

DEATH OF THE CITY MARSHAL

ANNE LOUISE BANNON



CHAPTER ONE

When the shooting stopped and the smoke cleared, there were five people bearing wounds from the bullets that had flown so fast and furiously. I had made a point of diving for cover the moment I'd seen City Marshal William Warren pull his derringer from behind his back. Most of the other women in front of the Clocktower Courthouse that fateful afternoon of October 31, the Year of Our Lord 1870, had quickly left the street for some safe indoor place the moment they'd heard Deputy Joe Dye screaming at Marshal Warren. The men and I had stayed to see the show.

My father often said that I didn't have the sense that God gave a goose. However, in my defense, I must point out that the closest indoor cover was a saloon, from which those of my fair sex were barred, and that any effort to seek cover across the street in the market on the first floor of the courthouse would have been impeded by the crowd that was gathering. I was looking for some other safe haven when I saw the marshal's derringer and decided that down on the board walkway was safer than anywhere I could reach.

As I rose, I was not surprised to see the marshal and a Chinaman on the ground and bleeding. What did surprise me was that Mr. Dye was bleeding from his forehead and his leg, but so enraged was he that he had pounced upon Marshal Warren and was biting his ear. Two men, I did not see who, grabbed Mr. Dye by the throat, and pulled him off the Marshal. Deputy Jose Redona was easing onto the ground, a bullet hole in his upper right arm. Deputy Constable Robert Brooks was bent over his bleeding right hand. The young Chinawoman Marshal Warren and Mr. Dye had been fighting over sat huddled near Mr. Brooks, too frightened to move.

I went first to the Chinaman and saw that the bullet had struck his jaw. I grabbed some bandages from the huge bag I always wore and began to gently bind his head, but another Chinaman eased me away and took over. So I went over to Marshal Warren.

"I'm killed," he groaned.

"Not if I have anything to say about it," I told him.

I began to bandage the nether region above his limbs in spite of his embarrassment. I did not like doing so in public, but he was bleeding and the bandage was necessary.

Perhaps I should explain, even though this is the second volume of my memoirs. My name is Madeline Franklin Wilcox, called Maddie by my intimate friends, and I am a trained

medical doctor. Nowadays, in our supposedly enlightened Twentieth Century, sadly, a woman medical doctor is almost unheard of. But when I finished my training in 1859, it was not all that unusual, though still fairly rare. My father had been so ashamed of me he forced me to marry Albert Wilcox, who promptly dragged me here to Los Angeles, then still a tiny pueblo of five thousand people. Mr. Wilcox bought a vineyard and promptly died, leaving me to make my way as a winemaker who happened to have a talent for the healing arts. I'd been forced to finally reveal myself as a doctor the previous spring. Not everyone, including Marshal Warren, was entirely comfortable with my true vocation.

Marshal Warren was an average-sized man with dark hair and eyes and an overgrown and unruly mustache and beard of the sort that was favored by men of that time. We'd never gotten on well. However, we had developed a grudging respect for each other, and if he did not appear happy that it was me that had come to his aid, at least he wasn't fighting me.

Four men took the marshal on ahead to his house. I told them that I would be there as soon as I checked on Mr. Redona and Mr. Brooks. Mr. Brooks' wound was superficial and barely needed bandaging. Doc MacKenzie was tending to Mr. Redona. Mr. Redona called out to me. He, apparently, had as little confidence in Doc MacKenzie as I did.

It wasn't entirely fair. Doc MacKenzie had many years of experience, even if he had no formal training. And he would give me the benefit of the doubt, which was more than most of the other doctors in town would. Fortunately, that day, we were both in agreement that the bullet had passed through Mr. Redona's arm without harming the bone and little more needed to be done beyond stitching the holes shut. I told Mr. Redona to keep the wound clean (which also served to remind Doc MacKenzie that sanitation was of the utmost importance). Then I hurried off to the marshal's house to tend to him.

Mrs. Warren was waiting for me as I ran up. Doctor Skillen came running up and glared at me. He generally approved of me when I tended to the women and children in town. However, he firmly believed that I had no business treating men. But Mrs. Warren told him in no uncertain terms that she wanted me tending to her husband and sent him off.

