soldier?"

"Yes, yes." Ramona answered.

"I know her," he remembered. "she is my cousin. Tombi was my uncle."

"Really?" Ramona asked in disbelief.

"Tell me, is she still alive?"

"Oh yes, she lives in Durant. I can't tell you where, but she goes by the name of Lula Douglas."

"Can you tell me where Tombi is buried?"

"Yes, the burial ground is on the other side of town, below that bluff." he said pointing the way.

Ramona looked in the direction of where he was pointing. Turning back to him, she hugged him, "Thank you so very much."

He didn't know how to react and stood there stiffly. Ramona let go and asked, "What is your name?"

"My name," he said, "is Sam Hana."

"Thank you, Mr. Hana."

"Your welcome, young lady."

Ramona got back into the car. "I can't believe it, he is my grandmother's cousin. He told me that she is living in Durant under the name Lula Douglas. I remember calling her Grandma Lula and Douglas was the name of my mother's father."

"So I guess we're off to Durant."

"First I need to go up to the burial ground under that bluff on the other side of town. He said that is where my great grandfather is buried."

It wasn't hard to find the cemetery which was in a shamble. Many of the headstones were either broken off or missing altogether. After wandering around for several minutes, Sheffield was the one to find what she was looking for. It was one of the larger headstones still standing, It simply read, "Tombi – Tribal Elder 1843 – 1934". next to it was his wife. Hers said "Opah 1850 – 1927".

From the burial grounds, Susannah drove them the fourteen miles up to Durant, the headquarters of the Choctaw Nation. Ramona's first idea was to look in a telephone directory. She wasn't listed; she obviously didn't have a telephone. The tribal offices were closed so that was of no use. Then she found a list

of tribal elders and officials and began calling them from a telephone booth. The first several that she called either weren't home or didn't know her.

Finally she found someone who knew her grandmother, after giving him enough information to know that she was who she said she was, he told her where Lula lived and how to find her.

They pulled up in front of a run down row of single level apartments and found the number on the door. Sheffield accompanied Ramona to the door but Grandma Erhart and Aunt Susannah stayed in the car. For what seemed like a long time, they waited for someone to open the door. It was obvious that someone was home because of the noise coming from inside.

When the door opened, a small woman resembling a much older version of who Ramona remembered as Grandma Lula answered the door. "Yes, can I help you?" she asked.

"Hello, Grandma Lula, I'm Ramona, your granddaughter, Paloma was my mother."

Lula gasped and put her trembling hand to her mouth. "Please come in, my dear." Once they stepped inside she asked, and who is this?"

"This is my husband?"

"Your what?"

"My husband. His name is Sheffield."

"Please won't you sit down?" she invited. "Why I haven't seen you since you were this high." she said gesturing with her hand. "Where have you been all of these years? I lost track of Poloma and Cy when they moved away. How are they?"

"I hate to tell you this, but they both died a long time ago."

"Poloma too?"

"I'm afraid so."

"What happened?"

"Its a long story."

"I have time, please tell me."

Ramona began with when they moved away and went into great detail up to the time when Poloma was hit by a car and was killed. Lula was taken back by the death of her daughter. "I have always held out hope that she was alive, somewhere." It was strange that she showed little emotion at the news.

Ramona skipped through the next several years rather quickly, mentioning her first two marriages and being widowed. She picked up the story again when she met Sheffield and up to the very moment when she knocked on her door.

"You haven't had an easy life have you dear. Everyone you loved died on you."

"I guess that's life. I'm glad that I found you alive and well. My mother told me about your life, but I'd

like to hear it from you.”

“Well there's not a lot to tell. I was born here on the reservation seventy seven years ago. When I was sixteen years old I was appointed to be the housekeeper for Colonel William Douglas. He was over the army post here. At first I was just his housekeeper, but a while later he had me move in with him and share his bed. He was more than twenty five years older than me but I was young and foolish and didn't know the difference. He was good to me and always had a gift for me.

