

PRAISE FOR *THE ALAMO BRIDE*

“*The Alamo Bride* is an exciting, romantic tale of the early days of the Texas Republic. The spunky, determined heroine is a perfect match for the handsome, mysterious hero who holds a secret that could either make or break Texas’ fight for independence. Great conflict, a strong faith element, and Kathleen Y’Barbo’s extensive research skills and knowledge of Texas history make this book a fascinating read.”

–Vickie McDonough, bestselling author
of forty-seven Christian romance books and novellas,
including *The Texas Boardinghouse Brides* series

“Kathleen Y’Barbo is a Texan through and through and a gifted storyteller on top of that. Her love of the Lone Star State has come through in so many of her books, but in *The Alamo Bride*, she brings all the legendary Texas mystique and history together in a story that readers won’t be able to put down. As a native Texan myself, I still honor the cry of 1836—Remember the Alamo—and I know historical romance lovers will long remember *The Alamo Bride*.”

–Kristen Ethridge, author of the bestselling Christian romances
in the *Port Provident* series

“Kathleen Y’Barbo knows how to write adventure-filled historical romance that will keep the pages turning! This book was packed with action, danger, adventure and of course, a bit of romance! I loved it! *The Alamo Bride* kept me on the edge of my seat, yet still managed to have plenty of warmth and humor from the characters. Fantastic read and a great addition to the *Daughters of the Mayflower* series!”

–Ashley Johnson, book blogger and reviewer at [BringingUpBooks](#)

*The
Alamo
Bride*



KATHLEEN
Y'BARBO

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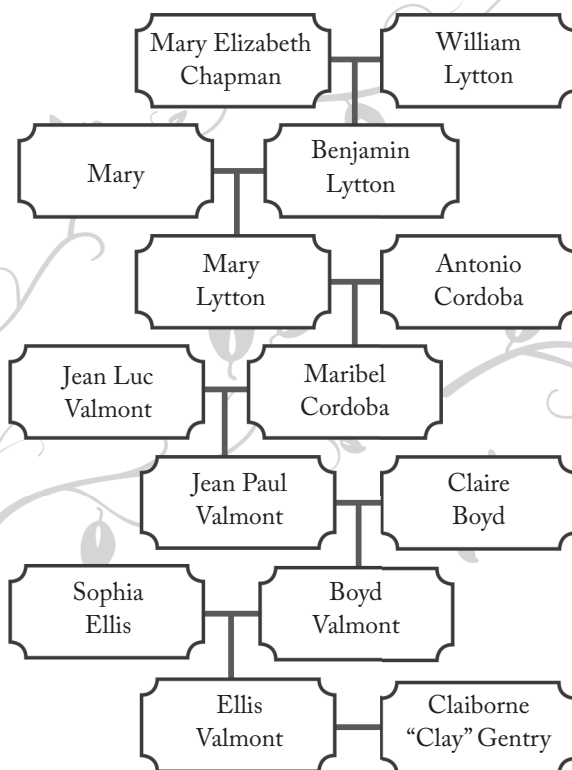
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DEDICATION

For Mary Beth Patton and Ginger Tumlinson
Cousins and keepers of the family flame

And to Linda Hang, polisher of prose and copy editor extraordinaire
Thank you all for doing what you do so I can do what I do.

Daughters of the Mayflower



The Lytton Family

William Lytton married Mary Elizabeth Chapman (Plymouth, 1621)

Parents of 13 children, including Benjamin

Benjamin Lytton married Mary (Massachusetts 1675)

Born to Benjamin and Mary

Mary Lytton married Antonio Cordoba (Spain 1698)

Only child was Maribel

Maribel Cordoba married Jean Luc Valmont (1736)

Only child was Jean Paul

Jean Paul Valmont married Clarie Boyd (1770)

Children included Boyd Valmont

Boyd Valmont married Sophia Ellis (1807)

Children included Ellis Valmont

Ellis Valmont married Claiborne "Clay" Gentry (1836)

Dear Reader,

Though *The Alamo Bride* has been in progress for quite some time, I began the actual writing of the story exactly 182 years after the day William Barret Travis penned his now-famous letter from behind the walls of the Alamo.

