

For a
LITTLE
SILVER

Marlene
Wise

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*In memory of all those brave souls who lived in the frontier days and
struggled to find their niche in a changing and untamed wild frontier.
They've forever left an indelible and wonderful print on our nation. This era is
remembered even in writings of fiction and could have happened at any time
in this westward movement.*

Endorsements

Marlene Wise knows how to weave a story with twists and turns that keeps the reader wondering what will happen next. This story of the old west is filled with good old-fashioned values. It will keep the reader enthralled to the end. The characters make their way into your heart. The setting of the story is a place the reader will want to come back to again and again.

Jean Lauderback

I very much enjoyed reading this novel. I found it hard to put down and couldn't wait to read the next chapter. If you love stories of this genre, I would recommend this book for your next reading pleasure.

Audrey Bretherton

Adventure-suspense-thrills-and romance--- A wonderful novel. You won't stop reading until you have finished the entire book. The characters, plot, and setting are well thought out and very interesting. It will hold your attention until you see the last two words---- "The End."

Christina Horton

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Prologue

The birth of the westward movement along with the true tales of life in a untamed and wild western frontier was a very colorful and challenging event. All types and races of people seeking a better life or just plain old fashioned adventure, were willing to face many harsh and difficult situations daily in order to accomplish their dreams.

This particular time in history was incubated with turbulence, violence, struggles, feuds, wars, robberies of banks and trains, gun-slingers and bullies, range wars and disturbances of land grabbing, cattlemen and shepherders disputes, Indian uprisings and wars, vigilante groups, and an increase in military activity and forts throughout the western region.

All of these turbulent actions and happenings increased with everyday people using guns, pistols, rifles, and knives, and even their bare fists. The Indians readily used their supply of bow and arrows, knives, tomahawks, and lances. The military decided that in order to bring cessation and control over these continual problems that affected areas of the western frontier, that they needed better rifles, guns, ammo, cannons, and machine guns to better assist them with solving these situations.

Because of a lack of law in many new and upcoming towns and places in the west, or some areas assigned to a sheriff that was too large to manage well, men finally made the decision that they would have to provide their own protection. There was a great lack of qualified sheriffs, deputies, U.S. Marshalls, courts and judges, but that was to change all in due time.

Guns were used for hunting to obtain food for the family, protection of self and family, protection of land, home and livestock, for traveling into wild and unknown areas. For some, it gave a sense of security and peace, whether it was false or real, and some just liked the looks of a gun hanging on the wall of their home or above the door. Many others used the gun to settle squabbles and disputes, fights and feuds, and still others saw the use of a gun as an easy way to take from their neighbors, stores, banks, and citizens of a town things that didn't rightly belong to them.

So, in writing fiction or nonfiction of the old western frontier there is naturally some violence and unsettling situations that take place just because of the time frame of the westward movement. Even fiction at times, seems to be touched or painted with strokes of truth as it is most probable that a situation that comes straight from the imagination could have really happened someplace and at sometime. Some would ask, "Does there need to be violence in the western stories?" Can there be war without guns and battle? If you are the writer, or the reader, then think and consider the time frame for the setting of the story. So then, the answer to the question is yes to a certain degree there will be some violence because this was the normal and true way of life for this era and time in history.

In later years, men were relieved of having to carry a weapon for self protection and was then able to use it only for hunting or having to put down a poor suffering animal with a broken leg or severe injury. Also, he might at times, enter a shooting contest to win a turkey or prize money and show off his shooting skills and abilities. But finally, the long awaited time came when the citizens, farmers, ranchers, and townspeople didn't have to mete out justice anymore and try to figure out what was a fair and just sentence or even have to stand by and watch a hasty hanging. More courts of law began to spring up, judges held court for all and any criminals and meted out justice by the voices of a jury of their own peers. Sheriffs and Marshalls appeared on the

scene and began to clean up towns that were in disarray and shambles with the legal system. Hence, many began to hang up their guns and went on to live simple lives full of hope and hard work and left the guns to the sheriffs who upheld the law, sometimes at a high price.

