

## Introduction

One of my several potential bridegrooms began his courtship by suggesting that I had considerable bridal disadvantages. At five-feet-seven inches I was too tall. I am skinny and muscular instead of fat and round. I was all thumbs in my basket-weaving attempts. I could not bring myself to butcher the small game and birds that my brother Thomas brought for our table. My excessively white skin and bright red hair made me too obviously foreign. And, besides having no parents, I had created no significant and useful items but a few crocheted things and boiled corn-on-the-cob to present to a bridegroom's family.

We called my latest suitor Mook-mo. He lived with his family group near our cabin at Lower Lake, a community of mostly natives of this North California territory of Mexico. I say "we called him" Mook-mo because that is probably his name, but the Xa-Ben-Na-Po, a tribe sometimes called *Pomo*, are not eager to give out their personal names, and may provide a false one, even to neighbors.

Mook-mo was an expert hunter, had a dark, round, sweet face. He exhibited a gentle temperament. As he wore no clothing whatsoever, even in brisk weather, he also exhibited signs that he was serious in his interest in me as bride material.

His admiring gaze from his barely five-foot height was long and approving. But my brother Thomas who, after less than a year here understood much of the native language and served as interpreter, reminded me that the opinion among our

neighbors was that, although I was acceptable as a neighbor, my disadvantages still outweighed my strengths as a bride.

Thomas pointed out, "Mook-mo was impressed with your physical ability and your skill with bow-and-arrow." He wagged his head. "Too bad you will not shoot some rabbits. They are more than plentiful, and we could trade the fur, as well as make some nice stews for the boys."

Thomas was correct in all that. Although I will eat meat to survive, I will not kill little creatures, even for food. But I had demonstrated my new-learnt skills quite brilliantly not long before.

Expertly signaled danger by our Pomo sentries, I had disabled at least two of a group of slave-seeking rovers with my well-placed arrows. The women of Mook-mo's family group had left their huts and raced into hiding in the forest. Chosen men of the tribe had created an ambush and were waiting to loose their arrows. I had moved from the safety of the house to the shifty shelter of a copse of alders, my braids coiled under my green wool cap.

On the same occasion, Thomas moved from his shooting step behind a boulder, fired one of our muskets at an intruder, and reached for the other gun expertly loaded by our friend Shabook-mo. A mustached rover shrieked, clutched his abdomen, and clambered upon his mount with some difficulty. Thomas fired several other shots, each producing a cry as it reached its target. Mook-mo and his friends let loose a multitude of arrows, some of which must have met their mark, for we heard more screams and saw blood on the ground at the trail head. Thus our efforts and those of our courageous neighbors may have discouraged future attacks. I will relate more of that later.

As Mook-mo reminded us, those evil white men had been here before. And before our time, there were *Californios* from the missions to the south who brought whips and chains in

order to secure laborers for their *ranchos*, slaves whom they tried virtuously to convert to Christianity. Thomas was of the opinion that neither the American rovers nor the Spanish-speaking Californios, would be likely to return here, now that they realize they would find, not slaves, but major resistance. But who knows, for slaving is said to be a legal and very profitable business, especially now that the rush for gold is on.

Slaves are being used more and more as gold miners. First discovered in the Sierra mountains across the valley last January of 1848, huge gold nuggets practically cover the ground in some places. Or so it is said. One can become enormously rich simply by picking up the nuggets, harvesting them as Mook-mo's family harvest acorns. With slaves to do the work of picking up the nuggets, the rovers could become wealthy in no time. Many weeks ago I decided to learn to fire the pistol and the musket. I did not want to become a captive again, not for a moment.

Without actually saying so, Mook-mo had indicated his willingness to take a matrimonial chance on me, but his family was another matter. We were all on good neighborly terms, but they were surely not likely to accept me as one of their own, for I had not only the disadvantages I have already mentioned, but I was an import from Boston, a place that was for them immeasurably far away. I was relieved at Mook-mo's family's reticence, as I was already too old to be a respectable bride for him, I being nearly thirteen.

Besides, my brother and I have learnt recently that we have some major decisions to make as, for example, with whom we shall associate for the rest of our lives and where we shall make our permanent home.

Probably I had better explain how Thomas and I got to our present state. So I shall begin a brief history, told necessarily in several parts.