President Andrew Jackson and General Sam Houston had a long history as friends from their days back in Tennessee as well as a mentoring relationship that might have led Houston to follow Jackson to the White House. When Houston made choices that sent him in a different direction, Jackson continued to support his friend with advice and occasionally political support or employment. Although, as president, Jackson could not officially help his old friend Houston when Houston took over control of the Texian army, it is believed he continued his pattern of aiding the general by not only providing advice but seeing to much-needed funding.

Most likely that funding occurred through secondary channels where allies of Jackson were encouraged to send money to the cause. These were not the only donations the army received. Sometimes the influx of cash came from entities and businesses, and other times it came from individuals or governments of other nations. Basically any person or government who disliked the politics of the Mexican government or saw a benefit in Texas becoming its own republic contributed.

Thus, people from diverse backgrounds and citizenships gave to the cause. A fictional New Orleans Grey with a desire to gain a little political stature and the right connections to do so—namely an uncle who was the first governor of the area gained in the Louisiana Purchase and a grandfather who sailed with Jean Lafitte—could definitely parley his information in regard to buried treasure to achieve that goal.

In October 1835, a group of men came together to form two companies of soldiers called the New Orleans Greys. The sole purpose of the Greys was to come to the aid of those fighting for freedom from Mexico. The Greys were a military organization, so named because of the grey wool uniforms they wore. Though members of the Greys came from all over the world, they were united in the cause of freedom for Texians and Tejanos. Before the Greys were disbanded two years later, many died for this cause.

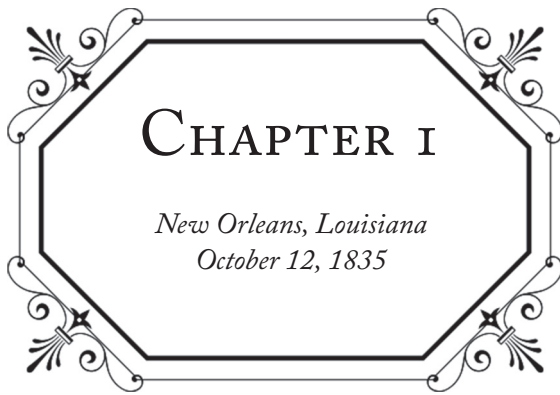
And in case you're wondering whether I misspelled the word *Texian*, rest assured, I did not. While no one knows for certain how this term originated, it refers to citizens of the lands that would eventually become the state of Texas. This word remained in use for quite some time, but once Texas achieved statehood, its citizens were most generally referred to by the same term we use today: Texans.

As an aside, my mother's family came to Texas in exactly the same way as my fictional Ellis Valmont's family. Setting off from New Orleans with three hundred of Stephen F. Austin's settlers—now referred to as the Old Three Hundred—they were given land on the Gulf of Mexico at Velasco, and some of their descendants still live on that very land. Thus, this is a personal favorite story of mine as well as a tale of Texas and the Texians.

Enjoy!

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. Because thou hast made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet. Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation.

PSALM 91



CHAPTER I

New Orleans, Louisiana
October 12, 1835

He was the nephew of a governor and statesman and the grandson of a pirate who sailed with the infamous Jean Lafitte, but tonight Claiborne William Andre Gentry was merely one of the many anonymous souls who walked along Magazine Street in the Vieux Carre.

Back in Tennessee, his sisters had teased him about the dark hair that was so different from their blond braids and yet so similar to the pirate whose name was forbidden in their home. Here in New Orleans, Clay's resemblance to the grandfather his family never spoke of had caused him to fit in rather than look out of place. And when a man was carrying a secret on behalf of the president of the United States, looking out of place was not the goal.

The night was warm, unseasonably so for October, and the air was thick. Like as not, there would be storms before daybreak.

Clay moved swiftly down Magazine Street, keeping to the shadows and avoiding the glare of the gas lamps. Though the full moon overhead turned everything it touched a dull silver, murky darkness was never far away in this city.

He knew from experience that the darkness did not merely extend to the streets and alleys. It also lay deep in the hearts of men who dwelled here.

In the last few months, he'd discovered the names of some of those men. His mission tonight was, in part, to discover if what he'd learned

was true. The remainder of his task for the evening—the duty he held and the favor the completion of that duty would incur—weighed heavy on his mind.

“He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust.”

