

*Opera is where a guy gets stabbed in the back,
and instead of dying,
he sings.*

Robert Burns

Introduction

My mother loves fine literature and opera. Although we're poor, her goal has always been to make sure I have been exposed to both. I can't tell you the number of times we sneaked into the back of the Astor Opera House in New York City to hear the latest opera from Europe.

Although I always tagged along on her adventures, I agree with what Rossini, the Italian composer, once said about opera, "One can't judge Wagner's opera *Lohengrin* after a first hearing, and I certainly don't intend to hear it a second time." I think I'm an even harsher critic. There are some operas I don't even want to hear for the first time.

I keep asking myself, am I being unfair, even immature about opera, and why is opera such a thorn in my life? I'll try to explain, although I admit it's complex. First things first, my name is Isolde Margarethe Bachmann, and yes, it's true. I'm named for the infamous Isolde, the scandalous adulteress of medieval and renaissance literature.

Although she was betrothed to another, the infamous Isolde took a love potion and entranced her lover, Tristan. Her age was never mentioned, but I've always assumed she was sixteen like me. She was obviously more precocious than me, however, to be involved in a love triangle at such a tender age.

I've often wondered what my mother was thinking when she named me Isolde. Did she think no one would ever discover the origins of my name or associate me with the shameful adulteress? Worse yet, many cultures believe that people's names foreshadow who they will become and what attributes they will possess. If that's true, I could be in deep trouble.

When I was younger, I admit I thought the name Isolde (which is pronounced ih-SOAL-duh) was pretty, and it flowed like a ribbon of water in a sunlit waterfall. I also agree it's been fun to have a unique name that's different from my other classmates. I've also been lucky. Most of my friends aren't particularly interested in reading books from the Middle Ages. So, I never worried about my notoriety in the world of literature.

Then the impossible fluke happened. My mother's favorite composer, Richard

Wagner in Germany, suddenly decided to put the whole ghastly love triangle to music in an opera called *Tristan and Isolde*, which recently made its debut in Munich in 1865. Suddenly, the anonymity of my name is gone.

To all my new schoolmates, I'm mockingly referred to as a star-crossed, adulterous lover who sings my death aria out of a body bag. Actually, it's my lover Tristan who dies first and who sings out of his body bag. Whoever is in the bag, it's not the cat any longer because, in a cruel twist of fate, the illicit escapades of my namesake a thousand years ago have jumped front and center onto the streets of my new hometown in Texas.

I know it sounds farfetched that a famous German composer and his new opera can wreak havoc on my life clear across the Atlantic Ocean in the middle of Comanche Indian country. But the fact is that Wagner, the beloved German composer and conductor, is a cult hero to many residents of my town and reminds them of their German heritage.

My new home is an unusual place called Fredericksburg, or Friedrichsburg as it's known in German. It's a wholly German settlement in the heart of Texas, a community which unabashedly loves Wagner.

Some of the older residents actually call the town Fritztown. It was named for Prince Frederick of Prussia when it was founded in 1846, and many of the residents still speak a dialect called Texas German. Wagner's new opera has recently become the hot topic of conversation in Fredericksburg and unwillingly, so have I, one of its newest residents.

My mother and I recently moved to Fredericksburg from New York City in May of 1865. I was still fifteen. It was a dangerous time to travel across the country. Confederate General Robert E. Lee had just surrendered at Appomattox, and emotions were still running high, although the Civil War was technically over. Twice our train was stopped by the United States Army, and the soldiers scoured the passenger cars for suspected insurrectionists.

As we got further west into Indian country, we began to be apprehensive about the repercussions of the Sand Creek Massacre, rather than the leftover anger from the Civil War. The massacre, which had resulted in the killing of more than a hundred Cheyenne, mainly women and children, had occurred in the Colorado territory on November 29, 1864. It was rumored an alliance of Indian tribes would seek revenge on white settlers throughout the Plains states, especially the area along the Smoky Hill and Republican Rivers in Kansas, which was the traditional Indian hunting grounds for buffalo.

