

## Hidden Canyon

### Exordium

Ever and anon he mulls back in after time to when he went to his grandfather's house in Tucson where he grew up and got the news. He had just returned from what they were calling the Korean Conflict, and as per his grandfather's wishes he scattered his ashes at one of his favorite places. It wasn't really ashes; it was more like gravel.

While sitting at his grandfather's old rolltop desk he found an envelope with his name on it, "Tasker" written in his grandfather's script with a fountain pen. Inside the envelope was one of those free Texaco highway maps of Arizona, with a ten-year-old, tattered, one-page BLM report about a Wilderness Area.

Tasker called his grandfather, "Granddaddy." He was his father's father, and he raised Tasker since he was 5 years old when his parents were killed in an auto accident. Tasker is ever especially proud to be named after him; his patronymic is Tasker Eric Rumbold, his grandfather was Eric Tasker Rumbold; he went by Eric.

The envelope, map and BLM report are dry and crinkly. Although there is a swamp cooler on the roof it can't keep up with the surrounding Sonoran Desert constantly sucking the moisture out of everything.

He glances over the report then unfolds the map and sees where his grandfather circled an area northwest of Wickenburg, and drew a small X near the center of

the circle with the fountain pen. The pen is on the desk. He looks at it and see the pen in his Granddaddy's hand with its scar of other years.

The report describes the Wilderness Area as “inaccessible,” surrounded by two, huge ranches, which do not grant access to the over 6,400 acres, and requests to the two adjoining landowners for permission to provide an access had not been fruitful.

Tasker has trouble has trouble going to sleep that night in his old room: he can't stop thinking about his grandfather, and the Wilderness Area. Why did Granddaddy leave the map and the report? How long has the envelope been in the drawer? What does the X signify? How much private property would have to be crossed to get to the Wilderness Area? And... over and again.

## Chapter 1

### From Wickenburg to Wikieup

Wickenburg and Wikieup are connected by a beautiful Old West highway, AZ 93, that traverses one of those rare and wonderful places where saguaro cactus and Joshua trees intermingle: where the Mohave Desert and the Sonoran Desert merge, overlap, and conjoin.

Tasker stops between Wickenburg and Wikieup at an abandoned rock and curio shop and looks across the desert toward the Wilderness Area where ominous looking air snakes dance in manic gyrations.

Motorized vehicles are not allowed in Wilderness Areas; however, hiking and camping are allowed. The report states that within this Wilderness Area there are several pre-historic lithic scatter and hearths as well as some adobe ruins. He grabs his backpack, climbs over the fence, and starts hiking toward the mountains.

The report also discloses that most artifact and ruins are found along Pactolus Canyon where there is evidence of past mining activity; tailings, adits, and arrastras. The U.S. Forest Service was founded to manage national forests, and the Bureau of Land Management originated to handle mineral rights and grazing leases on public lands, however neither agency seems to have paid much attention to this particular Wilderness Area, which isn't surprising since there are over 500 Wilderness Areas in the U.S. He finds it unusual when his research reveals there have never been grazing leases or timber sales on this expanse of land; land never claimed by homestead.

While hiking across the desert he stays down in washes and gullies whenever he can, and at one point comes to mesquite so dense he has to bend over to get through narrow, thorny tunnels made by cattle. He doesn't see any people and only a few cows in the two hours it takes to get to the fence that marks the end of the ranch and the beginning of the Wilderness Area. He exhales relief when he crosses over on to public land, then inhales anticipation as he starts up into the mountains.

The one-page report concludes that the "Area needs further exploration" so that's just what he is doing. He picks out the highest peak and starts climbing to get his bearings, and to look for signs of water.

When he achieves the summit, he uses his field glasses to inspect the surrounding terrane. Sixty-four hundred acres is about 10 square miles so he can only see a small part of the Wilderness, but what he sees is beautiful; wild, forested, and enticing. Also, from this vantage point he can see a game trail that offers a much easier way back down than the more direct way he climbed up.

That afternoon he follows a valley hoping to find water. On the Texaco map he noticed a faint blue line snaking its way through the mountains that he hopes represents a year-round source of water. He is trending north with a goal of hiking a big loop and ending up in a few days back where he started.

After a couple of hours, he is much relieved when he finds the creek. The water is clean, clear and tastes good; maybe even a little alkaline. He takes a break, sits on a fallen log, and assembles his AR-7 .22 rifle.