“To make it right with my father, who was one of the tribal elders, we were married in a Choctaw ceremony. I don't think it ever was a legal marriage. Its just as well because he had a wife and family in the east, I think Pennsylvania. It never occurred to me that one day he would leave and return home. Eventually I became pregnant and your mother was born.

“It didn't matter that she was a halfbreed as long as the Colonel was here. Then the day I never suspected arrived. He retired from the Army and returned to his family, leaving me with baby less than a year old. But he did take care of us. Before leaving he set up an account at the bank for me and every month he wired money to me.

“Being a halfbreed, Poloma was looked down on by the tribe, except for my father and mother. I too bore her shame for having been married to a white man. It wasn't easy for her growing up. Then one day when she was a young woman of seventeen, a young cowboy from Texas was brought in. He was in bad shape and needed nursed back to health. No one else wanted to bother with him so she was given the task.

“Your mother had a natural gift of healing. I don't know where it come from but she was always nursing someone or some critter back to health. She even became a midwife. As the young cowboy began to mend, they fell in love and were married soon after. It turned out that she was pregnant at the time.

“His father told him not to return so he was granted a piece of land and he and Poloma lived on the reservation, about five miles east of Colbert. Then one day, she had the most precious baby girl; you.

“Well, when you were about six years old, your father felt that he was being squeezed out. His little ranch wasn't doing well and so they packed up and moved away. That was the last time I ever saw them or heard from them.”

“So, tell me Grandma Lula, what did you do all of those years? How'd you take care of yourself.”

“I always got by. The money kept coming from Colonel Douglas for many years and then one day it stopped. I don't know if he died or what. I never wanted to contact him because his family knew nothing of me and Poloma and I didn't want to spoil his reputation. Over the years I worked doing different jobs and now I get buy on my government pension.”

“You never remarried?”

“No, I never did. I never learned to read or write and I never learned to drive a car.”

“Thank you for telling all of this. I'm so glad that I came to see you. We better be going now. I hope that someday I can come back.”

Sheffield, who hadn't said a word, stood up as did Ramona. When Lula got up Romana gave her a hug. “Good bye Grandam Lula and happy Mothers Day.” It was strange, there was no feeling of emotion coming form her grandmother. There was no real connection or bond like she experienced with Grandma Erhart. Lula walked them to the door and said good bye and closed the door behind them.

Ramona was quite for the most part on the drive back to the ranch. She was glad to have visited with Lula, yet disappointed in the lack of feelings. She had been cordial and informative, but disconnected. There was way too much water under the bridge to go back to the day that she had moved away with her family. She had grownup with only a vague memory of her and had gone through life without a relationship with her. Why would that change now? Lula got over their leaving long, long ago and the stream of life had carried her downstream from that bridge and that's just the way it was.

Once back at the ranch, Harvey and Marcella had prepared Mother's Day dinner for his mother and Grandma Erhart. Ramona enjoyed the rest of her time with her Grandma Erhart, her Aunt Susannah, and her cousin Harvey and his wife.. There was definitely a connection with these people, one that showed promise. She hoped to return someday and see them again.

While they were across the river, Harvey had flown his plane the short hop to Perrin Field, an Army Air Force flight training school about 15 miles away on the other side of Denison to get the plane serviced and refueled for the flight back.

That night Ramona didn't find the howl of the coyotes frightening, but rather a soothing serenade. She had returned to her very roots and had a better understanding of who she was and of her heritage. It wasn't her home, but she felt a connection with the ranch and the reservation.

The next morning, after a hearty ranch style breakfast, they loaded their luggage into the plane, said their goodbyes, and boarded the plane. Ramona waved through the window at the two very special women that she had never met until three days earlier. As the plane climbed higher, she had a birds eye view of the ranch. As it climbed even higher she looked out over the reservation where her life began.

As it faded behind them, Ramona turned her attention the future ahead of her and the man that was now her husband. There was more of life ahead than there was behind. Late in the afternoon, they returned to the Washington National Airport, where their car was waiting. It had been a wonderful trip but it was great to be home. As she said her prayers that night, she was grateful to have a family.

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