On November 25, 1864, a few days before the massacre at Sand Creek, Hutchinson County, Texas, saw one of the largest Indian battles ever to take place. The clash happened between the United States Army and five thousand

Native Americans, including the Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache tribes. It was named the Battle of Adobe Walls for an abandoned adobe trading post in the area. Although the army declared a victory, Colonel Kit Carson and his troops, which were outnumbered ten to one, were forced to flee the battlefield.

So it was with trepidation we journeyed into the unknown, first by train and then by stagecoach to central Texas. We worried all the while about disgruntled Confederates and vengeful Indians, and even about the mysterious older German man who had hired my mother to be his housekeeper, and who was allowing us to live in his house in Fredericksburg, Texas.

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*What should I have known or written
had I been a quiet, mercantile politician
or a lord in waiting?
A man must travel, and turmoil,
or there is no existence.*

Lord Byron

PART ONE

Chapter One

While the two of us stared out the rain-splattered train window at the passing farmland, my mother was very subdued. I kept watching the scenery. The crops were just beginning to sprout though the rich soil in a velvety bright green carpet.

The month of May was behaving as spring should, being slightly warm and sometimes rainy. As we got closer to Texas, it was even becoming summerlike. I wondered if I would ever get used to the hot temperatures of the South, especially after the more moderate climate of New York City with its cold and snowy winters.

As the repetitive clacking of the wheels against the train tracks hammered a mournful, hollow sound, I wondered whether my mother was as depressed as I was about leaving New York City and the memories of my father behind. I doubted we would ever return to the city again or put flowers on his simple grave.

I couldn't help but notice the paleness of my mother's face and her strained expression. Although she was a pretty woman with shoulder-length light brown hair and a good figure, she looked exhausted. It seemed as if life had become too hard for her. Although I loved her and usually supported her decisions without question, I thought we were making a big mistake by leaving New York City.

As the train wound its way across the countryside toward an unknown future, I also wondered whether she was as apprehensive as I was. We had no idea what kind of life awaited us in Texas, especially with a German man named Karl Mueller, who was a complete stranger. Although he seemed to be our benefactor, we knew nothing about him, nor did we have any references about his character. As far as I was concerned, we were jumping off a cliff.

Not only was the journey tedious and our traveling clothes covered with gritty soot from the steam locomotive, it was hard emotionally for me to wrap my mind around leaving the place of my birth. I had lived in New York City my entire life, and I was leaving my lifelong friends.

Curiously, I studied my distorted reflection in the window with my medium long, straight blond hair, delicate features, slate blue eyes, and very pale skin. With a frown on my face, I wondered what kind of impression I would make on my new classmates.

I was neither pretty nor homely, and I looked much younger than fifteen. Maybe unpretentious was a good word to describe my appearance, though I could be outspoken and independent, and even talkative once a person got to know me.

I was also very tiny and thin, only 5-foot-2 at the most and a hundred pounds with all my clothes on. I looked fragile, like a gust of wind could blow me over; but life hadn't always been easy for me, which had made me gutsy and determined.

I glanced back at my mother's exhausted face and noticed she had drifted off into a much-needed, but troubled sleep. I constantly tried to hide my disappointment in our move from my mother, and I continually prayed to be strong for her in what had to be a difficult decision to uproot our lives. It couldn't have been easy for her since my father died suddenly in a carriage accident a year ago.

Streaming in rivulets like endless river channels, the rain pelted the train windows and blocked my vision of the countryside. Although I couldn't see, I stared mindlessly though the gray mist and reflected on my parents' story. Their life in America began when my father, Peter, and my mother, Emma Bachmann, fled the poor economic conditions and political unrest in Germany just before the Revolution of 1848.

They landed at a hectic, overcrowded New York City that was teeming with immigrants, many of them fellow Germans. Because my parents hadn't been able to save enough money to travel elsewhere, they eventually found a tiny apartment in a crowded district of row houses. Within a few weeks, my father found employment as a shoemaker, which had been his trade in Bonn.

When my mother spoke of the early days of their marriage, she said times were economically challenging, but God provided for them. Most importantly, she said they always had their love for each other.

Later, when I was old enough to understand, she said she hoped for the same blessings in my life. She wished I would one day know the unwavering love of God through the tough times as well as the good times, and that I would know the steadfast love of a good man like my father, someone I could always count on.