He hikes beside the creek until near sunset then makes camp, builds a fire, and spits a quail he bagged along the way. The area is alive with wildlife; deer, rabbits, and birds are plentiful. Without where to lay his head he makes a couch of pine boughs and goes to sleep to the sound of the whispering stream.

The next morning, he follows the creek up to an embudo in the mountains. After he scrambles through the narrow, boulder strewn pass he looks down into a small, lush, hidden canyon. The concord seems primal, elemental, with a deep silent eloquence. He feels a delicious ecstasy of discovery as his eyes slowly discern the remains of a mining camp with dead mines strewn with relics of vanished enterprises where no prospector has walked for generations of prospector's lives. Long past the swelling times of bonanza when life there was probably like a story book, it is now poised in a still life quietude with bare foundations, a few rocks chimneys, and crumbling adobe walls, vine-covered and lovely.

The canyon produces a magnetizing effect, redolent of history, and the enclosing mountainsides exhibit a value dense geology with different colored mine tailings, mineral outcroppings, and open portals under a canopy of trees; pine, cedar, fir, juniper and spruce combining into incense.

He can see where the creek is originating from one of the mine portals near the far end of the canyon where a granite palisade rises up making of this a box canyon. Mines often had to be abandoned when the truck water; perhaps that's why this place was let go. He starts down into the canyon feeling as if he is entering a land of primeval and aboriginal mysteries with many untold stories.

Before he gets to the camp, he notices off to one side a sylvan glade where the campo santo is – the burial ground – with body-sized mounds of rocks lined up. The mounds of rocks are evenly spaced with a few primitive crosses lying about. The graves are rock-covered to hinder devil dogs – coyotes – from digging up the bodies.

In the camp, as he meanders slowly through this forgotten place, he realizes that it is old, old, and in more than just years, it is a place apart where time is not. In from of what may have once been a tiny adobe chapel is a three-foot- tall stone pedestal with a circular stone line a tabletop lying on the ground beside it. However, when he looks closer, he realizes it is a toppled sundial.

The more he wanders around in the camp, surrounded by it, feeling it under his boots, the more it comes into focus. His imagination portrays the foundations slowly rising up and forming walls. Trails and lanes grow sensible. The vanishments of live that live on only in the mind slowly materialize and become almost real. By nightfall the utterness of the place is complete and offers a beguiling form of enchantment.

He unrolls his sleeping bag in an open area that was once someone's home and reclines looking into his little campfire and remembering Granddaddy, and how at times like this when he was little, Granddaddy would sometimes read to him from Frost.

All the dust the wind blew high  
Appeared like gold in the sunset sky,  
But I was one of the children told  
Some of the dust was really gold.

Tasker is asleep when in the wee hours, a Guacamaya – a parrot – abruptly calls out a man’s name with a woman’s voice; “Joaquin, Joaquin.” It is a very loud wail that inclines the heart to melancholy, a sound heard nowhere in the ear of memory, and it evokes despair; a cry, beseeching, plaintive, desperate, and heart breaking; “Joaquin, Joaquin.”

He awakes at sunrise feeling to a wonderful degree that perhaps he has slept on the maps’ X, or maybe it was the night air, or the magic of the place, that provided a rejuvenating respite that cured something undiagnosed in him. He gets up, stretches and looks around. The sun hasn’t reached down into the canyon yet, and the morning mist make the scenery so romantic and picturesque it makes him want to establish habitancy. Of the previous night all he can recall is, “Joaquin, Joaquin.”

Later that morning while exploring, he come to a hedge of Ocotillo stalks that thorn-in an overgrown garden where berries, two small peach trees, and some greens are growing. The garden is a nice surprise but he isn’t concerned about food because when Granddaddy was a young man, back in the 1890’s, he had a friend, a civilized Yaqui Indian, who taught him how to live off the land, then Granddaddy taught Tasker.

Granddaddy knew the desert mile by stony mile and they often went camping with scant supplies and make meals of wild game, prickly pear pads, and the fruit of cholla, saguaro, and viznaga – barrel cacti. He noticed those and more while hiking across the desert to get here.

That afternoon, he goes in a mine that has a high ceiling but is very narrow. The miners were probably following a thin, overhead vein. After thirty yards, as he is nearing the end of the tunnel, his flashlight reveals the collapsed skeleton of a cow. A cow had entered the tunnel, walked to the end, but couldn't turn around, or back up, so it stood there and starved to death.

