

Lady in Blue

*They cannot know if the body or the soul moves,
but they are very conscious of what happens
and they know where they are going.*

— SAINT PADRE PIO, CONCERNING BILOCATION

Tuesday morning, Angela left early for her interview in Waco. Exiting Interstate 35, she found the Mayborn Museum on the left.

As she climbed its steps, passed between the six Tuscan columns, and entered the oversized doors, she psyched herself. *The conference call went well enough to invite me for a face-to-face interview. This will go well too.* She took a deep breath. Then, with a smile, she announced herself to the receptionist.

Minutes later, she was seated at the far end of a long mahogany table, while representatives from the city, university, and foundation sat at its head. She forced a smile as she felt the eyes staring, assessing her, not taking her at face value but judging her by her appearance: dark, shoulder-length hair, high cheek bones, and creamy complexion.

Swallowing, she discreetly wiped her damp palms on her thighs as she glanced at the time. *Don't watch the clock. Do what it does. Keep going.* She took another deep breath, grounding herself. With a subtle nod, Doctor West winked. Instantly, her spirits rose, and she returned his smile. Then he stood to address the small group.

“It’s my pleasure to recommend Angela Brannon for the grant writing position.” After making introductions around the table, he told them how Angela had been instrumental in writing a grant

application. "All I added was archaeological jargon, and it was ready for submission."

Numerous questions and nearly an hour later, Doctor Greene thanked her for her time. Then he glanced at the other interviewers.

"I'd like to fill this position today, but I have back-to-back appointments till two. Let's reconvene then to reach a decision."

As the others pushed back their chairs, stood, and began filing out, Doctor Greene took Angela aside.

"No promises, but I feel confident enough of the outcome to ask you to wait. It'd mean a delay today, but it might save you a second trip just to fill out the paperwork." Before she could answer, he smiled. "In fact, why don't you visit the mammoth site during the break? See if you think this position would be a good fit for you before we meet again this afternoon."

She nodded. "After all I've heard about it, I'd definitely like to see it."

"Good." He turned to one of the interviewers, a tall young man. "Kent, why don't you escort Angela?"

The man smiled easily. "It'd be my pleasure." Turning toward her, his eyes twinkled. "But it's nearly noon. Maybe you'd like a bite to eat first?"

Angela noted the golden-brown hair that dipped around his foxlike ears. She looked into Kent's hazel-brown eyes and saw the flicker of an honest smile. *I trust him*. Nodding, she smiled back.

"I'd like that."

As they left the museum, she realized he walked with a limp, and she matched her pace to his.

"Rather than take both cars, would you want to ride with me?" he said.

Again, she searched his eyes. Satisfied he was genuine, she nodded.

"Sure. Makes sense."

Climbing into his pickup, he glanced at her. “We could eat first and then see the site, or vice versa. How hungry are you?”

She grinned. “Did you hear my stomach growl during the interview? I skipped breakfast, and now I’m starving.”

He returned her smile. “I know just the place, not five minutes from here, and it’s right on the way.”

They drove to a Cajun restaurant built on stilts above the Brazos River. Wall-to-wall picture windows overlooked the river with its treelined banks. Louisianan décor and retro signs filled its interior walls. Seated in a fifties diner booth, Angela watched the red-faced ducks and red-eared sliders swimming below them. Without warning, thoughts of the flood and the centuries-old cypress trees reduced to snapped-off stumps came to mind. Memories of Billy’s stream—the turtle and orphaned fawn she had rescued—swept through her mind. She swallowed the lump in her throat.

“Is anything wrong?”

“No.” She blinked, feeling transparent, vulnerable. “Why?”

“Suddenly, you seemed miles away.”

Angela managed a wry grin. “Just being a little nostalgic.”

He smiled as more critters swam past. “Do the ducks remind you of where you live?”

“Lived. Past tense. I’m moving.” She squinted, seeing a flashback of the flood’s destruction and nature’s slow renewal. “The stream near me has ducks. Mallards, I think.” She glanced at the black-and-white ducks paddling by. “What kind are these?”

“Muscovy ducks.” He smiled. “Their red faces give them away.”

His smile brought her back to the moment. Dismissing her memories, she tried to be sociable.

“Are you from Waco?”

“Just finishing law school at Baylor. I’m from Fort Worth.”