"How is he?" I asked Mrs. Warren as she led me upstairs.

"Complaining like a little girl," she said, then frowned. "That's good, isn't it?"

"Usually, yes," I said, not wanting to say more.

The case could go either way, based on what I'd seen on the street. He'd been hit in the pelvis. Had the bullet pierced his belly, we would have been facing a long night that would end in a slow, painful death.

As it was, I was able to dose him with some morphine and ether, then opened up the wound. The bullet had landed next to his bladder. I got it out, then stitched the wound up, then cleaned and stitched his ear. You'll note, I did not sterilize anything. We didn't yet know. Mr. Lister's and Mr. Pasteur's work had yet to reach our benighted little corner of the world. All I knew was that keeping things clean made it less likely that wounds would fester. I was considered somewhat radical because I used ether and morphine to dull the pain of surgery.

It was a good two hours before I was done. My work apron was a mess, but it couldn't be helped. Fortunately, Juanita, my maid and confidant, worked miracles with blood stains. I was equally happy that I had on my third best riding habit that day, a somewhat faded cotton and wool suit festooned with ruffles around the skirt. I finished washing my hands to find that Mrs. Warren had brought a guest into the room.

He was a tall man, his dark hair neatly combed as it curled slightly around his ears. His eyes were bright blue and rather striking, actually. He wore the usual dark suit which looked fairly new, although there was some dust from the street on it.

“Reverend Jephtha Bennett, Ma’am,” he said, nodding at me. His voice was deep and he had a Yankee accent even thicker than my own. “I helped carry the marshal home and have stayed to help bear up Mrs. Warren and the marshal in prayer and spiritual comfort.”

“That’s kind of you, Reverend,” I said, glancing at Mrs. Warren.

She was small and dainty, with a narrow face that often reminded me of a cat. Her hair was coal black, as were her eyes. She was a Mexican, and as such, a Catholic. I’d heard the marshal was, too. Which meant that the Reverend’s offer was more kindly meant than practical.

I’d been hearing about Reverend Bennett through the previous months, although I hadn’t yet met him. He supposedly espoused the fire and brimstone kind of religion that I do not hold with at all. A traveling preacher, he’d arrived in the pueblo in the middle of the summer and his revival meetings had become so popular, he’d decided to stay indefinitely.

“Father Jimenez is on his way,” Mrs. Warren told me, eyeing the reverend with mild annoyance.

“It’s a pleasure to finally meet you, Reverend Bennett,” I said, returning to cleaning my surgical tools for a couple minutes and hoping he’d recognize this as the dismissal it was. He did not, so I turned to him. “Reverend, I would like to speak to Mrs. Warren privately, if I may?”

“Of course.” The reverend bowed his head slightly and left the room.

“How bad is it?” Mrs. Warren asked the second he was gone.

“The good news is that the surgery went well,” I said. “We’ll have to see if he takes sick from it. We should know in a few hours. I’ll wait here with you.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Wilcox,” she said, going over and stroking her husband’s face. “Oh, Mr. Ortiz came by. He thought you might be here and said to tell you that he will tell Mrs. Ortiz not to expect you for dinner.”

I couldn’t help smiling. I didn’t know whether Mr. Ortiz meant Sebastiano or Enrique. They were the brothers who helped me manage my property, with Sebastiano overseeing the winery and Enrique the vineyards. They had started as my workers, but we had become fast friends and I’d recently made them my partners. Their wives managed my household, with Enrique’s wife Magdalena as the housekeeper and Sebastiano’s wife Olivia as the cook. It didn’t matter which of the two brothers had delivered the message to Mrs. Warren, it was clear they knew me well.

“That was a kindness,” I said and went back to cleaning tools. “Are your daughters at home?”

Mrs. Warren’s three girls were still fairly young.

“Their grandmother is here but can take them to her house at any time.”

I glanced over at the marshal, who stirred. “I’m hopeful, but best keep them close.”

Mrs. Warren nodded, her eyes filling with tears. She knew as well as I did what peril the marshal was in, and that it would be best for the girls to be able to say goodbye to their father if need be. Still, he was breathing evenly and his color was good for his condition.