Jails and prisons soon began to spring up in sizable communities and this helped the everyday man feel more comfortable without toting a gun, as many criminals were sentenced to long, hard years in prison or hung in the town square or street. As numbers of law-breakers were rounded up and put away, people became relaxed and enjoyed life more. The gun played its part in the 1800's of the struggling westward movement, the travel to the west in wagon trains, and the building of new towns and communities and territories seeking statehood. But as with all things, change comes, and we must change with the times hoping that things will be better and not worse. Our westward frontier times with all of its brilliant color, vivid lifestyles, adventures, challenges, and pains of growth, became a part of our western heritage and memories that we gladly enjoy passing down to our present families in order not to forget our heritage and an important part of our history. Many have great grandparents or great - great grandparents that lived in this era of frontier times. They have some very wonderful, colorful, and original stories to pass down to our generation that helps to immortalize that rugged life style that many have forgotten. But the sleeping giant of the old west awakens with the help of printed books, e-books, cd's, TV, movies, and other technology. We are able to birth and bring to life the vivid warm memories, the intrigue of past lives, the exacting life styles, the legends and the truths of many of our heroes for those who have a real passion to relive the wild frontier days. The reflections of this struggling time in history and the study of bygone days of the challenging western life have been woven into the hearts of so many that they do not want to see the tales of our beloved western frontier forgotten any time soon.

So, pick up this book, [For a Little Silver](#), and enjoy some of our

past western heritage, a story with fictional characters with events that could have really happened at some point in history.

Marlene Wise, Author of Marcy, a Young Spirited Pioneer and For a Little Silver, Greed Became My Cruel Master

Chapter One

The Inheritance

The long ride to Willow Flats, Montana gave Cal and Amanda Blake time to talk and discuss plans about the inheritance they had received. Cal had previously made the same trip alone to Willow Flats when he had been summoned by his uncle's lawyer. Uncle Ben had died and bequeathed all of his possessions to the Blakes. Cal had already registered the deed into his and Amanda's name and paid the upcoming taxes on the land for the next year. Cal was so excited that he spoke rapidly and tried to tell Amanda everything he knew about the ranch and what it looked like as they traveled to see this beautiful gift that had so graciously been given to their family. It was difficult for him to contain his emotions and excitement. He was elated that Amanda and Edwin, his son, would now have a ranch. He was anxiously waiting for the moment that Amanda would cast her eyes on the inherited ranch land and the beauty of its shimmering lake.

The ranch set about seven miles out of town to the southwest and lay between two other large ranches. The neighbors on the east side were the Double D Ranch and the neighbors on the west -northwest were the Lazy Valley Ranch. Uncle Ben had named his ranch the Shimmering V Ranch because the property line cut a large V shape between the other two ranches. The open end of the V spread out perhaps 40 or 50 miles to the base of the mountains on either side. Upon reaching the hills above the ranch, you could look off in the distance on a clear sunny day and see a beautiful blue-green shimmering lake. The grassland was bountiful for cattle or horses and there seemed to be plenty of timber, water, and wildlife. The soil was rich and dark and would be good to grow crops, a garden, and some beautiful flowers

that Amanda so dearly loved. Uncle Ben had built a small home and had plans of greater detail for the future. But, when Cal had returned at the bidding of his father's lawyer, he had taken time to help build a home large enough to be habitable for his own family.