Soon after my parents settled in New York City, my mother said they were overjoyed to welcome my birth, although they had very little extra money. Because I was born in the United States, I was the first American citizen in my family, and it was a cause for celebration.

My birth itself, however, was traumatic for my parents. I was born with a deformity known as a club foot, and I needed medical treatment, which they could

barely afford. In my case, it only involved my left foot, but the abnormality, although not as severe as some, made my foot seem to rotate internally at my ankle. If not treated, my condition could have worsened, and it would have appeared that I was walking on my ankle, rather than my foot, as I grew older.

The least expensive treatment chosen for me by the doctors was a less severe route than surgery, and I wore a cast on my foot and ankle for the first two years of my life. This resulted in me walking later than the other children my age. Even though my treatment was considered successful, my left foot still remains smaller and weaker than the other, and my left calf is less developed as well.

As a result, I walk with a noticeable limp, but I consider myself blessed as I have very little pain. I usually use a beautiful wooden walking stick, which my father carved for me out of the sturdy wood of a maple tree. It is similar to a crutch or a cane, but not quite as large or cumbersome. I definitely need it to help me keep my balance when I walk or to lean on if I suddenly get tired. Sometimes if I make my way slowly like a turtle, I don't need it at all.

When I first discovered that I was different than the other children in the neighborhood and at school, I felt as though God was punishing me for something I had done, though I had to admit I didn't know what it was. I also felt conspicuous as if everyone was pointing and making fun of me behind my back.

But over the years, I've changed my mind, probably because my parents' love has shown me that God, my heavenly Father, also loves me. I now consider my limp not a disability, but a challenge and sometimes a blessing in disguise.

Without it, I would never have learned to appreciate the kindness of so many good people, who are angels that help me in subtle ways. By doing so, they unknowingly help themselves grow in compassion and understanding.

If I had the physical abilities and stamina of my other friends, I probably never would have sat still long enough to discover the far-reaching world of books or the joy of using my imagination. My lack of physical mobility has led to other more sedentary abilities in writing and picking up languages easily, and even, through observation, discerning the emotions of people around me. I'm a watcher and a thinker, rather than a mover.

But most of all, I have discovered the rare treat that I have musical abilities. When I was really little and unable to run like the other children, my father gave me a harmonica to play to end my boredom. Having been brought all the way from Europe, it was a beautiful instrument, and it had been made in Vienna by a well-known harmonica maker named Christian Messner & Co.

Over the course of my childhood, my father introduced me to a variety of songs, some nonsensical and for children and others like folk songs and ballads for adults. Soon, I could actually play the melodies and remember the words.

When I was five years old, I brought my harmonica to my first day of kindergarten. After hiding my walking stick in the corner of the classroom, I began entertaining the other children with comical folk songs and nursery rhymes, even getting them to sing along.

When the teacher came back into the room from the hallway where she had been talking to several parents, I had all my new friends sitting in a circle on the floor around my chair, and we were singing together and clapping. From that moment forward, I knew my limp didn't have to be a disability, but it could be a catalyst to finding extraordinary God-given abilities within.

Until my mother and I left for Texas, I didn't think about my limp much anymore. It never kept me from enjoying the opportunities of public school or playing with my many friends. As I grew older, I discovered that New York City was a melting pot of diverse-looking ethnic groups and all kinds of people with different physical challenges. I no longer felt like I was the center of attention just because I limped or used a walking stick.

About the only thing I was kept from doing over the years was participating in sports. I was way too slow and awkward to ever make a team at school. I didn't mind that, however, because my friends accepted that I would sit on the sidelines and cheer them on.

Although I was bilingual and could speak and read both German and English, I wondered if I would be equally accepted in Texas. As I stared through the rain, I became troubled about my limp for the first time in years, and I worried about the negative impression it might make.

My parents were wonderful about sharing their faith with me, and we were active as a family in a German-American Lutheran church. Not only was I baptized there, but I was confirmed just before my mother and I decided to move to Texas. My parents believed there was no place on earth where God was not, and I found myself relying on that assurance more and more as I journeyed into the unknown with my mother.

