

The Golden Dream

Angelina pulled the invitation out of the gold foil-lined envelope and ran her fingers over the raised print. The box of invitations had arrived just before she and Daniel jumped in the car for their mini holiday, and they hadn't had a chance to review them together. The lilac bloom was faint behind the black cursive print. "Mr. and Mrs. Steven Freeman and Mr. and Mrs. Johnathan Castle invite you to celebrate the marriage of their children, Angelina Sue Freeman and Daniel Wayne Castle..."

Smiling, she placed the invitation on the oak vanity, the one piece of furniture in their room at the historic Murphys hotel. She couldn't wait to build a life with Daniel. He was intelligent and warm, and he always made her laugh. And her parents liked him too. Her dad approved of Daniel right away, "An agricultural engineer with the Food & Drug Administration? It's a good, steady job, Lina."

Little did he know that Daniel hated that job. Instead, her fiancé dreamed of owning a vineyard and making his own wine. The thought of it made Angelina's stomach churn. They both needed steady jobs, and her salary as a high school teacher would not be enough for them to live on, let alone to start a family. She pushed aside the doubt that had nagged at her for weeks now and told herself, *He's just dreaming a bit. He'll grow out of it once we're married.*

"Whew! It's hot out there." Daniel stepped into the room and plopped onto his back on the four-poster bed. "What do you think of this place?"

"It's amazing, Hon. Did you see the Ulysses S. Grant room a few doors down?" Angelina settled on the bed next to Daniel, both of them staring up at the cracked plaster ceiling.

"Yeah. I peeked into it quickly. Wild, huh? And the bar downstairs? They say that's the original wooden bar from 1856." He took her hand and brought it to his mouth for a quick kiss.

They both loved these little gold rush towns, but this one was special. "Tell me again about your family and the property," Angelina asked.

He turned on his side, propped himself onto his elbow, and looked down at her with his light blue eyes. She reached up and ran her fingers through his jet-black hair, smoothing it to one side. *My handsome man.*

"So, it was my great, great grandparents who lived here during the gold rush! They had a little cabin on forty acres. It's always been in the family, and my dad inherited it when Grandpa passed. We used to

come here a lot when I was a kid. Dad just wanted to check on the place. We'd drive by, but the house was a total wreck, so we never even got out of the car."

Angelina got up and went to the vanity with its large, oval mirror. "But I thought they started the hardware stores in the Bay Area way back in the 1800s. Didn't they live in the East Bay?" Angelina asked as she pulled her chestnut hair into a ponytail.

"Yeah, that's right," he said, coming up behind her. He wrapped his arms around her waist and smiled. He talked at their reflection in the mirror. "I think my great, great grandfather decided to move to Oakland when his wife died of a heart attack. Sadly, she never got to see the store. Grandpa loved that store, and my dad was the one who expanded the business. Once he opened the next couple of locations, they just got too busy. We didn't come here anymore. Shoot, we didn't do anything together anymore."

Angelina watched Daniel's eyes drop absently to the oak surface of the vanity as he shifted from excitement to disappointment. She put her hands on his and squeezed as she talked to their reflection. "Well, I've done my homework on Murphys. It was founded by the Murphy brothers, who operated a trading post here in 1848 to support the miners."

That pulled his eyes back to her reflection. "I'm impressed," Daniel said. "Go on," and he kissed her neck lightly.

"Well, there was Albert Michelson – he was the first American to win the Nobel Prize for science. I think they named a school after him. And this guy, Mercer, he discovered huge caverns on his land grant. And then there were the bandits..."

"Can't you just imagine the energy in town?" Daniel interrupted her, his voice suddenly bright. He sat on the edge of the bed. "Everyone with big dreams, risking everything, hoping to strike it rich!" He grabbed his phone from the nightstand and scrolled his finger on the screen.

"Yeah...almost like you and your winery idea," Angelina couldn't help herself. But her voice held a bit more sarcasm than she meant to reveal.

"That's different, Hon. I know we can make it a huge success," Daniel replied with confidence. "Speaking of which, let's walk the town and do some wine tasting. Research, research!" He winked at her. "There are several tasting rooms within a stone's throw, right here on Main Street."

"OK," said Angelina, "but maybe we should eat a little

something first? I'm kinda hungry."

Daniel looked at his watch. "We only have an hour before the tasting rooms close. I'm sure they'll have something to munch on. Let's hit a couple of places, and then we can grab dinner. OK?"

Angelina opened her makeup bag. "OK. Give me one minute to spruce myself up a bit."

"You don't need any sprucing, Lina." Angelina saw Daniel's reflection in the mirror. He was looking at her adoringly. "You're prettier than a lilac in the spring."

