

The School Teacher

“Damnit! Move over woman! I gotta git in this coach too!” The loud and harsh demand was directed at Miss Abigail Smithington, a twenty six year old spinster School teacher from Boston Massachusetts. Possibly too choosy and too old to attract a husband, she had thrown caution to the wind and looked for story book adventure in the untamed west. Ignoring good advise, she had agreed to take a teaching position in the little town of Young Arizona Territory. Her trip, to date; had been miserable and very disappointing, but it was about to get worse!

Scared outta her wits by the loud demand, she immediately scooted to the far wall of the Coach to get as far as possible from the bearded and filthy looking man climbing in beside her. Lifting her fine delicate nose in the air and pulling her dress to herself ,she said, “ Well! Excuse me ; I’m accustomed to a little more politeness and consideration from the gentlemen of my acquaintance.”

The bearded one answered sarcastically, “ Well , your highness. You don’t have to excuse yourself. I’m not one of your whatever you said and I ain’t of a mind to do nothing but sleep. The dirty Bastards just let me outta prison and them damn Quechan Indians thought I escaped. They captured me , beat me and drug me back to Jail hoping to get a miserable ten dollar reward. Here I am now with a one way ticket to Young Town. Woman , if you think I’m someone you don’t wanna know or travel with; you’re right. I don’t wanna know or travel with you either. That should make you happy. I need some sleep, Good night!!!” Abigail sputtered and finally was able to say,“You ill mannered uncouth heathen!” , but he didn’t hear. He had passed out!

Unfortunately the uncouth heathen was not a calm or light sleeper and his full bearded and mange infected looking dirty head fell over on

her shoulder as the coach bounced along. Abigail was horrified, continually pushing him away shaking him, trying to get him awake to move from her shoulder. The sacks of mail between seats prevented any movement and Abigail was terrified when the sleeping Mister Uncouth fell sideways on a bad curve and sprawled across her lap! She tried every way possible to move him, but two hundred pounds of sleeping man was far beyond her ability to move. This was impossible and Abigail screamed in frustration! The other two passengers occupying the front seat were no help; almost afraid to touch the big man. They were openly laughing at and enjoying her predicament. The dirty and smelly Mister Uncouth was dead to the world and seemed to be peacefully content laying across her lap penning her in place. Two hours later her legs had become numb and Abigail had resigned herself to slowly dying on this trip when they finally came to a heavenly Stage Horse Change Station halting the stage and Mister Uncouth came alive.

Waking up, the man grabbed Abigail's leg pushing himself up. Abigail immediately screeched and slapped his hand. The man jerked himself up and tried to get his bearings saying, "Damnit woman, who are you? What the hell are you hittin me for?" Abigail heatedly replied, "You sir are the most insulting man I ever met! I wish that I had never come to Arizona. I Sir, am Miss Abigail Smithington, School Teacher; lately of Boston and you have been wallowing all over me for the last two horrible hours in this terrible Coach. As to why I was hitting you; if I had a bat, I would swat you for your insulting manner."

The man was rubbing sleep from his eyes and scratching his dirty beard as he replied, "Woman, I ain't never met no high falootin school teacher before but if they're all like you, I'm damn lucky that I never got no learning. Look a here woman, I've had a Damn hard four days without sleep and I maybe flopped around some, but I didn't hit you or anything on purpose. You ain't the prettiest thing anyway, and I don't see no bruises or broken bones that would harm your looks. And Madam, if you needed protection, it looks like you're covered well enough with all them skirts and petticoat things to give a mountain man a workout just skinning you. Oh, and Madam Symington or whatever the hell your name was, I ain't no Sir. My names Parlo Rivers.

Just got outta Yuma Prison out yonder. I could claim that I was wrongly accused of Cattle rustling and horse stealing, but I reckon that would be a lie. Why I should tell you this, I don't know . It ain't none of your business , but since you think I'm so horrible, I gotta set you straight. ”

“Yeah , I stole horses and cows, but not when I was caught. I was drunk and they was my own cows and horses that I was stealing. I reckon that I just sorta forgot that I'd sold the herd and the horses to a government buyer. Hell, they was carrying my brand! After a few drinks, what was I to think? I just drove the herd out and headed to my Ranch. That Damn Sheriff and Judge Peters just couldn't understand an honest mistake.”

“Then damnit, if that Judge didn't say, “Parlo, I'm a tolerating man and I believe in compassion for a man that drinks a little, but this is the third time you've come before me on the self same charge pleading drunk while stealing your own cattle and asking for Mercy of the Court. I have reviewed the charges and in keeping with my compassionate nature, I have decided to sentence you to only five years in Yuma Prison.” Do you know , Madam Symington, with that statement, the dirty Bastard slammed his wooden hammer down and I just spent the last five miserable years of my life busting rocks in that hell hole of a prison.”