When my father was alive, he frequently talked about an organization called The Society for the Protection of German Immigrants in Texas, sometimes known as the Noblemen's Society, or in German, Mainzer Adelsverein. It was formed in 1842 to promote German colonization in the Republic of Texas.

Although my parents came independently to this country and weren't actively involved with the organization, they were nonetheless amazed at the stories they heard from other German-Americans about the German settlements of New Braunfels and Fredericksburg in Texas. The Republic of Texas had been so eager for settlement that it had originally issued colonization land grants totaling almost

four and a half million acres. The Adelsverein had taken over some of these grants to establish a small German colony.

After my father died and we lost his income as a shoemaker, my mother tried to maintain our small apartment by cleaning houses. But the work was sporadic, and we struggled to make ends meet.

One night over dinner, she and I were discussing what to do as we were facing eviction from our apartment. It was then she remembered all the talks she'd had with my father about the German towns in Texas. After speaking with some of her German-American friends, she was given an address and began to correspond with the German Immigration Company, which had replaced the now bankrupt Adelsverein.

It wasn't long before she explained her plight by letter to a citizen of Fredericksburg, a local businessman and ranch store owner named Karl Mueller, who had been given her address by the German Immigration Company. She asked Mr. Mueller if anyone in either of the German towns of New Braunfels or Fredericksburg would need the services of a live-in German-American housekeeper who had a teenaged daughter.

Within weeks, he had written back, saying his wife had died two years earlier. He claimed to have a rather large house in Fredericksburg, which was practically a pigsty because he had no one to keep it clean. He said if my mother accepted his offer to put his house in order, he would give us room and board and my mother a modest salary. He also said he would send us train and stagecoach fare as well as seeing to my enrollment in the local German-American school.

I was suspicious from the start. The generous offer sounded too good to be true and too quickly forthcoming. My mother, conversely, viewed it as a gift from Heaven. She even asked me how I could suggest it wasn't. Because we were desperate for a solution and didn't have anywhere to go once we were thrown out of our apartment, my mother immediately accepted the offer.

I silently wished there had been a way to check Karl Mueller's reputation in his community, but there was no such information available. We could only trust that the German Immigration Company would only give us a reputable name.

When my mother first got Mr. Mueller's offer, she cried with relief. I debated at the time if I should tell her the truth that my intuition was raising a red flag. Although I hinted at my disapproval, I could tell she truly believed we would have a better life in the small German town. She was also very enthusiastic about moving to someplace warm with fellow German-Americans.

I finally decided I couldn't hurt her feelings by saying anything else negative or expressing my suspicions about Karl Mueller's sudden benevolence. The night before we left, however, I privately wept. I was disappointed in myself for not

speaking up, and I prayed for God to watch over us. Our well-being and future was solely in His hands.

I let my eyes drift shut as I leaned my head against the vibrating train window, which was still being pounded by rain. I couldn't let my mother see me cry as I was usually so brave and fearless. Muffling my sobs, I bit my lip so hard I drew blood. I don't know which was wetter, the rain-drenched window or my heart which was soaked in silent tears.

Chapter Two

With anticipation, we finally arrived at our destination. A scorching hot, sunny afternoon greeted us as we disembarked from a stagecoach, which had been the second part of our journey. All around us was an expanse of hills known as Texas Hill country. The lush, rolling land was intermingled with a ribbon-like river, lofty trees, some prairieland as well as fertile farmland, gnarled grapevines which appeared to be a vineyard, and an endless azure blue sky with fluffy, snowball-shaped clouds.

It was fresh and beautiful, especially after being cooped up on sooty trains and a dusty stagecoach for more than a week. What a difference it was from New York City! I couldn't help but breathe in deeply. The air was so inviting. Thank you, God, I whispered as I exhaled, almost in relief as I liked what I saw.

Instead of overcrowded, rundown buildings and fumes from factories, there was sparkling clean air, a sea of green vegetation, and wide open spaces. My spirits were totally uplifted at the promise of this new land, and my mother and I exchanged happy smiles.