Angelina rolled her eyes as she adjusted her ponytail. But then she smiled. He whispered this to her every morning when she rolled toward him in bed, opened her eyes, and found him looking at looking at her. And that's why she'd included the lilac on those wedding invitations.

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"Just relax here, Lina. I'm going to get us some water, OK?"

"Yep." That was all she could verbalize. She heard Daniel's voice and understood he wanted water, but she couldn't remember where they were. She closed her eyes and sat back in the chair.

She swallowed several times and rubbed her eyes, trying to focus. Red velvet stripes wavered on the cream-colored wallpaper. A large, framed photo on the wall grabbed her attention and anchored her. She pulled herself out of the chair and stumbled the four steps across the small hotel lobby. She peered up at the photograph. The greys, tans, and golds of the sepia photo began to swirl. She rubbed her eyes again. This time she saw the dirt street with buildings on either side and...yes, those were people standing on the side of the street, fuzzy and static. They were from a different time.

"OK, Lina. I got us four bottles of water. I also got a box of those little wine-tasting crackers, but you're going to need food at some point. C'mon, let's get you up to the room and into bed. Way too much wine for you!"

She heard all the words and felt Daniel put his arm around her waist. She let her head rest on his shoulder. She couldn't open her eyes. But she saw those people on the side of the dirt road, looking toward her, silent.

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She grabbed the corner of the feather pillow and rolled onto her side. The sunlight was bright, and she squinted at the open window. White, lacey curtains blew into the room, a breeze bringing the smell of dust and smoke. *Someone must be barbequing.* Then the pain pounded in

her temple as though someone was squeezing her head in a vice.

She ran her tongue across her lips – dry. Swallowing, she thought she tasted the remnants of red wine. Then it came to her. *Did we visit three tasting rooms or four?* She felt behind her in the bed. Daniel wasn't there.

She swung her legs over the side of the bed. The room spun, and the white, lacey curtains fluttered wildly. She closed her eyes and waited a moment. Then she mustered the strength to stand up and move toward the vanity.

The large, oval mirror showed a young woman standing in her room. Startled, she turned around too fast and nearly stumbled. But no one was behind her. She turned back toward the mirror and pressed her fingers to her temples. *Gosh, there's a bowling ball rolling around inside my head.* The woman in the reflection was wearing a deep blue skirt, puffed full with folds. Her off-white cotton blouse had a row of tiny buttons running from the waist to the collar. Angelina touched the small cameo pin at the neckline. *Oh my goodness...that's me!*

OK, this is fun. I love these dreams that feel so real. I'll probably wake up any moment. She looked down at her feet. Scuffed black leather boots peeked out from under the heavy skirt. She remembered pulling her hair into a ponytail before she and Daniel went wine tasting. Now it was pulled back into a bun with stray hairs falling across her right cheek. Instinctively, she smoothed the hair against her head and tucked the loose strands into the bun. She smiled at herself in the mirror, waiting to wake up. *I think these are called lucid dreams. Well, since I'm not waking up yet, I might as well...*

A loud bang rattled her. *Was that a gunshot?* Shouts came from downstairs in the bar, and it sounded like tables and chairs were being overturned. She tumbled down the stairs, holding the rail to steady herself, and stepped into the back of the bar. As she'd suspected, there was a brawl in full bloom.

"I ain't touched yer lousy gold dust, Harvey! But if you wan', I'll beat some out a' ye anyway!" One man swung and the other ducked to avoid the fist.

Angelina stood dumbfounded. The people in the dimly lit bar were barely visible through the smoke that hung in the air. It was just like all the Western movies she'd seen. *Well, of course it is,* she said to the stuffed moose head on the wall. *It's my own dream, now, isn't it?*

A woman came alongside her and scooped her arm through

Angelina's, guiding her back out of the bar and into the lobby. "Careful there, deary. There's nothing to be done once Harvey and Sam

have drunk their day's haul." The woman had a gentle but firm way about her. "C'mon. Let's head to the park. That's where all the fun is goin' on."

Angelina noticed the photo on the wall and the faces that still looked at her from the side of the dirt street. She shook her head and blinked again. *Can I wake up now?*

Then she and the woman were in the bright sun, walking arm in arm. They were there! On that same dirt street! The one in the photo! Angelina tried to relax. *Still dreaming.* The woman patted Angelina's arm, "You're new in town, right? I don't believe we've met. I'm Catalina Castillo." She smiled and squeezed Angelina's arm.