Parlo finally quit talking and stepped down out of the coach . Abigail thankfully scrambled down and headed for the outhouse. Anything she had to say would have to wait. She was hoping she could throw up and rid herself of the memory and torture she had endured for the past two hour lifetime. “ My God! What a relief! To be rid of that horrible low life beast for a little while.” Returning to the Station, she was praying that Mister Rivers would be staying there. If he didn't , maybe she would ask to stay.

Unfortunately for Abigail, Parlo had taken a liking for the fire in her dislike for him and his ability to horrify her with his insults. Maybe the trip to Young wouldn't be so miserable after all. Parlo was kinda looking forward to it. When Abigail returned, Parlo offered her a drink

from his canteen saying, "Miss Symington, this is pure cold water from the Station Well. Don't refuse, it's gonna be a long dry trip. Oh, and don't worry, the spout's clean. I just wiped it off with my sleeve." Abigail was horrified! His sleeve was covered with probably dry manure of some sort. She quickly went to the station water bucket and used the common dipper to get a drink. She almost threw up when one of the handler's came grabbing the bucket saying, "Excuse me Madam, but I need the bucket to water the horses." Parlo really insulted her when he yelled at the handler saying, "Better throw that out Boy and get some clean water. Don't want them horses catching anything."

Abigail was furious and steaming mad as she returned to the coach. She had totally forgotten any thoughts of staying at the Stage station. Moving to her far side of the seat, she pulled two mail sacks up to go between herself and Mister Rivers. She was thinking, "If that filthy beast wants to sleep, he can sleep on the mailbags." Her plan was good until Rivers climbed aboard as the Stage left in a rush. He immediately threw the bags to the floor saying, "Miss Symington, a woman of your ample size and tender age needs all the room and comfort she can get. These mail sacks belong on the floor."

Abigail fired back saying, "Mister Rivers, not that it's any of your business, but I am only twenty six years old and of normal weight, thank you. My name is Abigail Smithington, not that you have the mental capacity to remember it. You are the most insufferable and incorrigible person that I ever met. You have no manners, no feelings what so ever and all the instincts and unclean characteristics of an aborigine or a wild animal. It is my fervent prayer following this trip, that you never darken my presence again. I would very much appreciate your silence and my solitude for the remainder of this journey."

Parlo exclaimed, "Woman, are you cussing at me? I ain't heard them kinda words since I was throwed outta a fancy whore house in Dodge City. Did you ever work in Dodge City? You know I was kinda drunk that night, but I don't remember a working girl called Abigail. Are you right sure we maybe don't know each other like for the night

anyway? Course it's been over five years and you were probably a lot prettier then. Maybe I just didn't recognize you when I caught this stage. You know , Abigail , I probably look pretty old and kinda ragged too, so don't be too put out that you can't remember me. I don't remember you either."

Abigail almost fainted in anger, praying , " Dear God, I have never asked you for anything , but Please, Please, give me a gun. I have to shoot this insulting barbarian beast. I don't even know the hateful words necessary to give him an answer and I will never rest again or take a peaceful breath until this evil man is dead . Please take pity on me and strike him dead!" Abigail was crying with frustration and Parlo knew that he'd gone too far. This innocent woman was breaking down from his harsh treatment and it was time for him to back off, but he didn't know how to make any kind of peace with her. He had enjoyed the verbal bullying and was really enjoying her reaction to his destruction of her character. He moved to his side of the coach and tried to go back to sleep.

The stage had just topped a rise five miles west of the Station, when a barrage of gunshots interrupted Abigail's solitude and Parlo's sleep. The sudden gunfire and frightened yelling outside shocked them both as the Stage shotgun guard fell to the ground and the coach ground to an abrupt halt!

Abigail screamed as Parlo jerked her down between the seats covering her with his body. Gun shots continued as Abigail cowered down in total shock and fear as bullets continued pounding the coach. The two passengers in front were both firing at the attackers. The heavy wooden doors was their only protection and even then some of the spent bullets and splinters penetrated striking Parlo, causing minor wounds to his back.

He had no gun , or defense, but yelled at Abigail, "Stay down!" and pulled mail bags over her. Suddenly , he jerked a door slightly open, looking out and then dived to the ground . The shot gun guard lay dead at the rear wheel , but his Henry repeater was still in his dead hands.

Parlo scrambled for that gun, jerking it free and now he was able to return the fire of four Mexican Bandits attacking the Coach.

Parlo's luck , however; ended as a bullet caught him across the top of his fore head and he rolled over in a semi unconscious condition, his head covered with blood. The shooting stopped as the two other passengers threw out their guns and the driver threw up his hands. Parlo, in a semi daze and covered with blood was taken for dead. He couldn't see for the blood in his eyes and remained as still as possible, hoping they'd take him for dead

The Bandit's broke open the strong box , then ransacked the coach pulling Abigail and the other two passengers outside. Terrified, and frightened she could only submit to the demands of the Bandit's, giving up her little jewelry and the few dollars she had. In terrible and horrified concern , she saw the blood covered head of Parlo thinking , “ I hated him and wished him dead , but he gave his life for me. Oh God, I'm so sorry; what happens to me now don't matter. They'll probably kill me anyway.”