A verse first memorized at his mother’s knee because it made him laugh to think of the Lord covered in feathers, now these words gave him strength. With the verse in mind, Clay picked up his pace.

Just yesterday, news of the battle in Gonzales had reached the city. A squabble over ownership of two cannons very likely had launched what would become a full-blown war.

The general who would lead his troops in that war needed funding if he was to be successful. Funding that the Mexican government would very much wish to intercept.

For that reason, he’d spoken to no one since his arrival in New Orleans. In times of war, not all friends were truly friends. And, sadly, not all family escaped the title of enemy.

Though he kept the evidence of who he was—the papers that named him as a citizen of Louisiana by virtue of his uncle’s position—tucked into his boot, he would not make that evidence public. Better to remain a stranger than to be targeted because of an alliance that came from an accident of birth.

As he walked past Banks Arcade, he thought of the battle for Texas brewing here in New Orleans. A war of words had been waged for months between the owners of the Creole mercantile houses who supported the Mexican Federalists and the Americans who populated the Faubourg St. Marie. Recently the Americans had declared victory and celebrated by raising a quarter-million dollars in funds for two companies of men to go and join the fight.

One week from tonight these men would meet to have their names added to the rolls. To Clay’s understanding, one company would be

headed north to Nacogdoches while the other would be setting sail for Velasco.

His grandfather held a special fondness for Velasco. So much so that he'd left a substantial amount of the fortune he earned during his years at sea buried there. Father wanted nothing to do with what he deemed ill-gotten gains, but Clay had been fascinated with the idea of someday digging it all up. Over the years, he had begged his grandfather to show him the map that led to the location of this treasure, but the old man never would.

Then after his death, a letter came for Clay. Inside was a map and a two-sentence warning:

Commit this to memory and then destroy it. With great riches comes great responsibility, so you must only retrieve this to use it for a cause greater than yourself.

Someday he would fulfill his grandfather's request and find a use for that treasure, a cause greater than himself. Tonight, however, he had other issues to handle. Thoughts of Velasco would have to wait for another day.

For another cause.

Clay pulled open the ornate door and stepped inside the building situated at the corner of Natchez Street then climbed the stairs. Below him the market sold everything from china to ships to humans—a detestable trade—but one floor up, the atmosphere was decidedly different.

As on most nights, Jim Hewlett's dining establishment, known here by some as Hewlett's Exchange, was doing a brisk business. He tipped a nod toward the owner without slowing his pace.

Clay slipped past the privacy screens that kept this part of the structure hidden from prying eyes and paused beneath one of the four massive chandeliers that lit the expansive room. To his left was the wood and marble bar backed by row upon row of French glassware. Straight ahead,

the silver-haired man he was to meet awaited him in an alcove beneath an ornately framed but poor copy of a Caravaggio still life painting.

His companion for the evening was a man he knew as Reverend Smith—who, given his close attention to the ladies in the room and his thick French accent, was surely neither a man of the cloth nor in possession of that surname. Smith was thick around the middle and of average height, just the sort who would not call attention to himself in a crowd.

The older man barely acknowledged Clay as he approached, preferring to turn and stare up at the painting. “A pity the money that is won at the tables above us cannot be spent in part to decorate the tables here.”

Ignoring the reference to the gambling that went on upstairs, Clay merely nodded. “I suppose.”

“You suppose?” Smith’s thick brows rose as if Clay had insulted him personally. “I assure you that your grandfather not only would have an opinion but also would likely own the original.” A grin surfaced. “Or know how to acquire it.”

If Smith’s expression was meant to chastise Clay, the sentiment missed its mark. “No doubt he would. But the subject of my grandfather is not what we are here to discuss.”

The supposed reverend drummed his fingers on the table, calling attention to the signet ring on his right hand that bore the coat of arms of a prominent French family. “It is he who speaks for your character, my boy. Without your provenance, you’d not be undertaking this endeavor.”

His temper rose. “My provenance also includes a Louisiana governor and more than one man who merely made a quiet living and took care of his family.”

“So I have heard. Still I stand by my previous statement.”

Something inside Clay snapped. “We are here because I have proved myself worthy of this endeavor and for no other reason.”

More than proved himself, Clay had become indispensable to President Jackson in his cause of aiding his old friend Sam Houston. He let

the statement hang in the thick air between them.