Our Overland stagecoach, which was cloaked in trail dust and caked mud, stopped at a grocery and dry goods store named Doebbler's Inn. It was also a post office and relay station for stagecoaches, as well as an inn and stables in a town named Grapetown. The stagecoach station was located about ten miles south of Fredericksburg on what was known as the San Antonio-Fredericksburg Road, which was a thoroughfare for cattle drives.

Our instructions, which we received by telegram before we left New York City, were to stay at the inn until Mr. Mueller could pick us up. The date of our stagecoach arrival was only an approximation and if our benefactor hadn't shown up by day's end, we were to make ourselves comfortable at the inn at his expense.

My mother and I were glad we had time to rest and freshen up that night. The journey had exhausted us both. My bones literally ached from being jostled on the bumpy stagecoach trail. We ate a delicious dinner of hot roast beef sandwiches from Texas longhorn cattle, along with potatoes and gravy, and then we shared a clean, sparsely furnished bedroom, which we barely noticed as we quickly dropped off to sleep.

Not wanting to be late in the morning in case Karl Mueller came early, we were up at daybreak and dressed in fresh clothing, taking care with our appearance to make a good impression. Finally, we ate a filling breakfast of bacon and eggs before watching for my mother's new employer.

Just as we'd expected, Mr. Mueller drove up in a roomy, four-wheeled buggy at

eight o'clock. With our stacked luggage, my mother and I were relaxing on a wooden bench in front of the inn, hoping to show him how efficient we were.

I didn't think it was a good idea for me to approach Karl Mueller first and surprise him with my limp and walking stick. So I remained seated and watched the animated interaction between the older German man and my mother, who was acting very bubbly and full of youthful energy.

Although I try not to make snap judgments based on first impressions, the truth was that I had an uneasy feeling in my stomach upon seeing Karl Mueller. Goosebumps traveled up and down my arms in warning, although the day was already warm. I didn't know what caused my disquieting reaction, but I couldn't shake my apprehensiveness from that moment on.

It was like having an experience of *déjà vu*, when you feel sure you've already experienced a situation. Over the years, I'd learned to pay attention to my intuition, and it was shouting danger. It seemed to be a self-defense mechanism God had honed in me, probably because I had less mobility to escape from dangerous situations with my physical limitations.

My mother's new boss was a huge blocky man well over six feet tall. His rounded body was considerably overweight with a protruding stomach that looked like it would deflate if it were poked with a pin. His age might have been about sixty-eight as his bushy collar-length hair was silvery white as was his thick walrus moustache, which curled up perfectly on the ends. He had a very loud, booming voice and a boisterous, deep-throated laugh which easily carried across the distance from the buggy to the inn, where I studied him from my vantage point on the bench.

As the man spoke with my mother in German, probably testing her fluency to make sure she hadn't lied about her background, I suddenly realized what bothered me most. As Karl Mueller smiled broadly, displaying several shining gold teeth sparkling in the sunlight, his artificial smile never reached his cold, calculating eyes, which were shifting about the scene.

Although my mother was being as charming as was humanly possible and chattering amiably about our trip, he looked totally disinterested in her prattle. He even glanced at his pocket watch, which was on a bright gold chain.

My first impression was that this was a man with a self-serving agenda, and his interest in us only extended as far as we helped him achieve his plans. I had no idea what those plans were. I only hoped I was wrong as I wanted to like him for my mother's sake. If my past experiences with intuition were any indication, however, I was probably right.

All of a sudden, the enormous man spotted me sitting inconspicuously on the bench in front of the inn.

“And, who might this beautiful young lady be?” he said fawningly in English. He widened his grin to be even more charming.

I found him smarmy. *Well, here goes*, I thought to myself, wondering how good my acting abilities were to hide my intense distrust of this overly jovial man. *I wonder if he'll think I'm still enchanting when I hobble over to him.*

Very carefully, I stood up with my walking stick and got my balance. Then, unable to stop a defiant toss of my hair, I confidently threw my shoulders back and made my way over to where he and my mother were still standing. I was proud that I had barely limped and hadn't embarrassed my mother. She exhaled gratefully.

“This is my daughter, Isolde,” my mother said proudly to Mr. Mueller, silently motioning at me to shake his plump hand.

“Well, isn't this a pleasure, Isolde? My, my, aren't you a feast for the eyes?” the man commented, practically licking his chops as his pudgy, moist hand engulfed mine for what seemed too long of a time.