Fort Worth. Waco. Again, she swallowed, this time recalling the dream—the vision on Enchanted Rock.

“Are you familiar with Fort Worth?” he asked.

"I was there once as a kid. Why?"

He shrugged. "You seemed to react when I mentioned it."

She shook her head. "Just a touch of déjà vu."

When the waitress brought the appetizers, he grinned at Angela. "Ever try armadillo eggs?"

She wrinkled her nose. "What are they?"

"Bacon-wrapped chicken stuffed with sliced jalapeños and topped with pepper jack cheese," said the waitress, setting a second plate by her.

"Try one." He moved the sizzling platter closer.

She breathed in the smoky, spicy aroma. "Smells wonderful." Spearing a bacon-wrapped bundle, she sliced into it and took a bite. Then she sat up straight, her eyes opening wide. "Delicious."

He chuckled. "They're a house specialty. So, you're graduating from UTSA?"

"My classes end Friday." Still forcing small-talk, she asked, "When do you graduate?"

"I'll take the bar exam in February."

Bar exam. The phrase reminded her of the land-grabbing attorney who had wanted to buy Billy's stream. The word *shyster* came to mind. "You're going to be a lawyer."

His eyes twinkling, he laughed.

"What?" she said.

"That look."

"What look?"

"It has 'swindler' and 'ambulance chaser' written all over it."

"Am I that transparent?" She felt exposed beneath his stare.

"You're not the first person I've met with that reaction." Chuckling, he shook his head. "Some people think 'lawyer' is a dirty word."

Smiling at his relaxed sense of humor, she silently forgave him for being an attorney.

"What'll your specialty be?"

He set down his fork and leaned forward. "Since I was a kid, I've wanted to be an archeologist, but my father expected me to join his law firm. The compromise?" He looked at her expectantly.

Shaking her head, she shrugged her shoulders.

"I plan to specialize in art, antiquities, and cultural heritage."

"So you'll be an art lawyer?"

He shook his head. "Although my father's law firm specializes in art and antiquities, I'll focus on cultural heritage."

"Interesting." She arched an eyebrow.

"It is!" His eyes lit up.

"What exactly does a cultural heritage lawyer do?"

"Basically, I'll be an archaeologist *and* an attorney, specializing in both Paleolithic and prehistory law." His eyes glowing, he grinned.

She smiled at his enthusiasm. "I'm sure you'll do well." Then it occurred to her. "Is that your connection to the mammoth site?"

He nodded. "Always have been an archaeologist at heart."

"Understandable."

She told him about her narrow escape from the recent flood, describing the pictographs and shards she had found in the cave's tunnels as they had raced from the waters flooding the underground passageways. His eyes sparkling, he gave a low whistle.

"You sound like a female Indiana Jones."

She chuckled. "Archaeology's fascinating. Even if I haven't been bitten by the 'bug,' I can definitely identify with your attraction to it."

Catching each other's eye, they stared a moment. Then, feeling self-conscious, Angela cleared her throat.

"So . . . what are your plans after you pass the bar?"

He sat up straight. "Thinking positively that I *do* pass the bar, I plan to open a branch of my father's firm in Marfa."

"Marfa?" Angela came to attention.

"Why?" His head back, he appraised her. "What about Marfa?"

She shook her head. "It's just that several friends have moved to Fort Davis and Alpine recently. For one reason or another, everyone seems to be moving to West Texas." Blinking, she peered at him. "Out of curiosity, what will a cultural heritage lawyer do way out there?"

He grinned. "I plan to represent the art community."

"Who'll be your clients?" Head cocked, she frowned. "Ranchers?"

He nodded. "Plus artists, collectors, galleries, and art dealers."

"But about *what*?" She squinted, trying to imagine the connection. "What does law have to do with art?"

He chuckled good-naturedly. "There's a whole slew of art-related legal issues, from dispute to authenticity, to restitution of cultural heritage property, to setting up art investment vehicles, to advising the purchase and sale of artworks."

"I had no idea cultural heritage law offered such a range of options, especially in the middle of the Chihuahuan Desert." Then, as a thought occurred to her, she grinned. "You'd get along famously with my birth mother, Ceren."

"Birth mother?"

Nodding, she explained how Judith had raised her in an open adoption. "Ceren's my birth mother, as well as my 'second' mother."