His outburst caught the attention of the trio of gentlemen at the next table, among them Samuel Jarvis Peters. The banker tipped his head in a polite greeting and then went back to his conversation.

His temper was what got him into this situation. He could not allow it to make things any worse.

The Frenchman broke out in a broad smile. “I jest, my friend. If you were not worthy, you would not be here, yes?” He paused to cast a covert glance around the room before returning his attention to Clay. “I see that you know the Peters fellow. I should not be surprised. What I wonder is whether it’s through old William or Andre, rest his soul.”

Again Clay bristled, but he made an effort to keep his expression neutral. While his uncle, William Claiborne, a statesman and governor of this state, was a worthy relative, in Clay’s mind so was Andre Gallier. Both sailed seas of turmoil to claim victory, Claiborne’s over political causes and Gallier over the law itself. Neither was held in higher esteem than the other in his mind.

“He is a family friend,” Clay said, leaving the stranger to guess on which side of the family the alliance fell. Clay reached for his pocket watch, more as a show of his impatience with the wasted time than any hurry to be elsewhere.

“Of course you have managed to keep your ties to this city. Odd, don’t you think?”

“How so?”

Smith paused to grin. “Seeing as your father hid his family away in Tennessee to keep you from any taint of scandal. In any case,” he began as he retrieved a document from his vest pocket and slid it across the table, “I have this for you.”

Clay turned the document over and noted the presidential seal. He’d had plenty of communication with the president or his aides, but never had anything been in writing. Nor would it ever be, per the president’s

orders. The subject of Texas was a tricky one, fraught with issues of states' rights and already the source of much contention among the ranks in Washington and elsewhere. Clay's mission was personal and not at all connected with the position President Jackson held.

This had to be a trick.

Slowly he returned his gaze to Smith and found the older man watching him closely. "Who gave you this?"

The smile became a blank expression. "The same man who set the original plan in motion, Mr. Gentry. Surely you do not wish me to speak his name aloud in such a public place."

Clay broke the seal without looking away. The wax crumbled beneath his fingers. Finally he turned his attention to the letter.

Would that this finds you well, Claiborne. I offer my fondest wishes to you. I have authorized the bearer of this letter to receive the item you have guarded so well. Please accept my thanks for a job well done and rest assured those who will now take over for you have only the best interests of the mission at heart.

It was signed with the formal signature of the president himself.

Only it wasn't signed by him because Andrew Jackson did not write this letter. Not only was the signature slightly different, but the man who'd practically been family for as long as Clay could remember had never once called him Claiborne.

Further proof of deceit.

Clay folded the paper and settled it into his jacket pocket and then let out a long breath. "Have you read this?" he asked Smith.

"I have not."

Again Clay studied the man across the table as he calculated his next move. Somewhere between Andrew Jackson and Reverend Smith the plans to deliver aid to the Texian militias via their leader, General

Houston, had been discovered. The perpetrator of this fraud could be anyone. Clay's best guess was the source came from Mexico. There were many there who would pay well to put an end to the resistance on their northern border. And yet there were also those on this side of the border who could profit.

Clay kept his attention on Smith. He had pledged a vow on his own life that he would see that the money that had been quietly raised arrived at its intended destination. If he had to give that life for the cause, the money would arrive safely.

A strong desire to get out of this place and back into the shadows bore down on him. He needed time to think. Time to formulate an alternative plan.

"What does it say?" Smith asked.

He shrugged as if easing into the idea even as his eyes covertly scanned the room in search of any possible accomplices. "I am to make the delivery to you." He paused. "Tonight."

Smith leaned forward. "Those are the same instructions I received. I understand it is a change of plans, but given the current situation, it is the only way."

"What is the reason for this change?"

Another shrug and then Smith reached for his coat. "I was not told. So shall we go now?"

He ignored the question as he caught the attention of Hewlett. The older man offered a nod and Clay returned the gesture. Was Hewlett friend or foe?

At this moment, he could not say for certain, though before this day, Clay would have thought the relationship the exchange owner held with Grandfather Gallier and his associates meant that Clay could feel safe in this place.

Now every face that turned his direction could be a man looking to stop him from carrying out his mission. Again he considered the fact that

any friend could be a foe.

“Unless of course you’ve decided not to do as he has asked. I’m sure our mutual friend could be made to understand, although I doubt your father would.”