I glanced at my mother to see if she had noticed his overly eager attitude toward me, but she seemed not to have spotted any danger signals, preferring to think of him as our hero. *Maybe I'm only jumping to conclusions*, I berated myself.

As Karl Mueller finally let go of my hand, why did I want to scrub it clean with a brush and scalding water? *The situation was what it was*, I thought matter-of-factly. I decided that I would have to stay alert and deal with any future problems on my own.

While Mr. Mueller loaded our small amount of luggage into the rear of the buggy, I quickly clambered up into the back seat before he could eagerly help me. My mother, meanwhile, chatted with our benefactor, and he very gentlemanly lifted her onto the front seat next to him. If I didn't know any better, I could have sworn my mother was flirting with the man. I also knew she felt responsible to make him like us and not regret his decision to employ her.

“So, what happened to your foot, Isolde?” the man asked abruptly with a certain brazenness in his tone of voice. The horse's hooves clattered against the trail heading north to Fredericksburg. I quietly considered his question. “I hope you didn't injure it on your trip here.”

His bluntness irritated me. Before I could answer with my customary directness, my mother intervened and began explaining a few minimal details about my birth and having to wear a cast for a few years.

“Isolde's foot is in wonderful condition now and doesn't really bother her anymore,” my mother assured him, not wanting him to think she had brought an invalid to his house. “She does sometimes need her walking stick for support as she'll always have a slight weakness in that foot. Her foot's never in any pain, however, is it, Isolde?” my mother asked pointedly, expecting an answer.

I muttered a barely audible no and focused instead on the leafy green trees, which were flying past the buggy. The breeze felt cooling against my flushed cheeks as I realized my disability would be front and center in my new town.

"I'm glad to hear that, sweetheart," Karl Mueller commented, glancing over his shoulder with another artificial smile.

Did he just call me sweetheart? I shot my mother a concerned look. She was either totally indifferent or oblivious, preferring to comment on the lovely scenery.

"If you'd really been injured permanently, it would have ruined my surprise," our benefactor added mysteriously.

"What surprise is that, Mr. Mueller?" my mother asked cheerfully, seemingly pleased with his kindness.

"Well, before I tell you girls, there will be no more of this Mr. Mueller business. Mr. Mueller was my father. I want you to call me Karl, and I'll call you Emma," the man said, seeming to flirt back with my mother. She giggled, and I rolled my eyes. What on earth was happening to my mother or to my world for that matter?

"And that goes for you too, Isolde. I don't want you to think of me as some stodgy old man. I want you to call me Karl like your mother."

In disbelief, I stared wide-eyed at his broad back. He was old enough to be my grandfather.

"Getting back to my surprise, you're in Texas now, ladies, and everyone in Texas needs to know how to ride a horse. It's sometimes a necessity, especially if you want to go anyplace in a hurry. So, I got a pair of gentle mares for the two of you from a local rancher I know, and he's going to give you both riding lessons, if you want, of course. What do you think of that?" Karl asked, pleased as punch with himself.

My mother was effusive with her thanks, saying how considerate he was. But I knew she wasn't being totally honest. She was afraid of horses and hated riding. As for me, I had no idea whether I could master riding with my foot and all, but I couldn't wait to try.

It actually startled me that he had done such a thoughtful thing, and I wondered again if perhaps I had jumped to conclusions and misjudged him. A horse would mean independence and the ability to go off on my own without the nuisance of always using my walking stick. I couldn't wait to start my riding lessons.

"Thank you, uh, Karl," I spoke up deferentially. "I appreciate your kindness."

"You're welcome, Isolde," he said sweetly. He tilted his head toward me and flashed a few gold teeth, which once again sparkled in the sunlight. He was pleased I had called him by name. My intuition kicked in once more. There was nothing I could do about my hunches at this moment in time, so I began calmly watching the scenery. Worrying wasn't going to change our circumstances. We were poor and completely dependent on this stranger.

The ride through the gently sloping countryside was picturesque, and my mother and I were pleasantly surprised at the timbered hills. It wasn't at all what we expected. We had borrowed some books from our friends before the trip, and we had both been under the impression Texas was as flat as a pancake as far as a person could see.