On the way up to another mine, he comes to a medicine rock with petroglyphs incised on it. He doesn't know what the symbols mean except that they are indicia of Indians having been there. One of the petroglyphs reminds him of a symbol on a vintage Fred Harvey cuff that is in a drawer in Granddaddy's rolltop, and that reminds him of how one of Granddaddy's Desert Rat personas was that of a gem prospector. In his late twenties, he had some luck finding gemstones but after about 1915, all the jewelry stores were carrying reconstructed stones, what were later called synthetic stones. Many of the synthetics were sold to jewelers and then to their customers as rubies, amethyst, and other native stones, and most customers could not tell the difference between the man-made gems which are harder and cheaper, and the real thing. Gems were just one of several things that Granddaddy made a small fortune on, and there is still a nice collection of watermelon tourmaline crystals and turquoise nuggets rolling around in that same desk drawer.

Just past the medicine rock, Tasker goes in a mine that has a small adit where he has to stoop to get in, but once inside it opens up into a large room with a tunnel on the far side that continues only a few yards into the mountain; whatever they were following must have pinched out. There is a fire pit against one wall, and when he looks above it, he sees where someone forced a jagged hole to the outside... chimney. He sweeps his flashlight around the room and thinks... cozy.

He has decided against hiking a loop and is starting to think of this canyon as his new home away from home. After a lifetime of benevolence this is turning out to be one of Granddaddy's greatest gifts to him.

## Chapter 2

### Gunfight at Old Tucson

Granddaddy was only 68 when he passed away, and would that Tasker could have been there, holding his hand. A couple of weeks ago, when Tasker was discharged from the Army in Los Angeles, he hitchhiked to Las Vegas and partied for two days, then slept on a Greyhound Bus on the way to Tucson where he found the house empty. The neighbor lady, Carmen, who had been keeping an eye out for Tasker came over and told him that his grandfather passed away two days prior. She had gone over to check on him and when he didn't answer the door she went in and found him lying in bed; he died in the same room he was born in.

Carmen and Tasker sit at the dining table looking at old pictures when she shakes her head and looks sorrowful, "This is too strange."

Tasker looks up, "What?"

She sighs, then, "It was, let's see, 35 years ago, about a week before your Granddaddy got home from the war in Europe that his wife died in the flu epidemic of 1918. And now two days before you get home from the war in Korea..."

Tasker, "Wow, I knew she died while he was in Europe but all this time I thought she died and that's why they sent him home."

Carmen looks at a picture of Eric when he was young, "That's when his hair turned gray."

"What?"

She shows him the picture of Eric, "After he got home and found out he went up into the Catalinas by himself for ten days and when he came down his hair had turned gray."

They sit in silence for a minute then she smiles, holds up a picture of Tasker when he was little, and says, "I remember the day you came here to live. You brought so much joy and purpose to his life, you were a blessing to him, really, you gave him something to live for."

For the next couple of days Carmen and other family friends bring more food to the house than Tasker could ever eat. Most of the people who come to express their condolences are mature women, and many of them are crying and more upset than Tasker would have expected. When he tells Carmen that he thinks some of the women were more than just friends with Granddaddy, she laughs and says, "Tasker, your Granddaddy was muy macho."

In the past, Carmen's grandson, Gerardo, who was the same age as Tasker, often spent weekends with her and when he did, he would go over to Tasker's house to play; this is when they were between 7 and 12 years old. Sometimes Carmen would send Gerardo over with a picnic lunch then Granddaddy would let the boys ride in the back of the truck, while he drove the 12 miles out in the desert to Old Tucson where they would play Cowboy in the abandoned movie set. They would dress Western, strap on toy guns, and have shoot outs in the derelict saloons and streets of Old Tucson. Granddaddy had been a wrangler for the movie *Arizona*, the

only movie filmed at Old Tucson before it closed for several years during the war. Tasker can remember stalking Gerardo through the deserted buildings and alleys while Granddaddy sat in the truck reading a newspaper. Gerardo once climbed the back of Old Tucson's false front church and shot Tasker from the bell tower with his Gene Autry pearl-handled, six-shooter. It was a heck of a shot and Tasker arched his back, threw his arms up, and fell back in the dust.

Tasker's second night in the canyon, the moon is waxing toward fullness so he leaves his olive drab flashlight turned off and clipped to his belt as he drifts around with no reason. He comes to a little ravine going up the side of a mountain. He stumbles into the rock-strewn defile and notices small green specks that are glowing along both sides and the bottom of the trench looking like little green lightening bugs, but they aren't moving, and the light is steady. He picks up a rock and realizes it is peridot the only gemstone that occurs in only one color - green. A green so rich it can be illuminated by moonlight and in the past was sometimes mined at night for that reason. The San Carlos Reservation east of Phoenix has a peridot mine where it is found in crystal layers and is harvested by the Apache with hand tools. The little specimens here are not big enough to get excited about but still worth collecting, and there is a rock tumbler in the shed behind the house that he can use to polish them. The shed started out as a garage for Granddaddy's pickup truck but over the years it has filled up with adjuncts to his many interests.