The Bandit's were not satisfied with the mail bags or the strong box. It held no money and all of the Bank draft's and legal papers were of no value to them. The other passengers, two older men and the driver were being searched for valuables, while every box and bag was ripped open. Finally, the very angry leader grabbed Abigail ripping her dress down in front exposing her youthful breasts and torso. Jabbering in Spanish he directed one of his men to cut one of the lead horses out and tie Abigail on the horse. She was worth money in Mexico.

Abigail was terrified, finally realizing that she was to be carried off, she made a desperate attempt to get away , jerking free of the leader and running into the brush and downhill away from the Mexicans. One of the other Bandit's, a young man; jumped from his horse and ran after her. He easily caught up, jumping on her back tumbling her and himself into downhill brush. Abigail screamed, fighting the young Mexican as he drug her back up the hill side.

Parlo desperately wiped his eyes upon hearing the terrified and angry fighting screams of Abigail. Through bloodied eyes he saw the

leader and two others standing near the coach horses. They were looking downhill and laughing at Abigail's fighting struggle. Parlo wasted no time in firing bullets at all three. His shooting wasn't too accurate , but the leader fell and the two with him ran for their horses.

The Mexican dragging Abigail up the hill tried to get his gun out and Abigail fighting for her life , bit into his hand with all her strength. He screamed in pain trying to jerk his hand free and Parlo turned his attention to the Mexican with Abigail. As he cleared the brush , he was looking into the muzzle of Parlo's rifle. The young Mexican dropped his gun and threw his hands in the air , one of them bleeding from the teeth work of Abigail.

Quickly , the driver and passanger's grabbed guns throwing shots in the direction of the two escaping Bandits. The Bandit leader was dead. They roughly grabbed the young man with the bloody hand , tied him up ,throwing him in the back baggage boot. He would be left at the next Change Station for the local Marshall to handle.

Abigail ran scrambling and crawling under the coach to Parlo. Unaware of her nakedness, she was using part of a petticoat to wipe the blood from his face. Parlo, after clearing his eyes, was insisting that he was Ok and could crawl out. Abigail just knew he was dying and begged him to forgive her for causing him to get shot. She insisted upon sitting on the ground and holding his bleeding head in her lap.

Finally , almost in desperation, Parlo said, " Please Miss Abigail. You're causing me a problem. Would you pull your dress together?" Abigail screeched in alarm and embarrassment; realizing her half naked condition and immediately covered herself. Abigail snapped at him, "You are impossible!" ,but she helped him get out from under the coach. Later, with the help of the Driver, she bandaged Parlo's head stopping the bleeding. It was hours later that they stopped for overnight at the next Change Station where they could both clean up.

Still is some shock from the events of the day, she earnestly thanked him for pulling her to the floor and saving her life. Naturally, he made little of it as he said, " Woman, what's the matter with you ? I just threw you to the floor so's I'd have something soft to lay on. Don't

you be gittin no ideas that I might be takin a liking to you.” Abigail laughed saying, “ My dear Mister Rivers, I fully understand the preposterous likely hood of such a thing ever happening, but you sir, in addition to being everything I’ve said of you are also the biggest liar, I have ever met. You enjoy making me uncomfortable and putting me in a fighting mood, but deep inside you have a heart as soft as.” Parlo interrupted her, as he held up a hand and then rolled his eyes savoring his words, he said, “ As soft as a young lady’s bosom.” Abigail almost slapped him, realizing in the nick of time that he was wounded.

Snapping at him, “You are unspeakable!” and looking up at the ceiling; she exclaimed, “ Oh God! Please forgive me, give me a gun. I still want to shoot him!”

Parlo came back at her saying, “ Woman I don’t want you even thinking such a thing. With my luck, you’ll drop the gun and it’ll go off in my direction”. Abigail replied, “ Fear not Mister Rivers, I’ve never had a gun in my hands. I’d be afraid to handle one. You ,however ; seem to be very adroit with one.” “ Whoa up! Lady.” Says Parlo, “ Does that fancy word mean good or bad?”

Abigail replied, “ Why dear Mister Rivers, your heathen manners are slipping. Do you realize that you just called me a lady and you are displaying your ignorance of the King’s English. That fancy word you refer to means that you are very skillful with a rifle. It could also mean you are very skillful at being nasty and insulting. Please believe me; just as soon as I learn enough of your Barbaric western language, I’ll be talking to you in words even you can understand. I feel it’s a criminal waste for me to belabor you with good grammar .” Parlo answered, “ Woman, I ain’t never heard of this belaboring good grammar thing. Maybe you ought to use it on some body else. I told you I’ve had a really bad time this last week and I know you’re mad at me ,but I’m beat up enough .”

