

CHAPTER 1

Friday night and my workweek is over. A long awaited "night out with the girls" was my plan for the evening. Rummaging through my jewelry box, I search for my diamond stud earrings, and a childhood treasure catches my eye--a blue marble. Does it seem strange to find a marble in an adult woman's jewelry box? Not to me.

I collapse on my favorite soft velveteen chair exhausted from my busy workweek. Without hesitation, I am back there, at our old rock and adobe homestead house known as "The Philly Place," named after my Papa, Philadelphia Gonzales. The house is located a few miles east of Branson in southeastern Colorado. Many years ago when Papa and Mama first came to the United States from Mexico, his friends nicknamed him "Philly", and it stuck. I am transported back to that little girl sitting on the front steps in my faded flour sack dress playing with this marble in the dirt. I am waiting--waiting for Papa to get home. The year is 1928.

The rush of feelings and emotions from the past paralyzes me today in that comfortable velveteen chair. Though I'm mentally in 1928, my body is right here in Denver, Colorado at the end of a long workweek in 1960—those precious memories! I hadn't thought of that old place for years. Home--my roots--my past! Today, I live in Denver, miles away from that homestead. Years have passed. I am away from that life, yet that marble draws me back there again.

Look at me now. I am a forty-year-old international business consultant, divorced with three children, and successful. This country girl matured and became the woman I am today. I allow myself this traipses down memory lane so seldom any more.

For many years, I have put aside a request from Papa. Over the years, it nagged at me often, but I focused on raising my three children as a single Mom and pursuing a career I love. My children have grown: all three are in their twenties, in college and doing well on their own. This blue marble lures me back in time. I don't want to go there--I have plans for the evening. I want an evening with laughter and relaxation with my

girlfriends out on the town.

Today, I have all the luxuries of this modern life--hot and cold running water, inside toilet, and a warm solid house. I've forgotten how much I take for granted in this sophisticated world. It is nothing like that drafty rock house where I lived as a child whose only water supply was the nearby creek and reservoir. Our toilet was an outhouse.

The marble rolls around in my smooth well-manicured hand. I lounge back on my soft, velvety chair, lost in the present and its problems. The rush and hurry of my life builds up stress. I compare this peek back into a much more leisurely time to my hectic life today. I yearn for that carefree time of yesterday.

With the help of that blue marble, I'm swept up in a time machine of memories. I am no longer a forty-year-old woman but an eight-year-old child, moved back to one moment in my life that changed my world completely--waiting, waiting, waiting--

"When will Papa get home? *¿Cuándo regresa mi Papa a mi casa?* Huh, Mama, when? *¿Cuándo?*" I dart each question at her as I sit impatiently on the step facing the northeast, with nothing but the vast open prairie for miles--my front yard.

Days drag on when he is away. I miss him so, but he just left two days ago, and he's to be gone for at least a week--oh no! TWO DAYS--what an eternity!

As I sit thinking and waiting on the step, the blue marble turns round and round in my dusty hand. The smooth surface catches on my rough, calloused fingers. I don't have many toys, just my dolly and a few marbles—a newly acquired toy. My favorite marble is the blue one that matches the color of the sky.

“¡Maria, ven aquí!” Oh, no! Why does Mama want me to come inside now? What does she want? She's been so restless this time with Papa gone. He goes to Trinidad at least every other month, but this time she's upset about something—I can feel it. There's an edge in her voice. I have seen her wiping her eyes but she stops as soon as I see her. This morning she yelled at me for nothing at all. She usually doesn't yell at me--or at least not like this morning.

She always wants me to help with the household chores: wash the dishes and sprinkle, tap down and sweep the hard dirt floor, wash the clothes on the scrub board down at the creek. Wash, wash, wash—the list goes on forever! I hate these chores--they're woman's work.

I'd much rather be outside with Papa. I help him feed the horses and milk the cow. I ride alongside of Papa looking for stray calves or hunting coyotes. All this outside work allows me to be with Papa and be his little helper. His nickname for me is "Shorty," and I love the sound of that name. He's the only one who calls me that.

I don't like housework, but I do love our house--this beautiful, spacious two-room rock and adobe house we built ourselves. At first it was so drafty you could see between the rocks, but the adobe sealed it so it is snug in the winter cold, and cool in the summer heat. It is much better than the lean-to we lived in for two years. I shiver thinking about camping outside in the winter and summer on our travel here from New Mexico.

I was born in Laredo, TX in 1920 so I wasn't around for the long trip from Mexico, but I love to listen to Papa's stories about the trip. It sounded like quite an adventure—I'm sure that I would have enjoyed camping out under the stars but then I remember our trip from New Mexico and it was a shorter trip, so would I have really enjoyed the longer trip from Mexico? I wonder.

Two days are over with Papa gone--how will I survive another?