"Why did you say I'd get along with her?"

"She's an art history professor, and she adores art. Anything and everything to do with art." Angela smiled to herself, sensing Ceren would wholeheartedly approve of this avid art-law student.



After lunch, they drove to the mammoth site. Kent introduced her to the office staff and then led her to a bridge overlooking a lush grassy ravine.

“This is where they stumbled on a Columbian mammoth’s femur. Using only paintbrushes and bamboo scrapers, volunteer crews from the Mayborn Museum excavated the fossil remains of sixteen mammoths between 1978 and 1990.”

Angela looked at the peaceful scene. “They were found here? All together?”

He nodded. “It was a nursery herd that appears to have drowned during a flash flood and been buried in mud.”

A chill ran down her spine, although it was a sunny day in August.

“Are you cold?”

Rubbing away the goosebumps, she shook her head. “It’s just a grim reminder of what could have happened to my friends and me in the flood.”

“Flash floods are dangerous.” He studied her. “Are you okay?”

She managed a wry smile. “Yeah, I’m fine. Just déjà vu again.”

Giving her a sympathetic smile, he continued. “In the nineties, they found several more mammoths, a Western camel, American alligator, dwarf antelope, giant tortoise, and a juvenile saber-toothed cat’s tooth.”

“That’s quite a collection.” She gestured toward the building in front of them. “Are the fossils inside?”

He nodded. “Some. Others are in storage. They built this climate-controlled dig shelter so the fossils could be on public view, as well as protected from the elements. There’s also an exhibit at the Mayborn Museum.” Gesturing toward the entrance with his open palm, he smiled. “Ready to see it?”

“Absolutely.”

As they stepped inside, a wall painting of a life-sized mammoth greeted them.

“Whoa!” Angela caught her breath. “Mammoths were huge.”

Chuckling, he pressed his back against the painting’s hind leg. “I’m six foot three, and I only come up to its knee.” He walked to the railing overlooking the dig site. Using a laser beam, he identified

the various skeletons, pointing out the bones of a bull and calf. "The calf was found in its tusks. Floodwater might have washed the bones in that position, but I like to think the bull was trying to save it by lifting it to higher ground."

Touched by his compassionate scenario, Angela smiled at him. "That's sweet."

He shrugged, then checked his watch. "If you like, there's time before the meeting to see the museum's exhibit."



On the way back, Kent turned right after the suspension bridge and drove past a herd of bronze longhorns and drovers.

"What beautiful sculptures." She stared out the window at the cowboy and cattle statues.

"Branding the Brazos." He took his eyes off the road long enough to glance at her. "It's a three-dimensional tribute to Waco's days as a stop along the Chisholm Trail."

The farther they drove along the riverside park, the more statues she saw. "How many altogether?"

"Twenty-five longhorns and three cowboys. One black, one Hispanic, and one white."

Five minutes later, Kent pulled into the museum's parking lot and again checked his watch.

"Just enough time to see the mammoth exhibit before our meeting."

Inside the complex, he led her up the ramp into a room with a see-through floor. Glancing from him to the floor, she gingerly stepped onto the glass and peered down at the fossils beneath her feet.

"Ohmigosh, there are the bones."

"Those are the original casts of the fossils, but the display gives you an up-close view of how the mammoth bones looked when they were excavated."

His phone buzzed, and he glanced at the text. "It's from Doctor West. The one o'clock meeting's running over, pushing back our meeting, but they'll let us know as soon as the discussion ends."

She stiffened. "That can't be good."

"No, it's a policy meeting that's gone into overtime. Don't worry. With Doctor West's recommendation, you're a shoo-in for the position. Besides, this delay will give you time to see the museum."

A half hour later, they had finished touring the exhibits but still had not heard word. Pressing her lips together, Angela sighed.

"Is there a waiting room somewhere?"

His eyes crinkled in a sympathetic smile. "Instead of sitting and stewing, what about a walk to take your mind off it? I know an interesting place. Are you up for it?"

She worried about being late for the meeting's reconvene when the call came. "Is it nearby?"

"Right next door." He led her through the Grant Teaff Plaza, across the law school parking lot, to a well-manicured graveyard. "This is the First Street Cemetery. It's been here since 1852." Then he frowned, as if reconsidering his choice. "Is this okay, or is it too weird a place for a walk?"