I was glad we were wrong as the rolling hills were much more interesting. I could almost see me galloping up and down the hills on my new horse. Never having ridden before, I wondered how long it would take me to master riding, and I was definitely determined to become proficient at it.

Karl Mueller pointed out the winding, rocky bottomed Pedernales River as it curved along our buggy route. He said the river, which flowed west to east, was more than a hundred miles long and was a tributary of the Colorado River. It continued east into Gillespie County, which was where Fredericksburg was located and then past a number of rugged limestone cliffs.

About fifteen miles north of Fredericksburg, our benefactor said there was a famous geographical landmark he would take us to see someday. It was called Enchanted Rock. It was a huge pink granite dome that was a batholith, which was a large mass of rock formed in the Earth's crust and exposed in a molten state. The dome was 425 feet high and covered 640 acres.

My interest was piqued when he said Native Americans had lived in the area for thousands of years, and they ascribed magical and spiritual powers to the rock. I couldn't wait to poke around on my own once I learned to ride.

All of a sudden, Karl Mueller changed the subject and asked if we wanted to hear more about Fredericksburg and its founding father, John O. Meusebach. My mother answered enthusiastically that she did, and I actually found myself nodding as I was also curious about the place that was to be our new home.

"You both have heard about the Adelsverein, right?"

We both nodded again, although Karl Mueller couldn't see me in the seat behind him, which was fine with me.

"When the Republic of Texas opened the land for settlement, two men named Henry Fisher and Burchard Miller, who were both swindlers if I don't say so myself, received a colonization grant to settle a thousand immigrant families, including Germans and other northern Europeans. It was known as the Fisher-Miller Land Grant.

"In 1844 when Fisher and Miller sold the grant to the Adelsverein, which is also called the Verein, the two men were aware of the dangers of settling in Comancheria, which is what Comanche land is called. They did not inform the Verein, however. Likewise, the Verein accepted the sale on face value and did not question it. Although the two men sold their grant rights, Fisher kept his finger in

the pie, so to speak, and he remained on the Verein's colonial committee, a decision which would one day come to annoy the organization.

"A Prussian bureaucrat and burgermeister named Baron Otfried Hans von Meusebach read about the Republic of Texas and became interested in the Enchanted Rock. He contacted one of the original founders of the Adelsverein and expressed his interest in moving to the area to pursue his interest in geology and horticulture. Meusebach bought a share in the Verein for \$2,000 and also became the next commissioner-general of the Verein in Texas.

"Meusebach gave up his barony and became known as John O. Meusebach when he moved to Texas. When he arrived in 1845, he found the finances of the Verein in disarray, partly because of the mismanagement of the previous commissioner-general, and partly because of the shenanigans of Fisher and Miller.

"The situation was so bad that Meusebach considered leaving Texas in November of 1845. When he had first arrived as commissioner-general, the Society's attempt to settle the grant was stalled in New Braunfels where more than four hundred impatient people had waited for a year living at the expense of the Society.

"Meusebach stayed on, however, and located an ideal site for a second German town about sixty miles northwest of New Braunfels. He had a road constructed between New Braunfels and the new site in 1845. A year later he was told that more than four thousand emigrants were on the way from Europe to Texas. After solving the continuing funding problems with the Verein, Meusebach founded the second German settlement and called it Fredericksburg.

"The new town, which is your town now, is between two creeks and seven hills, which you'll see shortly when we round that far bend up ahead. Meusebach initially purchased ten thousand acres, giving each settler one town lot plus ten acres of farmland.

"The first batch of settlers arrived on May 8, 1846. First off, they planted a garden and then built a storehouse out of logs, a stockade, and a blockhouse, which was typically used in towns for protection from Indian raids. Are you ladies keeping up?"

Karl Mueller glanced around to see if he'd lulled us to sleep. My mother sat in rapt attention at his story, and I was contemplating the possibility of Indian raids and hiding in a roundhouse. He flashed his gold teeth in a forced smile and then continued his story, pleased we were still following along.