If Amanda only knew what lay ahead and what she would have to suffer, she would never have allowed Cal to talk her into leaving her beloved home in North Dakota. She had been reluctant to move away from her parents, who lived close to them. She had not wanted to break the circle of close family relationships, as most of her family lived in North Dakota. They had a good church and a nice school for Edwin in their community. Amanda was active in their church and helped with several charities that the church was involved in yearly. Cal was also a helper in the church and did volunteer work too. They were both quite happy to be around family and their church and live in the Dakotas. But, Cal had talked of nothing but the ranch and what he wished for his son, Edwin, after receiving the news about his inheritance. Amanda had finally given in so that Cal could fulfill the dream that he so often spoke and fantasized about. Amanda knew that it would be difficult, as this new land was not as settled and a little more wild than it was in North Dakota even though the Dakotas had had its day of wildness too. Perhaps, it was because she was so close to family and friends that she knew so well in North Dakota and she knew there would be no one that she really knew in Montana; she would be starting all over. Her aim in this adventure was to rely upon God and her faith as a source of wisdom and knowledge in all that she would have to deal with in this new life. Her parents had invested love, time, prayer, care, concern, values, and morals and the importance of making godly decisions into her young life. They had tried to install the good things that would make Amanda strong and help her to stand on her own two feet. Amanda knew that this move and new life in Montana would certainly bring with it a time of testing and trouble for her and her family. Amanda knew her character

would soon be tested. Would her strong faith and upbringing bring her through these tests?

Edwin was a small boned boy of five years, soon to be six in the summer. He had been snuggled down in the back of the wagon in a sound sleep; however, when Cal drew the wagon to a halt, Edwin was immediately wide-eyed and awake. For Edwin, a ride in the wagon always meant nap time if it was a very long ride. The gentle rock and sway of the creaking wagon and the repetitive sound of the wagon wheels usually caused a deep sleepiness to overcome Edwin and he would succumb to a lengthy nap whatever the time of day. But now, he rubbed the sleep from his big brown eyes and said that he was hungry as he climbed to the front seat of the wagon to be with his mother.

Cal said that if he remembered right, there was a small eatery just down the street that had good hot meals. The little town of Willow Flats seemed to be alive with commotion because many people were already roaming the street and standing on the sidewalks visiting with their neighbors. Many were busy going from one end of town to the other and visiting a variety of the little stores that lined the narrow dirt streets. Dust swirled and filtered through the air like a gray smoke as more riders and wagons arrived in town disturbing the loose dirt on the streets to whirl and blow about and settle on anything in its way. The horses, tethered to the hitching posts in front of the stores, stomped and swished their tails to drive away the biting flies. More riders, new and old, continued coming into town as others left with their newly purchased goods letting all know that the town seemed to have a good deal of business today.

The Blakes entered the small cafe and found an empty table next to the window and helped themselves to seats. Edwin was full of his usual questions, and he could ask them faster than they could be answered. A waitress finally came and took their order for breakfast. As she did so, she paused and chatted for a few moments. "You must be new in town as I haven't seen you here before. Are you just passing

through?” “I was here in your fair town of Willow Flats and the nearby area on business for about two months a year ago. But, you’ll probably see us a little more often as we have a ranch just outside of town called the Shimmering V Ranch.” As Cal stated this, a hush fell over the room and all that could be heard were a few whispers. Several men seated at the table just across from them turned in their direction and rudely stared at them. Their behavior made Amanda feel quite uncomfortable, but fortunately, the staring men soon vacated their table and disappeared. Amanda was glad and quite relieved when they left, as she hated for anyone to sit and stare at her. Just as the Blakes finished their meal, one of the men returned with a heavy set man and pointed to the Blakes. The large man motioned for the men with him to go on and join the others outside. He straightened his dirty, tattered vest and walked directly to the Blake’s table. “Good morning!” He extended a grubby, dirty looking hand out to Cal. “I don’t believe that we have met before. I’m Hoyle Dackman owner of the Double D Ranch. Is it true that you’re now the owner of the ranch that is next to mine? Yes, old Ben Tallridge offered to sell that land to me awhile back, but sadly, before I had the chance to close the deal, he took sick and died. Perhaps we could meet in a few days before you get settled in and discuss a profitable sale. I’m very interested in this land, especially since it is next door to what I already own. I would be willing to make you a very good offer or perhaps trade you some other properties that I have.” “Well, Mr. Dackman, I did not buy it from under you or obtain it in any illegal way. Ben Tallridge was my uncle; and I have inherited the land legally. I will not be interested in any kind of a sale or trade of land under any circumstance. I love this land; it is what I have always wanted, and now my dream has come true. Thanks to my dear Uncle Ben, it is going to be my home, our home, as he looked at Amanda with a twinkle in his eyes. A home that I can pass down to my own son, Edwin.” As Cal made this statement he leaned over and gently patted Edwin on the head who had not understood any of what was going on.