Abigail laughing replied, “ Mister Rivers, I’m not going to beat you with anything. I’m sorry that I used that expression and I’m not mad at you. It’s just that you are so aggravating with your beastly insults. You take such great pleasure in upsetting me. I wish that we could be

friends, but I'm not sure you would like that." Parlo fired back rolling his eyes and saying, " Woman, I thought we was already friends. Any man and woman that's been together like us, sure ought to be." Abigail blushed and said,"Mister Rivers, at the risk of letting you win, I'm gonna ignore that vulgar comment and ask you a civil question."

"Being a School teacher, I'm curious. What does over yonder mean? The driver used that expression when he was talking about where the water came from that I drank at the station. Is there a river in Arizona named Yonder? Everyone , including you are always saying we're going over yonder." Parlo looked hard at her saying, " Woman, there ain't no river anywhere around that's called Yonder. I don't know where you Yankees git your learning from. Over yonder means over yonder, like I'm going over yonder, but you ain't." Abigail replied, " Mister Rivers, I'm asking you. Where in God's name is yonder? Maybe I'd like to go too.?"

Parlo just shook his head thinking, " Damn, this woman is too dumb to pour rain water outta her boots. I reckon I better take it a little easier with her." He said, " Woman, I was a fixing to think School Teachers were smart and knew everything, but I reckon I was wrong. Every kid in Young knows what over yonder means." Abigail replied, " Mister Rivers, I'm not every kid in Young and I don't know what it means and I'm beginning to think that you don't either."

"You use the word fixing? I always use fixing as a repair to something. You always say you're fixing to do something. What does that mean?" Parlo replied, " Now I git you Miss Abigail! When I'm a fixing to do something, it means I'm gittin ready." Abigail replied, " Oh dear! Mister Rivers you are surely suffering from a concussion. Do you realize you just called me Miss Abigail and I know it to be completely out of character for you but assuming you ever did such a thing; I would say that if you washed your hands, it would mean you were fixing to eat." Parlo replied , " No, I'm a fixing to eat when I pick up my spoon. Miss Abigail I'm sorry for your lack of learning , but my head hurts and I gotta git some sleep. Talk to you tomorrow. Good night."

The insufferable Mister Rivers immediately passed out and Abigail laughed as she watched him snoring away. She said out loud as she went to her bunk, “ I think I’m getting soft headed. I’m beginning to enjoy fighting with him. If I take a tonic pill tonight , maybe I’ll get over it.”

The Coach loaded at daybreak and Parlo was still suffering a bad headache. Abigail refrained from saying anything that might get his feathers ruffled and tried to enjoy the far desert distances and the fabulous blue skies. By noon , Parlo was feeling better and Abigail wondered what kind of nasty he was gonna come up with. What he came up with to annoy her was what she least expected. The Station Manager had given Parlo a little something to express their appreciation for his efforts in fighting off the Mexican Bandits. It was a full quart bottle of Old Jack whiskey.

Pulling the bottle from a bag, he said, “ Miss Abigail, would you join me in a little eye opener to sorta clear the road dust from your tonsils. I have a clean tin cup for you.”

Abigail was shocked! No one in her life had ever offered her a cup of whiskey. In her very finest New England manner, she replied, “Mister Rivers, I would very much appreciate your abstinence of alcohol spirits while you are in my presence. I personally do not imbibe and cannot tolerate the smell. Additionally I make every effort to divest myself of any inebriated company.” Parlo replied, “ Damn it woman , there you go again! Just what the hell was it you just said? Do you wanna drink or don’t you?”

Abigail rolled her eyes heavenward saying, “ Poor Mister Rivers, I shall endeavor to explain in your words. What I said was, I don’t want you guzzling whiskey while I’m here. I don’t drink the stuff and I think it stinks! If you turn into a blithering drunk, I’ll roll you outta the coach and leave you for the Indians or whatever wild life lives out here! No, and in your own words, I don’t wanna Damn drink!”

Parlo let out a joyous “Whoop!” and scared her as he slapped his knee saying, “ Hot Damn it woman , I knew you had fire in you! Lady, I’m gonna like you. You’re ginnin to talk straight. When you come out

from hiding behind all that fancy lingo, there's a real woman there. Damnit Abigail, I'm gonna like having you around town. Which Saloon you gonna be working in?"

Abigail took a long breath and said, " Parlo, you have insulted me enough. You know very well that I'm a School teacher. I'm just going to have to learn to ignore you if I intend to keep my sanity. The City Fathers of Young have hired me to teach the elementary basics to their young children. For such as you , that means reading and writing and using numbers; like counting to a hundred and beyond. I understand the local Church will be my classroom until such time as a proper school house can be built. As to where I shall live , I don't know yet. I'm hoping there's a cottage I can rent or something suitable."