I grew more hopeful as the afternoon wore on. Father Jimenez arrived and sat next to the window, muttering over his beads. Marshal Warren mostly slept. He awoke once just before sunset, chided me briefly, then went back to sleep again. Outside the house, several of the marshal’s friends ambled back and forth, waiting.

Mr. Leander Wills, a notary of the local court, came by after dusk to get the marshal's testimony for the court's examination of Deputy Dye, which would be the next day. Mr. Wills was so insistent, I could hear him all the way upstairs. I told Mrs. Warren to wait with her husband and went to the front door.

Mr. Wills was a small man with a rounded belly and pince-nez glasses. He was meticulously clean-shaven and his suits were hand-tailored of the best wool, and his vests usually a shade of blue or yellow. He was wearing one the color of marigolds that evening.

"I am here as an officer of the court," he announced. "I must get the marshal's testimony."

"I'm afraid you're not going to get it," I told him. "The marshal is asleep and neither I, nor anyone else, is going to wake him."

Mr. Wills' eyes narrowed. Standing behind him was Mr. King, one of the two men who ran The Daily News. Mr. King did most of the reporting for the newspaper. Mr. Wills harrumphed a couple times. I continued to glare at him. Mr. Wills harrumphed one more time then turned away from the door. As I shut it, I saw him shrug at the reporter.

Half an hour later, Constable Brooks came by to visit and was able to speak briefly with the marshal, as did Deputy Redona.

"You should be in bed," I told the deputy. "You could still take sick from that hole in your arm."

Deputy Redona laughed loudly and the smell of whiskey washed over me. It was patently obvious how Doc MacKenzie had chosen to dull Mr. Redona's pain.

"It'll take more than this little hole to knock me down," Deputy Redona said, his body listing slightly to the right.

Deputy Redona did leave shortly after, promising to return, and left Constable Brooks in the front parlor to watch. Reverend Bennett stayed with them. Father Jimenez had stayed until dinner time. In fairness, it didn't look like the marshal was going to need last rites. When the family's eight-day clock struck ten that night, I checked the marshal for fever, found he didn't have one, then motioned Mrs. Warren outside the room.

"I can't say for sure that he's out of danger," I told her. "You know as well as I do, wounds can look perfectly all right, then all of a sudden start festering. But I do think it's unlikely at this point. If you want me to stay, I'll be happy to. However, I see little point in it."

"I don't either," she said, looking through the door at her husband. "He just needs rest."

"As do I," I said. "If anything changes, don't wait to send for me. But I'll be back by dawn. Would it be all right if I didn't knock? I don't want to wake anyone unnecessarily."

"Oh, please, just come straight in."

I returned to the room to gather my bag and other things. I almost always carried a large leather bag, not unlike a saddle bag, with me wherever I went. The long strap crossed over my chest and wore my dresses terribly. However, I had my surgical tools and my most useful drugs with me at all times. The gunplay that we'd seen earlier that day was all too common, along with knife fights and other forms of violence. Even if it weren't, malaria, assorted poxes, and scarlet fever lurked everywhere, not to mention typhoid and cholera. Then there were the accidents from runaway horses or cattle or in the mills or on the farms and vineyards surrounding our tiny pueblo. I never knew when I'd be called to the side of an ailing ranch hand or child or young mother struggling to give birth. It was best to keep my most-used remedies and tools with me.

I had folded the work apron into the bag and looked, at least, mostly presentable as I left the Warren house. The crowd outside had lessened to around five or six men. Armando Ortiz,

Enrique's eldest son and a strapping youth who had just turned sixteen, was lounging on the porch. He bounced to his feet the second he saw me.

"Tío had me bring the buggy for you," he said softly in Spanish.

"That's a mercy," I replied in the same language. I had already seen the conveyance, hitched to my roan mare, Daisy, and tied up outside the house.

"Tía Olivia says that she will have soup ready for you when we get home." Armando helped me onto the trap's seat, then pulled himself up and took the reins.

Daisy ambled her way along the street toward my vineyard, winery and home, Rancho de las Flores. The wheel on the buggy squeaked exceptionally loudly and I made a mental note to ask Enrique about it when I saw him.