Granddaddy's father built the house in 1880 when Tucson was over a hundred years old but still the frontier. Tasker didn't appreciate how special the house was until he got older and his friends would come over and act like it was a big deal. It's near downtown and there is no front yard, the adobe wall and front gate are even with the sidewalk like other homes in this historic neighborhood. The gate is

big, dark wood, with double doors that during the day they leave open and people passing by can see into the courtyard with its center fountain.

From the ravine, Tasker looks up at the star's shining overhead, then looks down at the green starry rocks, as the evening envelopes him in subdued luminousness.

He is conflicted, terribly saddened by the loss of Granddaddy, who to him was like a hero in a novel, but at the same time he's elated at the discovery of the canyon. He feels guilty for being so excited about the canyon, but he knows Granddaddy wouldn't want him to mourn. Granddaddy once told him that when the time came, he should not mourn but instead, take his remains and scatter them down at Puerto Penasco where they used to go fishing. Granddaddy loved it there where the Sonoran Desert meets the Sea of Cortez.

While on the beach at night, with the waves crashing before him and holding the urn with both hands against his chest he is reminded of Alfred, Lord Tennyson:

Break, break, break,  
On thy cold gray stones, O Sea  
And I would that my tongue could utter  
The thoughts that arise in me.

Tennyson was writing about the death of his best friend, the twenty-two-year-old, Arthur Hallam. When Tennyson told Hallam's fiance that Hallam had died - she fainted.

Granddaddy had a full and adventurous life, and Tasker is thankful for their community of time. Granddaddy wasn't quixotic like some prospectors with their unrealistic, romantic view of searching for their burro and then "finding color." For example, another of his Desert Rat personas was as a mineral surveyor with which skill he surveyed and found unlocated fractions of claims between existing, claims that he would locate, file and then sell, usually to adjoining claim holders. This sometimes resulted in another of those small fortunes.

One night, Tasker climbs to the highest ridge above the camp and goes into what turns out to be a cave, not a mine. He's carrying a portable fluorescent light to look for scheelite an ore of tungsten, or to perhaps find lead, uranium, diamond, opals, or rubies, all of which sometimes fluoresce. Fluorescent lights have become popular since the uranium boom exploded in the Utah Four Corners region a few years ago.

Once in the dark cave he turns on the light but what he sees isn't minerals or gems, instead, the walls are crawling with fluorescent, greenish, glowing, alacrane - scorpions. He quickly looks overhead and down at his boots to make sure none are near him, then looks around in amazement at the glowing chamber. He notices half-melted candles, and a circle of stones in the center of the floor. As his eyes become adjusted to the fluorescent gloom, he sees that the rock walls are covered with arcane symbols, esoteric marks, and primitive grotesque drawings. The ground is littered with broken pottery, clay figurines, and bones. There is an awful smell that he can't identify or locate and the atmosphere is frightful but enthralling. He has heard that some of the ancient tribes who live south of the border are home to brujos who practice a doctrine of folk botany that they can use to send a subject through a warp in time and space.

These obscure tribes, who live by chase and on roots and seeds, believe the soul leaves the body during sleep and goes to secret vortexes to take part in necromancy; to communicate with the dead, foretell the future, and practice the black arts. They also believe that scorpions can be summoned by the strains of a violin, and that their sting can cure disease. After a few seconds, he shakes his head out of a thickening trance and backs out of the cave thinking that it is imponderable, impossible to assess, and best avoided. He also thinks that may this isolated little mining camp wasn't deserted because it was no longer productive, but because something sinister happened.

That night, while trying not to think about the cave Tasker remembers when he was a teenager and Granddaddy would take him to the Pima County Recorder's Office, and the BLM office where they would go through mining claims. Granddaddy would contact mine owners and offer to do their required annual assessment work for a fee. This could include road and trail maintenance, mineral exploration by hand or by core drilling, building a headframe, or other improvements. When he got this kind of work, he would take Tasker with him and explain the methods of mining being used, the geology of the claim, and the potential of the surrounding land.

