

# MEETING JOHN WAYNE



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## CHAPTER 1



MARCIE

“*H*oly hell!” Marcie muttered under her breath. “It worked.”

Turning in a slow circle she scanned the horizon, her light green eyes darkened in concentration. The absence of headlights throwing yellow feelers into the night, and the disappearance of telephone poles standing in rigid rows sent a queasy wriggling to her stomach. She drew a deep breath and closed her eyes. She listened to the deep quiet of a non-mechanized, non-car world. The silence had a depth that soothed. Overhead the meteor shower that propelled her slip through time burned and flared in brilliant streaks of light.

Picking up her two bags, Marcie turned in the direction of her childhood home and started walking. She came to find her sister. Her sister who disappeared five years ago. Disappeared without a trace. She never believed such a thing was possible, but she knew better now. Without a trace happened. Marcie had been frantic

with worry, consumed with guilt, and missed her sister like an amputated limb.

A short message on a painted piece of wood had appeared on the river bank two weeks after the disappearance telling her not to worry. Fat chance. Marcie moved home and checked that river bank daily. Four years later, Amanda sent a letter with the unbelievable story of falling one hundred years through time during a meteor shower—with how-to instructions if she cared to follow.

Marcie packed and planned and prepared for the next year. Tonight, meteors blazed. Falling stars fell, and Marcie had gone to the river with two bags clutched tightly on her lap and... it worked. The modern world of electricity, highways and telephones was gone.

She stopped as the sky exploded in another brilliant shower of light. Just ahead the silhouette of a barn stood in stark relief against the glowing sky. Marcie lifted her skirt with one hand, pulled her bags closer to her side and ran. Those grueling hours spent running down country roads paid off now. The rhythm of her pumping legs saying *Amanda, Amanda, Amanda*.

When close to the barn, Marcie stopped and listened. A woman cried and apologized to a steady smack of hand on flesh. A low voice rumbled beneath the female distress. "Now, darlin', you knew better. You knew better, and you went outside anyway. What would I tell Tommy and Jeanette and Joe if their mommy was gone? How would we go on? We would all be heart broken."

"I know. I know. I'm sorry, Tom. Please, I'm sorry. I won't do it again." Her voice wailed into the dusky gloom of the barn.

The smack, smack, smack, paused and resumed. "Well, let's just be sure that's the case."

Marcie crept to the door of the barn and peeked inside. A wide expanse of masculine back was turned to her. He sat on a bale of hay with a woman securely pinned across his lap. Even from this distance Marcie could tell her bottom glowed like an Hawaiian

sunset. A large hand floated into the air and fell with a clap onto scarlet cheeks.

Marcie crept closer. The hand drew back once more revealing a heart shaped birthmark on the back of the woman's left thigh. She would know that mark anywhere.

She shot forward. Her small fists pummeled the muscled back. "Stop hitting my sister. Stop right now. Stop. Amanda, are you all right?" The man's arm hung in the air. His palm suspended at the apex of his swing. Amanda twisted her head to look over her shoulder. "Marcie?" she croaked. "Is that you, Marcie?"

Amanda squirmed and struggled, "Let me up. Let me up."

"Settle down, Amanda. You'll hurt yourself. Let me help." The big man lifted her sister and sat her carefully on his lap.

"That's mighty funny. You're worried she'll hurt herself when you were just beating her." Marcie stamped her foot and threw her arms in the air.

"Now, hold on a dog-gone minute. I was not beating my wife. I was spanking her, and she deserved it. But that's between Amanda and me, and none of your business."

"None of my business? That's my sister with the crimson bottom, my friend." Marcie's hands were planted on her hips while her eyes shot daggers at the cowboy.

"Your sister?" His eyebrows rushed to his hairline.

"Marcie, oh my God, Marcie. It's you. I have missed you so much." Amanda jumped from her husband's lap and threw her arms around Marcie's neck and hugged. She pulled back for a better look and hugged again.

"Why was that man beating you?" Marcie continued to glare over her sister's shoulder.