He was just an innocent little five year old boy in his own little world who was entertaining himself as he patiently waited for his breakfast.

Hoyle Dackman's greedy and miserable countenance fell and he looked very troubled. "Perhaps you will feel like changing your mind later." He turned and abruptly left the room pausing briefly, then spoke with his men across the street, and slid his massive frame across the big bay tied to the hitching post and left town.

Amanda with a quizzical look on her soft face spoke in a hushed whisper. "Cal, do you really think Uncle Ben offered to sell the ranch to this crude Hoyle fellow?" "No! I do not!" Cal clinched his fist and then looked at Amanda tensely and with fear in his face. "Cal, what is it? I know that look and something is wrong." "Amanda, I have not told you everything. I figured that if I did, it would spoil my dream for my own family and I feared that you would not come with me if you knew the whole truth." "Cal, what is it? What have you not told me?" she asked him with a sound of urgency and agitation in her voice. "Okay, Okay, Uncle Ben did not die as I have told you. He did not have a lengthy illness. He came in for supplies one day and was ambushed going back home, he was in bad shape and died two days later. From what I could gather when I was here before, I believe that it was Dackman and his men. However, I have no solid proof of this. He wants this particular land really badly and I do believe that he might do or try anything to get his way. One of the men from Lazy Valley told me to be very careful and never turn my back on any of Dackman's men. Dackman is a mighty mean man and it is true that a lot of people in this town are afraid of him. Ben was in no shape to talk and tell anyone what had happened to him." "Oh Cal," Amanda whispered, "then this means that we could all be in danger for our lives. Cal, don't you see? If this man has killed once, then he will kill again to gain his profits or get whatever he wants. He apparently doesn't value the life of any person but his own. Cal you should have told me and talked with me about this. We have never kept secrets from one another, and especially something

like this when it involves us as a family. You have a son to think of now, Cal. It isn't like when it was just you and me. We may all be in great danger from this man." Amanda prayed quietly in her own heart that God would watch over her family and keep them in his protection.

They hurriedly purchased their supplies while they cautiously glanced and watched over their shoulders. The wagon was loaded in a great hurry. Cal turned the horses in a southwestern direction and headed to the ranch as fast as he could possibly go with his load of goods and his family.

About half way through the travels, they heard horses coming from behind. Without words, Cal quickly handed the reins to Amanda and reached for his rifle just under the seat. The riders came upon them on either side of the wagon forcing Amanda to pull on the reins and halt the horses. Cal was preparing to stand up with his old hunting rifle as the men spoke to him. "We're friends, not the foe! Sorry if we scared you and your family." Cal sighed a breath of relief and weakly sat down again. "Please forgive us ma'am. We were in town today and heard what took place with Dackman and his men at the café. Dackman wants to get his hands on your land. Trust us, we know him and his men very well and how they deal with people. They aren't always on the up and up. We are on our way back to the ranch with some supplies too, so if you don't mind, we'll ride along with you," said the tall dark haired man closest to the wagon. "By the way, I'm Drew Garrison, foreman at the Lazy Valley Ranch, and these are ranch hands of mine. The owner of our ranch is Mr. Dutch Sands. When you meet him, you will find out that he is the complete opposite of Dackman. Dutch is really worth getting to know, but I can't say that about Dackman as his values and morals can't hold a candle to Mr. Sands. We're glad to see others coming and settling in our area. It's nice to have neighbors and friends close by. Of course, we can only speak for ourselves. We do all we can to help new neighbors get settled with a minimum of problems. We're here now to offer our assistance and help in any way that

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we can to accommodate you and your family.” Just as Drew turned to join his riders, he paused and then made a mighty hard and matter of fact statement. “You will find out soon enough that Dackman and his men are intensely greedy and out for self profit and for what they can get and not have to pay for. You need to be extra cautious around him or any of his men. You might as well know the truth now as later.”