"After another influx of settlers, Fredericksburg had about six hundred people by 1847, and it was a mixture of log houses and huts covered with dry grass. Over time, the town has grown considerably, and it has many businesses, a flour mill, stores, churches, schools, and some mighty fine houses, one being mine.

"One of the reasons for the success of Fredericksburg is that Meusebach was a

clever man. When he realized the land grant was in the heart of Comanche Indian country and the grant would be lost if the land wasn't surveyed by a certain deadline, he went ahead and negotiated a peace treaty with the Indians himself. They even had a special name for him, El Sol Colorado, which means the Red Sun, because of his reddish blond beard and hair.

"The peace treaty is unique from what I hear. First, it's the only peace treaty ever negotiated by a private citizen and endorsed by the federal government. And unlike other treaties, it didn't take away any rights of the Penateka Comanche, which is the name of the Comanche band in the area.

"Instead, the treaty agreed the Comanche and settlers would share the land, even allowing the Indians to go in and out of the white settlements. It was a stroke of genius. The Indians never felt threatened or thought they were being cheated. Would you ladies believe the peace treaty has never been broken to this day?"

Karl Mueller glanced around again, wanting to see our reactions. I guess we gave the appropriate surprised looks as he continued his story.

"The treaty opened up more than three million acres of land to the German Immigration Company, which replaced the Adelsverein. It's fairly safe around here too, unless you stray beyond the borders of the treaty. Everywhere else, the Indians are raiding white settlements, but I think you'll appreciate that the violence isn't happening in Fredericksburg or New Braunfels.

"Oh, I should tell you one other humorous thing. Every year on Palm Sunday, we have a commemoration of what's called the Easter Fires. When the treaty was signed around Easter in 1847, the Penateka Comanche lit huge fires on the hills to send smoke signals about the progress of the negotiations. The settler mothers told their frightened children that the fires in the hills were the Easter bunnies boiling water for eggs. So every year the story of the signing of the peace treaty is retold."

"What a delightful story, Karl," my mother said, her face sparkling with interest. Our benefactor looked unusually pleased with his storytelling abilities. "What ever happened to Mr. Meusebach?"

"Well, not everyone supported him. Early on, there were several attempts to oust him as commissioner-general, and he eventually resigned in 1847. On a trip to Germany in 1851, he severed all ties to the Adelsverein.

"When he returned, he found he had been elected to serve in the Texas State Senate. He also served as a state commissioner to settle land titles promised by the Verein. Eventually, Meusebach moved from New Braunfels to Comanche Spring, where he was the director of the New Braunfels botanical garden. During the Civil War, he moved from Comanche Spring to Fredericksburg and opened a mercantile business. So in answer to your question, he lives here," Karl Mueller said proudly. He was obviously a supporter of Meusebach.

“Why that’s wonderful, Karl,” my mother chimed in. “He sounds like quite a celebrity. What a good man to have sought peace with the Indians.”

I was actually absorbed in the story myself. Imagine the satisfaction of helping people find a new life in a new country and then negotiating a peace treaty so they would be safe. The thought of something so immense astonished my mind. *What makes one person have courage and the ability to tackle adversity? Yet, why does another person fail in the same circumstances?*

A whole series of questions raced through my mind. *Had it been Meusebach’s destiny to make the peace treaty with the Comanche, or was it a coincidence of being in the right place at the right time? Was there even such a thing as destiny? And if there were such a thing as destiny, what could be mine?*

A deep voice jolted me back to reality. “Well, what do you think, ladies?”

I quickly glanced up from my thoughts, feeling guilty I’d lost track of what he was saying. The buggy slowed to a stop in front of a two-story Tudor style home on a street called Creek Street. The house had an inviting front porch with several wooden rockers and two shady oak trees, which kept the porch cool in the hot sun.

Karl Mueller explained that his house was called a fachwerk house, which meant it was half-timbered with sturdy beams exposed on the outside similar to European architecture. The area between the beams was filled in with local stone.

Although I had never been to Germany, I felt like I had stepped out onto the streets of Bonn. I could tell by my mother’s delighted face that I was right. In spite of my suspicions about our benefactor’s far-reaching intentions, things were definitely looking up. I’d have to save my thoughts about destiny for another day as it was time to face my new reality.