Parlo went on like he hadn't even heard her, he said, " Miss Abigail you're a very special lady. I think a drink is just what we need to celebrate. Here , take a little sip of ol'Jack. Just a little bracer to sorta hold up your nerves." Abigail replied heatedly, " Parlo, I told you I don't drink! Except for you , my nerves are fine. What is it you think we should celebrate?" Parlo replied, " Miss Abigail, I ain't never ever told a woman that I like her. You're the first! I think that calls for a celebration. Ain't you glad now that you met me?"

Abigail rolled her eyes and shaking her head, she said, " Gimme the damn tin cup! I'm beginning to think that maybe I do need a bracer for my sanity. Of all the conceited Jackasses I ever met, Parlo you are in a class by yourself." Abigail, fool heartedly; downed the tin cup of ol'Jack and immediately launched into a spasm of coughing. Her throat was on fire, she couldn't breathe and grew faint from the effort. Parlo immediately grabbed her and pulled the cork from his canteen forcing her to swallow a little water. Slowly her coughing eased off and she could breath again. Parlo was saying, "Damn Fool. Damn fool!"

Abigail was finally able to talk, saying as she wiped the tears, " Yes Parlo. I'm a damn fool! That stuff is horrible. It almost killed me. I told you, I don't drink. Yes I'm a damn fool for drinking that stuff." Parlo replied , " No Miss Abigail, I'm the damn fool for ever trying to get you to drink it. Please believe me I'm sorry. You're a wonderful Lady and

I'm sorry for treating you so bad. I mean what I said. You're the first woman I ever said that I liked." Abigail reached over and patted his arm saying, " Thank you Parlo, I'll take that as a wonderful compliment. Thank you again and while I regain my breath, please tell me something about yourself. Why are you going to the town of Young?"

Parlo replied, "Thought I told you. This is where I live. Gotta ranch out yonder. It's the Bar R R. Shoulda been just the Bar R, but I guess I was a little drunk and me and the government man sorta got mixed up with big letters and little letters. I never knew bar had a R in it too, so it came out Bar R R. Damndest mistake I ever made. I had to go around and add an R to all my cows. Miss Abigail, don't never get drunk when you're registering a brand. Them cows don't take branding kindly. When they're little calves it ain't bad, but when they're old and mean, they can git down right cantankerous. If you think that was bad , you ortta seen my horses. They'd kick your head off. " Abigail wasn't sure if Parlo was telling the truth , but decided to hear him out. So far his story pretty well matched the man.

Parlo continued with, " Had some trouble with old man Borden and his ranch. He has a big layout south of me and Paul. Oh yeah, Paul. I didn't tell you about him. He's married to my sister. They have a big ranch west of my place. They kept my place going while I was in Yuma. Didn't get much of a calf crop while I was gone. Paul wrote me a letter; the Warden read it for me. He just don't understand cattle like I do. You see the breeding season starts right after calves are dropped. Well ol'man Borden has the best bulls in the county, so I sorta gather all my new mother cows down at the south border of my ranch and his bulls come over to my ranch while the cows are nursing and nature does it's thing. Borden swore that I'm running a cattle whore house for his bulls and living off his calf crop. I think it's just smart cattle management. I don't have to keep a bunch of bulls around and besides I never heard the bulls complain."

Abigail said, " Parlo, I'm not the least surprised. This is exactly like you, enjoying every bit ,but knowing that you're doing something wrong in stealing from your neighbor that way". Abigail suddenly

giggled and said, “ Oh , dear! I didn’t mean to do that.” Parlo said, “ Miss Abigail, I think you are feeling a little of Old Jack.” Abigail replied, “Parlo , I feel great, but this coach is sure moving funny. It’s going from side to side and I’m getting dizzy.” A few minutes later, she suddenly exclaimed, “ Oh dear I’m gonna be sick!” Parlo yelled at the driver, “ Stop Damnit! Miss Abigail is sick!”

Quickly, he helped her from the coach and just in time as she threw up. Holding her up , Parlo was cursing himself once again for getting her to drink the whiskey. Finally after five minutes, Abigail had finished and Parlo had wet his bandana wiping her face. He was still telling her how sorry he was after getting her settled back in the coach.

He said , “ I’m shore sorry Miss Abigail, I promise you, I’ll never give you another drink. I shore am sorry.” Abigail finally able to settle down some said, “ Parlo, it’s my own fault. I’ve never drank whiskey before.” Parlo replied, “ No, it’s me Miss Abigail. I’m just dumb when it comes to a nice lady like you. I make fun of you because I don’t know how to talk to you. You’re the first woman I ever really liked and here I’ve treated you so bad. I got you mad and sick both. Miss Abigail, I’m really sorry. Maybe I can make it up to you when we git to Young.”Parlo was still talking, but Abigail didn’t hear him ; she had passed out.

The two passengers in the front seat were trying to play a hand of cards and arguing. Their bickering irritated Parlo and he said , “ You two shut up . Miss Abigail is sleeping.” They started to object, but the cocking of Parlo’s rifle brought instant silence inside the coach. Later as they once again stopped at a Change Station, Abigail came awake as Parlo was adjusting his rolled up bedroll as a pillow for her.