“What does my father have to do with this?” Clay managed through a clenched jaw as he swung his attention back to Smith.

“Everything and nothing,” the Frenchman said with a casual lift of one shoulder. “I worry for the safety of your family, is all. However, that is a conversation for another time, for we are likely being watched. I suggest you offer me a smile as we leave this place. I would hate to think those who had an opinion as to the business we are conducting here might consider taking action.”

Clay rose and stared down at Smith from his superior height. “I find it odd that you would threaten a man who is on the same side as you, Reverend Smith.”

“Do you now?” Smith stood and shrugged himself into his coat. “Look into your heart, Mr. Gentry, and then look around this room. Just as you are looking to serve your needs, so are they. Do not think you’re above it.”

The statement jarred him more than Clay would have liked. It was a simple thing to consider himself part of the noble cause of aiding General Houston to bring freedom to Texas. A bit more complicated were Clay’s other reasons for doing so.

Was he following a path leading to his own benefit, or had he truly chosen a nobler way?

The question chased him as he descended the staircase, trading the elegance of the dining establishment for the fetid chaos of the exchange below and then finally for the damp night air of Magazine Street. As he’d expected, a slow drizzle of rain had begun.

With Smith on his heels, Clay ignored the rain to lead him in circles through the dark streets at a brisk pace, formulating a plan as he went. With their destination finally in sight, he stopped and whirled around to

watch the older man hurrying to catch up.

Out of breath, Smith shook his head. “If your plan was to lose me on the way here, you failed, sir. Besides, it is common knowledge that you took rooms on the third floor of Banks Arcade.”

Common knowledge. Hardly.

Still, Clay forced a laugh. “If my plan had been to lose you, I would not have failed.” He paused. “But this is where we part ways for now. I will make the delivery as planned, but on my terms.” His expression went serious. “In one hour at the Place d’Armes.”

Smith took a step back to look beyond him. “No, Mr. Gentry. The exchange has already occurred. I’m afraid you are no longer needed.”

And then everything went dark.

Clay opened his eyes to find the last of the stars overhead being chased away by the dawn. With his head throbbing and the horizon unsteady at best, he stumbled to his feet and made his way to his rooms.

As he expected, they had been ransacked and the money was gone. Cursing himself for a fool, Clay fell back onto the narrow cot and stared up at the ceiling. Every detail of the mission had been committed to memory just as he’d done as a child with Grandfather Gallier’s map.

Less than six weeks from now he was expected to arrive at the agreed meeting place and transfer the funds. To fail was not an option.

He studied the crack in the plaster ceiling and allowed his mind to consider all the options available to him. His own personal assets could never match the amount of the missing funds.

Or could they?

Clay sat bolt upright, ignoring the jolt of pain and the spinning room as he laughed out loud. Of course. The Gallier treasure. According to Grandfather, the value of what lay beneath the Texas soil was much more than what had been stolen last night.

He stood and began to pace, holding on to the walls until the room slowed its turning. Years of practice allowed him to call up the image his

grandfather made him memorize. All that remained was how to make the trip there without drawing attention to himself.

For as crafty as the Smith fellow was, he couldn't possibly have hit him on the back of his head while standing in front of him. There was at least one accomplice in this endeavor, likely more.

A smile rose and laughter once again followed as an idea occurred. Why bother to make a covert escape and risk being followed when he could sail out of New Orleans in plain sight?

His passion for the plight of Texas was well known, as was his intention to do what he could for that cause. Thus, no one who knew him would find it odd when one week hence he attended the meeting downstairs in the very building where he now sat and presented himself as a candidate for the roster of the New Orleans Greys.

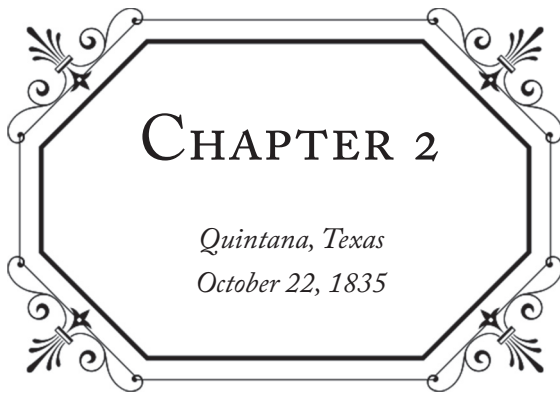
He would muster in with Captain Morris's battalion and be delivered to Velasco before the end of the month without anyone lifting an eyebrow. The only wrinkle in what was a nearly flawless plan was the question of how he might slip away to retrieve the treasure. That, he decided, would be left to God's own provision. If need be, he could invoke the name of Andrew Jackson himself should he be caught and questioned.