It had started to rain a little bit so the men took time to get out their rain gear before it started to rain heavily. “You can never tell about the weather this time of year because sometimes it’s just a small afternoon shower and other times it’s a savage rainstorm.” Amanda got in the back of the wagon with Edwin because the rain had begun to come down quite heavily. The lightning began to crisscross back and forth in jagged and forked lines of intense bolts of light that seemed to run from the top of the heavens down to the roots of the ground. Each time it struck, you could make out swirling angry gray clouds from the illumination of the fireworks across the western skies. This was really no time to be out in a storm with such intense lightening, so Amanda and Edwin both bowed their head in the back of the wagon and asked God for protection from the storm. Cal was greatly disappointed for he had wanted Amanda to see the ranch from the top of the hills above the valley so she could get a true view of the beauty of the land. When the sun glistened off the lake it looked like a huge diamond that had been set in the earth with every facet shining its brightest. When the streams of gold sunshine shone into the emerald green pastures, it was a gorgeous and beautiful shimmering sight to behold. After awhile, the rain began to slow down and Drew commented, “This is probably just one of the quick thunderstorms we sometimes have.” They traveled on for several miles before they came to the bend at the top of the hills that turned into the shimmering valley below. One of the men riding in front of the group rode back and said that he saw smoke in the valley. As they stopped upon the hilltop, Cal’s face grew dark and he looked as if he was in great pain. “Oh no! no! no! It’s the cabins!

They're on fire!" Drew gave orders for the wagon to stay put. "Cal you stay with your wife and son, don't leave this wagon for any reason. Keep your rifle next to you and ready! Stay put! We'll go and investigate." They raced down the hill and as they did, they met two riders approaching them. One had a half smirk on his face. "Say, did you see that lightning strike over there? Looks like it hit that cabin and buildings. Sure sorry about that, it's a real shame. They looked like real nice cabins too." Drew was sure that they were riders for the Double D, but could not be positive because they were all covered in rain gear. Drew asked the men in an agitated tone of voice, "What are you all doing out in this rain?" "We were just rounding up some stray cattle that roamed over this way." "Surely you wouldn't have cattle that strayed over this far, you do know that this is Shimmering V Ranch property? Well, I am quite sure you must be aware of that." "Your not accusing us of any wrong doing with that fire are you?" Drew replied, "It could be that you were just in the wrong place at the wrong time." "We weren't even close to the buildings, in fact, we had just ridden down the hill when the lightning struck," said the older man of the two. The hair on Drew's neck raised and he knew they were lying, but he needed to have solid proof of some sort. Drew seemed to know that the newcomers were in for a hard time, just as he and his family had been several years ago. He just hated to see Amanda and Edwin have to go through the same nonsense that they had a few years ago. It was hard enough for a man to face, but extra hard for a woman in a wild and untamed place. As Drew and his men rode back to the wagon, Drew leaned over and said to Barker, one of his ranch hands, "I smell a rat around here and something isn't right, I can feel it. Tell Hiram to take the Blakes to Lazy Valley. Put them up in my cabin and I'll bunk down with the men at the bunkhouse temporarily. Also, tell Hiram to fill Dutch in on all that has happened today, and on your way out ask Judd to come and ride down to the cabins with me. We're going to have a look around. Oh yeah, for now tell Hiram to let the Blakes think that it really was

lightning that started the fire until I tell you otherwise.” Barker did as asked, and then Judd, Drew’s brother, came to ride down with him. They both rode slowly down to the smoldering cabin hoping to find some sort of clue as to what had really taken place. Drew slid from his saddle carefully so as not to disturb the fresh tracks. He could see two sets of boot prints and two sets of horse prints. He noticed that one set of boot prints were a little unusual. The right boot print had an indented place in the heel which left a little round mound of dirt to one side. The ground was still moist and soft from the rain so the print was fairly clear. Drew knew in his heart that the two men had set the fire and he had every intention in trying to trace the boot print, but in his own quiet way and time. The hoof prints were clear and unusual too. These prints shouldn’t be too hard to find.