Surprised , she looked at him and said, “ Parlo, you’re way outta character now , and I’m just not used to you treating me nice. I appreciate your concern for me and please don’t feel bad about my getting sick. It was my own dumb fault. I’ve been around enough to know that some people can’t handle spirits and get sick. I suppose

that I'm one of those. I feel much better now and I don't think I'll be drinking whiskey again. Where are we now?"

Parlo replied, " We're just outside of Young town. This is Hanging Woman Station. It's the last horse change before we get to Young. How are you feeling?" Abigail replied , " My stomach is still a little queasy , but Parlo; I feel fine. That little nap did wonders for me. Do you think I could get a drink of water?" Parlo quickly got out saying, " Miss Abigail , they got the best water in Arizona , right here at Hanging Woman. I'll git you a cup full." Abigail replied, " No Parlo, it's they "have" the best water and I'll "get" you a cup full. " Parlo stopped in his tracks saying, " Miss Abigail, that's what I said and I'll git me a cup too. You can stay right here." Abigail just shook her head rolling her eyes upward saying, " It's hopeless." Later she thanked him for the water and agreeing that it was wonderful she asked, " Parlo, I'm curious, why do they call this station Hanging Woman?"

Parlo replied, " Most every Station has a name that comes from something that happened there. There was an Indian raid here and the lady Maggie Stone that lived here with her husband was out hanging clothes when they attacked the Station. There weren't nobody inside, but they didn't know that. She said they was a hootin and a hollerin shootin guns and arrows at the Station house. Maggie was scared and needed to hide somewhere."

"The Station well was behind a couple of trees and she ran over there and shinnied down the rope hanging in the well. Most folks will leave the well bucket tied off , but down in the well to keep insects, birds, and other animals from leavin their stuff in it. You see it keeps it cleaner that way. She couldn't a found a better hidin place. Maggie said that she stood in that bucket holdin onto that rope and hanging there for hours while them Redskins burned the Station down. She climbed out when they left." Abigail took a big drink saying , " This is the best water Parlo ,but what did poor Maggie do standing in a bucket and holding on to a rope and suffering there for hours?" Parlo replied, " Maggie said she couldn't do nothing to help herself and she was sorry but she peed in the well!"

Abigail coughed and sputtered dumping out the remainder of her cup of water. Parlo ,alarmed; grabbed her arm and began patting her on the back saying , “ Miss Abigail, Miss Abigail ! Are you Ok? Do you need another cup of water?” Finally catching her breath Abigail said, “ No, No, Parlo I’m fine . I guess that I drank too quickly and I’m just not used to the coarse language, lifestyle, and taste of Western hospitality .” Parlo replied, “ Miss Abigail, I don’t know what that means, but I don’t think Maggie had anything to do with the taste of the water. It’s been over ten years since she peed in it and we’ve had to fish a lotta dead birds and other animals out since then.” Parlo’s concern and reassurance didn’t help Abigail’s queasy stomach at all. Abigail held up her hand practically gagging and said , “ Please Parlo, let’s talk about something else.”

The remainder of their trip was a pleasure for Abigail as Parlo did his best to make her comfortable. Abigail had never been given this much honest admiration and attention from a man in her life. She was becoming fond of Parlo, although she kept telling herself that she was getting soft headed to believe that he was someone she could be interested in. When the talk turned to her plans for setting up a school, Parlo asked, “How about if I come to your school and you can learn me to read and write?” Abigail replied , “Teach Parlo. I could teach you to read and write.” “Well Damn! “ Said Parlo, “Ain’t that what I just said? You could learn me to read and write.”Abigail looked Heaven ward just shook her head, and then said,

“No, I’m afraid that you would be a big distraction to my young students, I could maybe give you private tutoring possibly on weekends when I had days off.” Parlo replied, “Miss Abigail, I was gonna ask you if I could come calling on weekends. I told you I ain’t never said I liked a woman before. You’re the first and I ain’t never done it before , but maybe I could come sparking . Whatta you say?”

Abigail looked in surprise at Parlo and exclaimed, “ You mean that you want to court me? Bring me flowers, walk in the moonlight , maybe take me horseback riding or go on a picnic. How about Church? They told me that Parson Crawford has a special evening for young folks. Parlo, I can’t believe you would do all that.”

Parlo turned pale and said, “ No Miss Abigail, I ain’t never done none of that. I thought maybe I’d just shave and take a bath . I ain’t much for flowers . Most of’em around here are larks spur or locoweed. Poison to cows and horses and I never walk in the moonlight. Indians are still bad around here. Being a Yankee, you ain’t never heard of the Cheyenne Moon. That’s the best time for horse stealing and killing.”