"That man is my husband, and he wasn't beating me. It was a spanking. It's different in this time. Most men spank their wives."

"But why?"

"Because we have a rule. I am not to go outside on nights like tonight when the sky is lit up like the Fourth of July. I don't want to

slip away in time, and we don't really know how it all works. But I woke up tonight, and something called me, pulled me outside. Now that I see you, I think I felt your arrival. I should have asked Tom to check. He would have been happy to do it. Instead, he woke up, and I was gone, and the meteors were shining like high noon. He found me standing in the yard in my nightgown gazing at the show. I knew better. I deserved the spanking."

Amanda looked from her husband to her sister. "Marcie, I'd like you to meet my husband, Tom Thornton. Tom, this is my sister, Marcie."

Marcie extended her hand, and Tom took it in his much larger one. "Women don't shake hands with men in 1888. I tip my hat and you give a polite nod." His laugh echoed in the cavernous barn.

"Come inside. We didn't want to wake the children. That's why we were using the barn." Tom picked up Marcie's bags, and the three walked to the house.

A large black and gray dog slept in front of the banked fire. He raised his head and thumped his big tail on the floor. Tom motioned and said, "Rex, come meet Marcie." The old dog pulled himself up and came to Tom's side. "He's a good dog, protective and smart."

Marcie leaned down to rub his ears. "Hello, Rex. Nice to meet you." Rex leaned into her hand with eyes tightly closed.

Tom pointed to the rug in front of the fire. "Down, Rex."

"Well, there's surely no doubt that you two are sisters. You're alike as two peas in a pod." The small women stood side by side. They both had a sprinkle of freckles across their noses. But, Marcie's mass of curls were a darker brown and shorter than her sister's. Amanda's eyes were the shade of a summer sky while Marcie's were the light green of a new fern. From a distance, they would be hard to tell apart. He chuckled.

"You two girls should get some sleep. The children will be up in a few hours, and then the day will be started tired or not." Tom looked from blue eyes to green ones.

"I know, but I haven't seen Marcie in four years. I can't believe you're here. You are a sight for sore eyes." Amanda put an arm around Marcie's waist and pulled her close.

"You'll be tired tomorrow." He raised an eyebrow in warning.

"I know, but we can take a little nap when the children rest after dinner. We'll be all right, but thanks for worrying about us." Amanda's voice was quiet, respectful.

"I guess I'm going to bed alone." Tom's pursed lips spoke of displeasure. "Marcie, you can sleep in the loft. It will be the boy's room when they are big enough to climb a ladder, but it's empty now."

"Thank you. I just need the one bag with me in the loft. So, Tommy and Jeanette, right? They must be four and two. I am excited to meet them." Tom took the bag his sister-in-law pointed at and headed for the ladder.

"Yes, Tommy and Jeanette, but now we have baby Joe. He's three months old. They are a lively bunch and will be beyond thrilled to have a new aunt."

"So, do you have indoor plumbing?" Marcie asked.

Amanda's laugh emerged as an amused snort. "No. Come on. I'll show you the outhouse."

Marcie squealed and opened the case left behind. She pulled out a roll of toilet paper, a new toothbrush and a large tube of toothpaste. "I brought some modern conveniences. I couldn't resist."

"So, this is toilet paper. Amanda has even talked of it in her sleep." Tom examined the roll of quilted heaven he had heard so much about. "You both know anything not from our time must be kept out of sight. I don't think we should let Tommy or Jeanette see it, either. At their ages, they are terrible with secrets. I'm headed for bed. See you in the morning, Marcie. Welcome to our home."

"Thank you. Once I got your message and knew I had a chance to see Amanda and meet her family, I had to try the time leap. I'm still a little shocked it worked, but here I am." Marcie held her dress out to her sides and did a small curtsy.

“Come on.” Amanda led her sister around the house to a little building. “This time does have its drawbacks, but I love it here. I’ll see you back inside when you’re finished.”

Marcie opened the door to the outhouse and shook her head. “Drawbacks, indeed.”