Once his mission was complete and the funds were transferred to Sam Houston's representatives, the president would surely excuse him from his duties as a Grey and call him to Washington. There Clay would be given the place in the Jackson administration that he had been promised. The appointment that would make everything right that Clay and his temper had made wrong.

Clay smiled. Yes, this would work. It had to.

The only question remaining was whether to alert the president to the situation. With nearly six weeks until the date of the exchange, there was no reason to worry the man.

If all went well, President Jackson would never know that the stake Clay had in seeing the mission complete was now a very personal one.



CHAPTER 2

Quintana, Texas
October 22, 1835

Despite the fact that her feet stood on Texas soil, the blood of Spanish noblemen and French privateers ran through Ellis Valmont's veins. Her family tree was populated with brave souls who fought and died for a cause greater than themselves. Even though she'd married into the Valmont family, Mama could recite their stories as if calling back memories fresh enough to see with her eyes closed.

As a child Papa heard tales of his noble-born Cordoba grandmother who survived a childhood orphaned on a Caribbean island and then married a privateer whose goal was to rescue treasure much greater than gold and silver, the treasure of enslaved souls. Grandmother Valmont told those same stories to Mama when she joined the family, as much to see that the tales were passed down as to explain why Papa sometimes got lost in a book or caught the wandering fever and picked up stakes to travel bold paths others might shun.

Had Papa not inherited that penchant for adventure passed down through the generations, this branch of the Valmonts might have continued to reside in some well-appointed home along the Rue Royal or another grand address. Ellis had given up counting the number of aunts, uncles, and cousins they'd left behind when Papa took them to Texas.

These same family members proclaimed Papa to have lost his mind. To this, Papa would tell them he'd finally found it. Had found a home here on the banks of the river and a cause for which he was willing to

lay down his life.

Until war came to the shores of her coastal Texas home, Ellis had never given serious thought to what it might be like to make a choice to die for a cause greater than self. Now she thought of such things constantly.

Too often an unfamiliar sail on the horizon cast fear into her heart, and now she could not blame the ancient crumbling books Mama preserved from her New Orleans home and carried to Texas. Books that once entertained Great-Grandmother Maribel Cordoba on Isla de Santa Maria now lay covered in quilts in a trunk beside Mama's bed, only to be removed by Mama and turned with care lest the fragile pages be ruined.

Of the two, Mama was the one who always looked to preserve the past, while Papa was always looking to the future. As the only daughter, she had learned much from both of them.

From her mother, Ellis learned the ways of healing using plants that grew near their coastal Texas homeland. As deep as the roots of these healing herbs grew, deeper still grew Ellis's roots in the Texas soil.

She drew her *rebozo* close and gave thanks her mother insisted she take the colorful Mexican scarf along on this morning's mission to deliver a remedy for Grandfather Valmont's persistent cough. She had arisen well before the sun to mix the herbs and now carried them down the familiar path to where the canoe was kept. On the other side of the river in his Velasco home, Grandfather was likely sipping chicory coffee while the sky bled from deep purple to pale blue.

Though war waged elsewhere, there had been little cause for worry lately in Quintana and Velasco. Still, no citizen of this disputed land could rest easy with Mexican forces unwilling to give in to those who sought freedom.

Thus, she was always on her guard wherever she walked, and she never went anywhere without a watchful eye and a knife hidden in the pocket of her skirt. And, of course, with an escort of some sort, though

generally it was one of her rowdy and most unhelpful younger brothers or the elderly farmhand they called Mr. Jim.

The boys' absence today, caused by misbehavior that Mama had punished by sentencing them to cleaning out the barn starting well before daylight, meant she would make the trip without them. Mr. Jim had been called down the road to help the Widow Callahan by cutting up a tree that fell on her chicken coop, so he too was unavailable.