Hiram took the Blakes to the cabin that set just north of Dutch Sands big ranch house. It was a nice, sturdy, and strong cabin with a charming porch and rocking chair out front which gave it a very homey and comfortable look. Cal was taking in the size and lay of the land and saying that one day he hoped to have something just like this. Amanda paid no attention to the land surrounding the cabin, because she only saw the cabin that they were to call home for awhile. She noticed flowers out to one side of the cabin and that curtains covered the windows. Everything looked so neat, clean, and in place. She wondered if there was a Mrs. Garrison, but, no one came out to meet them. It was very calm and quiet around the place. Hiram finally broke the silence of her thoughts. “Ma’am, may I help you down? This will be your home for awhile until we can get things arranged differently for you. Drew should be along shortly; however, he plans on staying down at the bunkhouse with the men. Make yourself at home. I’ll help you unload before I leave.” Amanda took Edwin by one hand and then carried a small suitcase in the other. As she entered the cabin and walked into the front room, she felt a strange sensation sweep over her. She knew the cabin was not hers, but she suddenly felt at ease and at home

here. She felt secure and very peaceful as she stood eyeing the coziness of the cabin. Drew rode up and brought some more items in. He instructed Cal to put his work tools and other articles that he wouldn't be using any time soon in the shed behind the cabin. Drew turned to Amanda and stated that the cabin was fairly large and that he hoped it would be to her liking, and they would feel at home. He led Amanda to a closed door and opened it up. "You and Cal can use my room." Then he took a few steps down to the next door and said, "Edwin can sleep here in the bunkhouse." Amanda stepped inside and saw that it had four bunks around the walls of the room. "This will be fine for Edwin, perhaps he will think that he is a cowboy in the bunkhouse." Drew explained that when they first started the ranch, his helpers had to stay here until the bunkhouse down by the corrals had been built.

Judd returned to tell Drew that he would have to bunk here at his own house or go over and stay with Dutch. "Two new men had been hired just this morning and so there are no more empty bunks in the bunkhouse." He decided that he would have to bunk with Edwin in the spare room as he usually rose earlier than Dutch and was up and about his work at the crack of dawn. Now that Dutch was older and not as strong as he had been in his younger days, he usually slept later and was not involved in much of the day to day labor on the ranch, but he was still the overseer. Dutch usually attended to the bookkeeping and the supply lists and so forth and was contented to do so. He could also come and go as he pleased at whatever time he chose to do so.

After everyone had gone to their rooms for the night, Cal whispered to Amanda, "We must find someplace to hide the deed to the land and the extra money. If Dackman's men get hold of it, we're ruined." Amanda thought as she paced the floor back and forth. Suddenly, she stopped. "We can't hide it in here. This is the first place they would look. I'm sure they know we are here. There's no other place to stay around here." After pacing the floor for quite some time, Amanda grabbed Cal by the arm and said in an excited voice, "Cal, I

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know the perfect hiding place. We can put it in the saddle that father gave to Edwin for his first horse. Remember? There is a secret pocket underneath? The gold coin grandfather gave him on his fifth birthday is still hidden there.” “Yes, I had completely forgotten about that. We can put it there for safe keeping and no one will be the wiser.” Amanda’s father’s business was making saddles, harnesses, and all sorts of leather goods. No one knew of the little pocket but Cal, Amanda, and Edwin’s grandfather. They had never even told Edwin about it. When he was old enough, they would tell him. It had been sewn in so well and so smoothly, that if one didn’t know it was there, they couldn’t find it. Cal said, “Tomorrow morning we’ll put it there for safe keeping. I don’t think anyone would bother such a small child’s saddle. It’s so small, it looks like a child’s toy. Good night, Amanda. Hopefully tomorrow will be a better and brighter day. I love you.”