“ I’m sorry but horseback riding ain’t for me on my day off either. I chase cows all week. My butt is plenty sore, come the weekend and I ain’t never been in a Church, but now when you said picnic, well I am a good eater. Anytime you want me to come for a meal, why I’m ready!” Abigail looked heavenward , rolled her eyes and replied, “ Parlo, I should have known better, but I’ll tell you what. You come to town on a “Sunday and I’ll fix you a dinner.” Parlo replied , “ Fried chicken! Hot Damn! Miss Abigail, there ain’t nothing better than fried chicken!” Abigail shook her head. “She got the message.” She said, “ Parlo, it’ll be a while before I can ask you for dinner. I have to set myself up first. I don’t even have a place to live.”

Parlo replied , “ You know something Miss Abigail? I just might be able to help you there. I gotta cabin that I won at poker from Mitch Carson the bartender, from the Red Front Saloon. He used to rent it from me. If it’s empty, I could clean it up some. You could live there. It’s right near the Church.” Abigail looked at Parlo and said, “ Thank you Parlo, but I’ll see what the Town Council or Fathers have in mind first. Knowing you and your connections with a Bartender, I suspect that your cabin may have an unsavory reputation totally unsuitable for the Town’s lady School teacher.” Parlo replied, “Oh , Miss Abigail it’s set up real good for a woman, nice out house close by, good well and flowers growing in the yard. Mitch had lots of his girls living there from time to time.” Abigail quickly replied , “ Exactly! I’ll see what the council has.”

Two weeks had gone by since Abigail’s arrival and the School was getting underway. Abigail was excited at the prospect of getting started and the Council had rented a cabin for her. One that had a suitable history. She had been advanced a salary and Parlo had come to town twice to help her get things in order. Parlo, on the other hand

had been feverishly cleaning up his Ranch house to invite Abigail to a reunion dinner with his sister and her husband. Finally, things were in order and Parlo surprised Abigail with his invitation to dinner. Abigail accepted with strong reservations, but she looked forward to seeing his Ranch.

Another surprise awaited her when Parlo showed up in a pretty little four wheel surrey and actually got down to offer her an arm when she climbed aboard. Arriving at the ranch, she was met with a sight that was totally out of character for Parlo. Expecting a cabin of sorts with out buildings, she was met with a beautiful Ranch house nestled in a fenced yard sat away from corrals and a barn. The inside was comfortable with a homey feeling and although the furniture was old, everything was spotlessly clean. A fabulous dinner was spread out as Parlo introduced her saying, "Here miss Abigail, I want you to meet my sister. This is Paul her husband. Like I told you, he ain't much of a cattleman, matter of fact, he is a sheep herder. A stinking mutton lover. Oh yeah! My sister."

"Yeah, her name's Hortense, used to be Rivers like me but since she got married to Paul here, it's been Mrs Paul Watson. Before that all us boys just called her Hor for short. Reckon she didn't like that. Our Daddy was kinda funny about names. He said that I was named after him. All the girls called him Parlor Jim because he was such a good customer; so my real name is Parlor Rivers. Daddy was a good man though. He adopted me and Hor when we was just babies. Both of us came from the girls at the Longhorn Saloon in Wichita Kansas. He done real right by both of us. Gave us each half of his Ranch when he died. This house is where we was raised. Hor wanted the west side of the home Ranch and that's where they live. Me. I liked this old house."

"Paul here thinks I should be raising woolies like him, but you know something Miss Abigail, I love to eat beef. Just can't help myself, it's kinda like a bad habit with me. Like today, I found this fat yearling steer that probably belongs to ol'Borden, but he ain't wearing no brand. Why I got me a pan of biscuits and gravy going, then follow that critter until he turned into this big dinner! It's just something I can't seem to git away from." Abigail sharply replied "Parlo, that's

stealing! You shouldn't be doing things like that and you know it. It's no wonder you spent the last five years in prison. It's also a wonder they didn't hang you. Why don't you follow and eat your own beef ?"

Parlo replied, " Miss Abigail, there's just something about the taste and flavor of somebody else's beef that just can't be found in my own. Just take a taste of that steak. You'll never taste a better one. They tell me that Borden has had the best crop of calves over the last five years that he ever had. " Abigail said, " Yes, and has anyone around here voiced the idea that your incarceration may have something to do with that?"

Parlo replied, " There you go again Miss Abigail with those big words . Hor , do you know what she's saying?" Hortense sharply snapped, " Damn you Parlo, you know I hate that name! Call me Hortense . Yes, what she's saying is; since you were locked up in Jail, his calf crop was much better." Parlo questioned , " Do you mean that moving my cows down to the edge of his Ranch caused his Bulls to visit my cows and they didn't take care of their business at home? Is that why Borden claimed I was running a Whore house for his Bulls?"