Also, while in the Recorders Office they would occasionally find claims where the taxes had not been paid, or sometimes there would be a Notice of Abandonment, which meant a mine was open to location. They would then visit the claim and do a feasibility study to determine if the claim was worth acquiring. In this way he made more of those small fortunes.

One day Tasker goes over the pass and back out into the desert to hunt game and gather cactus fruit. In an arroyo, he spooks a lone javelina or musk hog, some people call them stink pigs or peccaries. The javelina takes off through the brush and Tasker has to chase after him and shoot on the run. He misses a few times but eventually brings him down, then dresses him on the spot and takes a hind quarter back to camp where he cooks it slow over a mesquite fire, and it is delicious. He pretends he has a female companion that he shares it with.

After a week in camp he has explored all the mines save one. When he goes in that last mine, he has to stoop to walk down the tunnel. At the end of the tunnel he turns his flashlight up and is stunned by what he sees. The rock face is covered with jewelry rock; gold in thin, clear veins so rich he can dig it out with his hand pick. Granddaddy had demonstrated to him that gold doesn't glitter, it gleams, and the veins in this rock face are gleaming. He is suddenly aglow with a heightened awareness and a lightsomeness that causes him to sink to his knees in glorious appreciation of the artsome, natural beauty before him; an intricate gold filigree engraved upon a wall of black rock. He feels blessed.

Early the next morning, he puts rocks in his pack that are laced with gold. While loading the pack he stops a few times and picks it up to make sure he isn't making it too heavy.

Climbing the pass is the hardest part, but once he gets down in the desert, he can make better time; he wants to get back to the truck in one day. He estimates he has 50 pounds on his back, and it is a hard hike, but he can't stop smiling, and talking to himself. He is making happy plans to get some claim forms from Granddaddy's desk then go back to the canyon and stake his claim. He is also trying to remember

everything Granddaddy taught him about processing ore into refined gold. Granddaddy was also an assayer who knew how to extract and melt gold or silver bullion into bars.

## Chapter 3

### A Woman's Touch

The sun is setting when Tasker sees someone riding a horse on the other side of the fence, moving slowly toward the truck, and whoever it is has probably seen him so there is nothing to do but to keep going.

When he reaches the fence, the sun is behind the rider. Tasker takes his pack off and puts it down beside the fence without giving away how heavy it is, or how relieved he is to take it off. When he looks up, he sees that the rider is a beautiful young lady, about his age, dressed Western and sitting atop a splendid mount.

He is taken aback, "Wow, I mean Howdy."

She smiles at his greeting, and says, "Did your truck break down, or are you lost or what?"

He regrets not having shaved or taken a bath in the past week, "No, I've, ah, I've been over in the Wilderness Area. That's a fine-looking horse you.got there.

Where'd you get a horse like that?"

"Thank you, he's one of my favorites. My Daddy bought him at the King Ranch in Texas. But maybe you didn't see all those Posted and No Trespassing signs when you were driving up the road here, is that it?"

"The King Ranch, huh? So, he's a descendent of Old Sorrel, nice pedigree."

She laughs at his evasiveness, while her horse slowly walks around the truck and she looks down into the cab and the bed. He pushes the pack under the fence and then climbs over and puts the pack, carefully, in the back of the truck.

In this first minute there is a commencing; they talk, their eyes meet, she laughs, he smiles flirtatiously, something unspoken causes them to pause while something within them aligns.

He opens the tailgate, sits on it, takes a drink from his canteen, looks at the fiercely setting sun, and waits. She dismounts, ties the reins to a fence post, ambles over, leans against the side of the tailgate, then looks from him to the horizon.

After a few seconds she playfully says, "You know my Daddy doesn't like it when people trespass on his property."

"You're not gonna shoot me, are you? You look like the kinda girl who would shoot first and ask questions later."

She laughs, "No, I wouldn't do that. My Daddy might have one of the hired hands do it, but I wouldn't. Just kidding, but really, what were you doing out there?"

"Well, as you know, there's no access road into the Wilderness Area so I hiked across your ranch to get there. I didn't think anyone would ever know. Ah, sorry."

"Yeah, my Daddy and Mr. Baca who owns the ranch on the other side of the Wilderness, don't want people crossing their land. They like the idea of there being some places where people don't go, where it's just nature."

"I can understand that, I agree."

He pats the tailgate and nods for her to sit down. She sits, looks west, and their faces glow bronze.

"I'm Tasker Rumbold."

"Nice to meet you Tasker, I'm Mary Temple."

"I guess that explains the circle T on your horse." "Yeah,"

He asks, "Have you ever been in there?"