"Pleased to meet you," Angelina replied, returning the smile. "I'm Angelina Freeman." *Just act natural, Lina. Go with it. How could it hurt?* She continued, picking up her confidence, "Yes. I just arrived in town." *Well, that is true.*

"Welcome to Murphys Diggins, Angelina. Don't let them rascals in the bar scare you off, now. We're a gentle bunch here. Most of the men are searching for their fortunes, and the women folk are just suffering through it." Catalina chuckled to herself.

They continued down the road beside the hotel, and Angelina wasn't sure who was steadying who as they walked. An idyllic community park came into view. "Where did you come from, deary?" Catalina asked.

I came from 2021. No, that wouldn't go over well. "I'm from San Francisco." Angelina said carefully.

"Oh! The big city! My husband and I have been thinking of pickin' up and moving there. We've been here a few years now, since '49. Came out just ahead of the crowds. Jay – that's my husband – he works for the Brainerds when he's not panning himself. They own the hardware store at the end of town. Business is booming with picks and shovels, of course. But Jay and I – -we'd like to open our own hardware store someday. We imagine folks really need building supplies out there in San Francisco. Tell me, please, do you think we're right?"

What did San Francisco look like in the 1850s, Angelina wondered. Her only reference point was the 1906 earthquake. Surely then they would need everything in the reconstruction effort, but during the gold rush? She supposed all of California was growing in that era. "Oh, I believe so. People always need building supplies, don't they? But nearby Oakland might be a better location." *More affordable, even then, I'm sure.* Home Depot and Lowes came to mind.

"Hmmm, Oakland. Well, it won't be for a year or two more.

We're trying to save a bit of money. Got a young'un comin' along at the end of the year." She put her hand on her belly. "Where's your husband, deary? Is he finding his fortune as we speak?"

Angelina didn't know how to answer. "Oh, we're not quite married yet. We're planning to be wed in October. He's...he's in San Francisco, but he'll be joinin' me here soon." *Is that some sort of southern belle accent coming from my lips? Watch it, Lina. Don't overplay your role. Think: Little House on the Prairie.*

"Oh, that's wonderful. In the meantime, why don't you visit with us today? Wally Crump's little band is going to play some music for us, and Jay has our picnic all set up. There he is!" She waved over her head and a tall man waved back before flicking a quilt in the air and settling it to the ground. The sweet, grassy park hosted several families with their spreads, and a river rumbled at the far edge. Two men were setting up a canopy on a wooden platform where another man was tuning the steel strings of a banjo.

"Jay, Honey, this is Miss Angelina. She's from San Francisco, and she's on her own today. So I've invited her to join us."

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Miss Angelina." Jay put his hand on his heart and bowed his head respectfully. "Please sit," he gestured to the bright patchwork quilt. We have plenty of food and a bottle of fine wine." Angelina's stomach tumbled.

"That's very kind of you, Mr. Castillo," she said as she knelt on the quilt, her thick skirt billowing around her.

"Oh, please call me Jay. And my wife is simply 'Lina.'"

"That's funny. My friends call me 'Lina' too." Angelina said, deciding that she really liked this young couple.

Catalina dug into the picnic basket and pulled out a loaf of brown bread and four apples. She brushed the back of her hand across her forehead, "My word, it's quite warm today. I feel I'm wilting."

"Oh, my Lina, you are as pretty as a lilac in the spring," said Jay as he reached over and squeezed her hand.

The words rang in Angelina's head. Daniel had just said that to her earlier that day...or was it yesterday? *Dreams are so funny. But I'm ready to wake up now. Daniel's going to get a kick out of this.*

She pinched her arm firmly. Then again, even harder. But she was still there, and Catalina handed her an apple. "Are you alright, Miss Lina?"

"Oh, yes, thank you." Angelina smiled as best she could even though panic was welling into her throat. She flashed through memories of time-traveling stories – Outlander, Timeline, The Time

Traveler's Wife. It couldn't possibly be that this vivid dream was not a dream at all. *No. No. You just had way too much wine on an empty stomach. You just need to sleep through this.*

Catalina dabbed at her forehead with a white handkerchief, and Angelina noticed the purple flowers embroidered at the corner. Lilacs? "Lina, you breathin' okay?" Jay asked his wife with a tinge of fear behind his eyes.

"I'm fine, Jay. Just the sun today." She tucked the handkerchief into her pocket and nodded at him.

"OK, then," he said. "I'm going to help Wally with that tent." He kissed Catalina on the cheek, got to his feet, and nodded to Angelina. His blue eyes sparkled brightly in contrast to his tan face and black hair.

Catalina watched him trot over to the stage then turned to Angelina, "Tell me about your lucky fiancé, deary."

"Oh, well..." Angelina hesitated. "He's a very kind man...and handsome. And he makes me laugh."