"I hope she will not be too put out if I'm not hungry," I said. "Señora Lopez made sure that there was plenty of food and insisted that I have some."

Señora Lopez was Mrs. Warren's mother. The Lopez family was one of our more distinguished. They had vast holdings in the area and raised cattle for beef, tallow, and hides. I can't remember if Mrs. Warren was from the third or fourth generation since the family had settled here, but they'd been here almost from the founding of the pueblo in 1781.

Armando shrugged. We both knew that Olivia considered my care and feeding her personal domain, and it was impossible to say how she would react to my having eaten. Sometimes, she would regard someone else feeding me as interference and become quite resentful. Other times, she'd be grateful that someone had actually taken care of it. Heaven knows, she did not trust me to see to feeding myself, alas, with some justice on her part.

Olivia was waiting on the outside porch as Armando and I drove in through the gate of the ranch. The adobe where I and the Ortiz families lived was not far from the gate and across the yard was the huge barn which was our winery. There was a livestock barn just beyond that, which housed Daisy, a pair of mules, a family of goats, and the three ranch dogs. The chickens had a good-sized coop closer to the barracks house, where most of our ranch hands and their families lived.

Armando helped me down off the trap's seat, then went to lock the ranch gate. I tried to read Olivia's mood. It was not an easy task. However sweet and even merry her heart was, Olivia's face was permanently set in a scowl. Her black hair was sprinkled with gray and her dark eyes were the one clue to whether there would be a tongue lashing in store for me or not.

That night, the soup she had prepared had actually been made in advance of the morning's breakfast, as the weather was turning cold and we'd even had some solid rain the week before.

"I knew Señora Lopez would feed you," Olivia said as she ushered me inside the adobe. "She's a good woman."

Olivia sniffed as if to add that however good a woman Señora Lopez was, her food couldn't possibly match Olivia's.

"It wasn't as good as I'd have gotten here," I said, dutifully.

Sebastiano, who ran our winery, was waiting for me in the front parlor, which opened directly onto the yard. He was about average size, with broad shoulders and a drooping black mustache. I can't remember if it had started to go gray by that time or if that happened later. His dark eyes usually flashed with good humor, but that night, he was not happy.

"We found two more barrels," he told me.

I bit back the foul words that sprang to my mind. "Two? How many more could there be?"

Sebastiano shrugged. Just over a week before, yet another group of young men had broken into the winery and tainted several barrels of the brandy we'd distilled the year before to make our angelica. It was the local sherry that was made all over the area, although ours was considered among the best. With the harvest done and that year's grapes mostly done fermenting, we needed the brandy to add to the new wine to fortify it so that it kept better.

We were, sadly, quite frequently the target of such vandalism. Sometimes it was from competitors. But mostly it came from men who believed a woman had no place owning a business, never mind that I had no other means of support. Even though I was getting some money for my doctoring services by then, it was hardly enough to keep me in bandages, let alone support my sizable household.

"We have enough good barrels for this year's wine," Sebastiano said. "But just enough."

"I'm assuming you made sure that they are soundly locked up?"

"Naturamente."

I thought for a moment. "Are the chickens locked in their coop?"

"Sí. You want to let the dogs loose in the yard?"

"It can't hurt."

Sebastian smiled. "I was about to suggest it."

"I'm afraid I've got to get to bed," I said, trying to stifle a yawn. "I told Mrs. Warren I'd get back to the marshal by first light."

"So he's likely to live a while longer?" Sebastiano said, his face rather neutral. He did not like the marshal, with good reason, alas, but he was too kind a man to wish anyone ill.

"It looks that way but we both know how fast that could turn."

I went on to bed. As I had planned, I was up well before the sun. Sebastiano had risen, also, and gotten Daisy, saddled for me. I thanked him, mounted, and trotted off. The first rays were lightening the sky as I approached the door of the marshal's house. The household was still asleep. Deputy Redona snored softly from the sofa in the front parlor. I slipped upstairs quietly. Mrs. Warren was asleep in her daughters' room. Señora Lopez had, apparently, gone home.

I knew the second I entered the marshal's bedroom that something was amiss. The covers around him were completely rumpled as if he'd been struggling. A pillow lay at his feet. The marshal's eyes were wide open and he was dead.