"In the Wilderness Area, yeah, there's lots of game in there."

Tasker, "And evidently some exotic birds."

She looks at him keenly, "Why do you say that?"

"I've been in there for the past week and a couple of times in the middle of the night I heard what I guess was some kinda parrot calling a man's name."

She looks down, clicks her boot heels together, and says, "Joaquin?" He looks at her with surprise, "How did you know that?"

Mary, "Were you in that little box canyon where there used to be a mining camp?"

"Yeah."

"My grandmother told me a story that had been told to her when she was young about how there were some miners living up there, and a few of them had their wives and children with them. One night one of the miners came home and caught his wife in bed with another man. The husband grabbed his shotgun killed the other man then shot and killed himself right in front of his wife. She went crazy and ran off into the mountains screaming her lover's name... 'Joaquin'."

Tasker, "Holy crap, what happened to her?"

Mary, "She was never seen again."

Tasker, "Wow!"

Mary, "Wait it gets worse. The people who lived in there were already - how should I put it - superstitious, and their curandero, their medicine man, or whatever he was, told them that the place was now cursed. A few of them moved away but most of them were still living there when the Hualapai swooped down, killed all the men and captured the women and children."

Tasker, "Damn! Well that explains that."

Mary, "What do you mean?"

"Nothing, I was just thinking out loud."

Mary, "I don't know if the place is really cursed or not but as far as I know no one has been in there until you came along. That story is another reason why Daddy and Mr. Baca won't allow an access road."

Tasker, "But you've been there?"

"Once, just up to the pass, I didn't go down to where the camp was."

"It's kinda hidden how did you find it?"

"My Daddy knew where it was."

They're quiet for a minute while he thinks over what she has told him, then... "But the voice I heard sounded like a parrot."

Mary, "I've heard that there are parrots that can live over a hundred years, and we're not that far from Mexico it could have been brought up here as a pet by one of the miners."

"I almost wish you hadn't told me that, now I'm gonna be... "

She teases, "Afraid?"

He, defensively, "No, not afraid, but it is something to think about."

They watch the diminishing light show on the horizon as their faces fade to copper. "So, does that mean you're gonna continue your life of crime trespassing across our ranch?"

He looks at her with a slight smile, raises his eyebrows, and doesn't say anything.

She loves it, "I'm just kidding, I don't care if you go in there."

The night cozies them and they sit and talk for an indeterminate amount of time.

Eventually she says she should be going home. He asks for her phone number, she tells him, then hesitates, they look kind of out of place for a second, before they look down, say goodbye and turn away.

While driving back to Tucson, Tasker only stops thinking about Mary long enough to wonder what Granddaddy would think of her; he knows that Granddaddy would approve.

Mary is an education major at the University of Arizona in Tucson less than a mile from Tasker's house; they begin a friendship. They go to movies at the Fox Theater, have picnics in Sabino Canyon, and explore abandoned mines and ghost towns in the surrounding mountains. One afternoon, he invites Carmen over to meet Mary, and Mary wonders if Carmen is always so happy and excited. At one point, Tasker goes outside for something, and when he does Carmen looks around the room, then says to Mary, "This a beautiful home, all it needs is a woman's touch." Then she smiles at Mary while Mary looks down and blushes.

One Saturday in February Mary watches Tasker compete in bronc riding and bull dogging at the Tucson Fiesta de los Vaqueros. He doesn't place but she gets to see another side of him. However, it isn't until a few months later as she watches him make her breakfast... the radio is playing in the background... she looks out at the courtyard where two little birds are splashing in the fountain... Tasker stands at the stove talking and laughing about something... and at that moment she realizes - He's the one!

The night she graduates from U of A, after going out to dinner, he takes her to the shed in back of the house where there is a rock saw, tumbler, table saw, and the walls are lined with shelves and the shelves are cluttered with rocks and tools and antique paraphernalia that she can't imagine. He answers her questions; "What's this?" "Where did you find this?" "How old is this?" while he sits at a table hammering, filing, and working on something with old inherited hand tools.

He is using a piece of cloth to polish something small in his hand that she can't see. He takes her left hand and slips an embossed and bejeweled gold ring onto her ring finger.

She's stunned, "Did you make this?"

"Yeah."

"What does it mean?"

"I hope it means that you'll let me love you forever."

She looks from him to the ring, then back to him, "Oh I will, but only if you'll promise to let me love you forever."

They kiss, as gold from a hidden canyon gleams on her hand.

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