"That's a mighty fine quality. After all, you'll be together the rest of your lives. It's good to find humor every day, and especially on the days that test your soul." Catalina handed Angelina a chunk of cheese. "Oh, my dear, I can see some doubt in your eyes. What is it?"

Angelina was surprised she'd revealed a trace of doubt. Did Daniel or her parents see the same thing in her eyes? "Well, it's just that he has such big dreams..." She looked down at the quilt as shame heated her cheeks. Then the words burst forward. "I want to support him, but I feel he should be pursuing a steady and secure job, rather than chasing these outlandish dreams that will probably amount to nothing."

A silence fell on the quilt until Catalina finally spoke. "My dear." She put her hand on Angelina's. "Look around you," she swept an open hand in front of her. "This town is full of men with outlandish dreams. There is time for them to find a sensible job, as they surely will – some much sooner than others. In the meantime, the gold fever has captured their hearts and compels them to keep trying. It gives them life." She took a bit of her cheese. "Goodness, sometimes I think it is the pursuit of the dream that is just as satisfying as finding a fine nugget. I suppose it's the same as when they're courting their girl. Right?" She smiled at Angelina.

She continued, "I know that Jay would love to pull a gold boulder from the ground." She winked at Angelina, "He's actually done pretty well, and I've squirreled away the gold he's found so far." She

lowered her head and whispered with a little smile, “I’ve hidden those bits away in a coffee can under the hearth of our fireplace. He’s happy he doesn’t know where they are.” She giggled. “And I’ll support his dreams of the gold. It thrills him so. In the end, the real dream is to share a life together. Soon we’ll build the life we truly want – opening our own mercantile... in Oakland.” She smiled and nodded with satisfaction.

Catalina’s words stuck to Angelina like honey. Daniel glowed when he spoke of his dream winery. *The real dream is to share a life together.* She missed him.

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“Lina! Lina, c’mon. Wake up!”

She opened her eyes as Daniel swept a lock of hair from her forehead. “There you are,” he said, smiling at her. “You were totally out! I’m sorry, Hon, I should’ve made sure you had something to eat.”

Angelina rubbed her eyes and sat up. Her head still felt heavy. She squinted at the bright light in the room. “Daniel, you really need to do the winery,” she said without thinking. The lacey curtains fluttered in the window, and she had an overwhelming sense of déjà vu.

He laughed, “Okay,” he said slowly, his eyebrows tilted with confusion. “What brought that on?”

She cupped his cheek in her hand then smoothed his hair to the side and said, “You won’t believe the dream I just had.”

“Fine. But first priority is to get a good breakfast in you!”

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Their SUV kicked up dust as they bumped down the one-lane road that twisted its way around massive oak trees. “There it is,” said Daniel as he pulled into a drive that was covered in knee-high weeds. All that remained of the home was one wall with a shattered windowpane and half of a stone chimney.

“Wow. It’s amazing. To think your great, great grandparents lived here...” Angelina stood beside the window.

“Yeah. They should have one of those historical markers, “Here stands the home of Joaquin and Catalina Castillo,” Daniel said with bravado.

“What? Why isn’t his last name Castle, like yours?” Angelina asked, feeling a little uneasy.

“Well, his name was actually Joaquin Castillo. But around that time there was a gang of bandits known as the Five Joaquins. Your research probably mentioned Joaquin Murieta, right?”

“Yeah, I remember seeing that,” she replied. Something was

bothering her, some detail she couldn't place.

"I think that he didn't want to be known as a Joaquin. So, he went by "Jay" back then. Dad said he changed his full name to Jason Castle when he moved himself to Oakland and opened the store.

Angelina's head swam with bits that nearly coalesced. Jay and Catalina. The scenes of her dream came into focus. The grassy park, the bright patchwork quilt. The white handkerchief with the lilacs on the corner.

She stepped over broken boards to the stone fireplace. Several stones were scattered around it, having fallen from the chimney. She found the corner of the hearth and began picking at the rocks, loosening big chunks of the crumbling ruins.

"Lina, what are you doing?" Daniel came up beside her.

She lifted one large stone and saw a dull red can buried beneath it. She dug around it with her hands and freed it from its tomb.

"What in the world? Lina, how did you know to dig for this?" Daniel took the can from her trembling hands.

"Oh my God," she said. Her heart beat hard, and she heard the blood pumping in her ears.

The can rattled as he shook it. He pried the lid off and tipped the contents into his palm. Several gold nuggets spilled over his hand and the sun made those left in his palm sparkle. His mouth fell open, and he looked at Angelina. Silent questions hung in the air between them.

"Let me tell you about that dream," said Angelina.