Thus, she was alone. Not that she minded, for the quiet solitude that came from walking the path, crossing the river, and then making her way to Grandfather Valmont's home was something she liked very much.

The canoe was where she last left it, well hidden in the reeds on the far end of their property at the river's edge. Ellis quickly crossed the deep brown waters and secured the canoe out of sight on the other bank. Grasping her basket of herbs, she climbed out and made her way down the path.

A few minutes later, she rounded a corner and Velasco appeared in the distance. The city was situated at the eastern shore of the Brazos River, the dark thread of water called the *Rio de los Brazos de Dios*—River of the Arms of God—by the Spaniards. Huddled against the river's banks all the way down to where the Brazos met the bay, the collection of buildings spread in both directions away from the shipyard and the impressive Valmont home. Ships bobbed at anchor here as well as along the coast, some of them built by Grandfather and his men.

It was a source of pride to both Papa and Grandfather that Valmont Shipbuilders was bigger than any other enterprise in Velasco other than the military outpost of Fort Velasco. Now that the skirmish at Gonzales appeared to portend more than just an ongoing disagreement with Mexico, likely both the fort and the shipyard were destined to expand to fill the needs of protecting Texas.

Ellis shook off the thought with a shrug of her shoulders. That the Valmont family was well-off financially compared to others in the city

held little place in her thoughts. Even though the shipyard would profit from war, the Valmonts prayed only for peace.

Built adjacent to his place of work, Jean Paul Valmont's grand home sat as near to the shoreline as he could place it without getting doused when the spring rains fell. The love of the open water had been passed down through the generations, but unlike those before him, Grandfather built boats rather than sailed them.

Ellis had made this walk more frequently since Papa and her brother Thomas went to fight with Major Burleson and the militiamen at Gonzales last month. With the men away—she refused to believe the rumor regarding casualties that reached them several weeks ago—it was up to Ellis to see that all was well with the senior member of the family.

She found her grandfather right where she expected, but she had not anticipated that he would have company at this hour. Voices rose in conversation that seemed to border on disagreement, causing her to stall on the stone path that led to the back of the home and the porch facing the river.

"I'll not believe it until there's proof," Grandfather said in the French language he rarely used here in Texas. "They're alive and would never do what you claim."

"The proof will come soon enough." The speaker was male, but beyond this Ellis could discern nothing further. "I warn you only because the friendship between our families goes back longer than either of us have been alive."

"And your jealousy of me and my family goes back to our own parents, does it not?" Grandfather paused to allow a fit of coughing to pass. "I thought I'd be rid of you when the Lord took my Claire home, but it appears the vendetta you swore against me did not die with her."

Laughter that held no humor reached Ellis's ears. She craned her neck to try to spy something of the stranger's identity.

"The fact that Claire did not deserve you has nothing to do with this.

Although, perhaps had she chosen me instead of you, none of this would have happened. Now I merely wish to offer an opportunity that will make us both very wealthy.”

Ellis edged closer at the mention of her namesake grandmother, Claire Ellis Valmont. Who was this man?

“You came to gloat at what you wish me to believe is my loss and nothing else,” Grandfather said, his voice almost unrecognizable in the anger this usually soft-spoken man’s tone showed. “Boyd and his son are neither traitors to our cause nor dead and buried. You, however, are known to shift loyalties to follow what benefits you.”

“On that we agree. However, you must consider the fact that your son may be clever enough to preserve his life and the lives of his family by doing things that he might otherwise find abhorrent.”

Silence crackled between them. Ellis’s temper rose. How dare that man accuse her father of doing abhorrent things?

Whatever that meant.

“Henri,” her grandfather finally said, “go back to whoever sent you and tell him it did not work.”

“Be reasonable, Jean Paul,” the man said, switching to English. “Just outside your door is Fort Velasco, a Mexican garrison until four summers ago. Soldiers from New Orleans have only just arrived to join the fight. But look what they fight against!”

“Seems I heard the same arguments back in ’32, and yet we sent General Ugartechea and the Mexican army away on ships we had waiting for them.”

“General Santa Anna is no Ugartechea. There’s no surrender in him, I promise you,” Henri said. “And unlike the previous commander, the general and his superior army will kill us all unless he has assurance of our loyalty.”

“And so you wish me to throw my support your way so that we might join a cause that you claim has taken my son and grandson? Which of