Abigail cut in saying, " No Parlo, what I meant was his calf crop was high because you were locked up and not here to eat up part of his herd." Parlo spun around looking at Abigail saying, " Miss Abigail, are you saying that I'm a cattle rustler? I thought we were friends." Abigail replied , " Parlo, by your own admission; you were a cattle rustler and spent five years in prison for it. Yes, I'm your friend and I intend to see that you don't go back to prison again. I appreciate the dinner and I'll admit it's some of the best beef I've ever eaten, but I'll never eat beef here again if you're gonna steal it."

Parlo quickly replied, " Miss Abigail, I promise you that the next time you come to my Ranch for a dinner of good beef. It'll be wearing my brand." Abigail almost nodded a satisfied "Yes", but then saw the smile on Parlo's face. Quickly shaking her finger at him, she said, "It better not be a fresh brand!" Parlo replied, "Miss Abigail, I'll do like the Judge said and solemnly swear to you that I raised my beef from a little puppy or doogie whichever it was. Will that do?" Abigail rolled her

eyes heavenward and said, “ Parlo, sometimes you’re wonderful, but full time you’re the biggest liar I ever met. This time I’ll forgive you. This dinner is the best I’ve had since coming west.”

Abigail had worked day and night to get everything ready for teaching her nine students. Most of them were girls as the young boys were kept home to help with the farm and Ranch work. She was anxiously looking forward to her first day when disappointment struck. The Town Fathers came to visit her and expressed their opinion that she would not be suitable to teach their children! She could keep the wages advanced ,but she was released from employment.

This was a major heartbreak for Abigail. She had no idea what she could do in the small town of Young. Being the resourceful lady she was; she began looking to her future. She was thinking, “ Well I jumped out of Boston and took my chances. I can do the same and go to a larger town. I hate the thought of losing a dear friend in Parlo, but I have to make my own way. I wonder how he’ll feel about my leaving?”

When the weekend came around , Parlo rode in for his weekly visit. Abigail sat with him on the porch and tearfully told him , that she had some disturbing news. She said, “Parlo, I regard you as a very good and special friend. One that I cherish, but you have a reputation as a heavy drinker and being seen in your company has caused a lot of talk and gossip around town. Your strong comments and raw stories of our forced familiarity during the stage hold up have spread around town and unfortunately compromised my reputation.”

“ I can never thank you enough for what you did for me and cannot understand their thinking. I’m sorry to have to say this ,but the town fathers are concerned that I ,as an unmarried and possibly loose woman, will not be suitable for teaching their children. I may have to find some other means of work.”

Parlo exploded with, “ What the hell! Who are they Miss Abigail that think you’re not good enough ? I’ll shoot the Bastards! They ain’t never seen a woman as good as you.” Abigail put a hand on his arm saying, “ Parlo you can’t do that. I appreciate your concern for my welfare, but these folks are right. They only know you and your

reputation has colored mine because of our friendship. These folks don't really know me and they do know you. Apparently only too well. I have come to the conclusion that I made a grave mistake in coming west to teach in a small town. I treasure our friendship and I hate to leave, but as soon as I can get my affairs in order here, I'll be moving on to Tucson. There's plenty of work there for a school teacher."

Parlo practically yelled, " No! No! No! Miss Abigail, you can't do that. You come on out to my place. You can stay there. Don't let these Bastards run you out!" Abigail replied, " Parlo, you know I can't do that. I'd be no more than a common saloon girl."

"No, No " Parlo said, "We'd git hitched, all legal like; I told you Miss Abigail you're the only woman I ever liked." Abigail took Parlo's arm saying, " Parlo, do you know what you're saying? Are you proposing to me. Are you saying you want to get married?" Parlo turned pale, choked , swallowed hard and finally managed a faint, "Yes". Abigail hugged his dirty neck and said , " Parlo I said you could be wonderful at times. At the grave risk of my sanity; I'm going to accept your proposal, because underneath, you're a true gentleman; probably the bravest and most gallant I ever met. Yes dear Parlo, I'd love to marry you. I've often wondered how it would be married to you. If I could clean you up and make you the wonderful man I see behind your reputation. You go home, take a bath, shave and put on your best . I'll see Parson Crawford and meet you here tomorrow at noon."

The following afternoon, Parlo brought his surrey to Abigail's . He was cleaner than she had ever seen him. When she came out into the yard, Parlo was shocked saying, " Miss Abigail, you're pettier than a speckled hound chasin a red wagon but how come you're all gussied up and wearing all that white stuff?"

Abigail replied in her finest New England manner, "Parlo, in my best interpretation of your Western Heathen language; I reckon I'm a fixing to git ready to go over yonder to visit that Bible thumper Crawford and git all hitched up to a cantankerous ol'cattle stealin buzzard, name of Parlo Rivers!" Parlo grabbed her in a big bear hug, saying, "Miss Abigail, you couldn't a got a better man! It shore makes me happy to

make you happy!” Abigail , looked heavenward, rolled her eyes, but noddod agreement, grabbed his arm and brushing bread crumbs from his shirt, herded him towards the Church.

The End