"It's great." She warmed to him, appreciating his concern. "I love old cemeteries."

As they climbed over the knee-high stone wall, several feral cats scurried away and a flock of pigeons took flight.

"Guess they're not used to visitors." He chuckled as they walked from one antiquated tombstone to another.

She grinned back as she glanced at the ancient live oak trees. "If only they could talk."

"I know what you mean." He nodded. "Silent sentinels, trees witness so much history."

Again, she thought of the stately cypresses snapped off during the flood.

They walked toward an enclosed area, a family plot, where an immense tree had grown through and around the old iron grates.

The tree had finally been cut down, but part of it remained on both sides of the graceful wrought-iron fence. Angela shook her head at the evidence of the passage of time. Then she came to a dead stop.

In front of them, a wounded man in a frayed Confederate uniform leaned against a headstone. His right arm hanging limply, bleeding, he grabbed his injured elbow with his other hand, propping it up.

“Ma’am,” said the apparition, “where can I find a doctor?”

Swallowing hard, Angela discreetly shrugged and shook her head, mouthing *Sorry*. She glanced at Kent, hoping he had not seen her response. There wasn’t time to explain her gift to him before the meeting. *And it could influence my getting the job*. Then she froze in surprise.

Staring at her, Kent held his arm in the same way as the specter. Holding up his right elbow with his left hand, Kent imitated the Confederate soldier’s body language. Their eyes met in a silent barrage of questions, but before she found her voice, his cell phone buzzed. He slowly lowered his arm, took out his phone, and glanced at its screen.

“It’s Doctor West. They’re ready to see you.”

With a quick nod, Angela turned and rushed back to the museum. Several minutes later, she found herself sitting at the long mahogany table again. In addition to the previous interviewers, a woman had joined them. Angela smiled at each of the members, barely glancing at Kent. The vision of him mirroring the specter kept replaying in her mind.

I can’t think of that now. I have to focus.

As Dr. Greene called them to order, she took a deep breath, grounding herself.

“Miss Brannon,” said Dr. Greene, “after an exhaustive discussion, we’ve reached a decision.”

She tried to read his face, but his blank gaze gave no clue. She glanced around the table at the impassive faces. Straightening her shoulders, she forced a smile.

"Welcome to the team." He broke out in a grin. "The vote was unanimous." He glanced at the new woman and Kent before returning his attention to her. "You'll be working with Grace and Kent on a variety of projects, writing grant proposals for nonprofit groups. Congratulations!"

She broke out in a genuine smile, relieved the verdict was in. But as she glanced at Kent's face, she gave an involuntary shudder. *I'll be collaborating with him . . . on a daily basis.*

"I'd like to introduce you two ladies." Walking toward Angela, Dr. Greene motioned to Kent and the woman to join him. "Angela, this is Grace Lujan. She knows more about Texas history than the lot of us combined."

Smiling, they shook hands.

"And of course, you know Kent Shields."

Nodding, she smiled in his direction without meeting his eyes.

"Again, welcome." Then Dr. Greene glanced at Grace and Kent. "I'm leaving Angela in your capable hands. Help her with the paperwork. Answer her questions. Show her around the facilities." As they agreed, he turned back to her. "We'll see you bright and early Monday morning."

"Thank you, I appreciate this opportunity." After they shook hands and he left, Angela turned to her new colleagues, feeling giddy. "Monday. Guess I'd better find a place to stay . . . and soon."

"Did you get the student housing list I emailed?" Kent wore a cautious smile.

Angela stiffened. "Oh, I didn't realize that was you who'd sent it. Yes, but I thought I'd wait until, *if* I was hired." She gave a nervous chuckle. "Now I wish I'd at least made a few calls."

"Not a problem." Grace smiled at her. "My apartment has an empty room. Why don't you move in with me?"

"You wouldn't mind?"

Angela studied the young woman's serious, dark eyes and prominent cheekbones. Her long dark hair was parted down the middle, and her eyes twinkled as she smiled.

“Not as long as you help me with the rent.”

Angela chuckled. “Deal.”

“First, let’s get your paperwork started for the job.”

“Kent, have you got a minute?” Dr. Greene said.

As they turned toward Doctor Greene, Kent nodded. “Sure. What do you need?”

“More data just came in for the Red Top Jail. I need you to run some statistics.” Doctor Greene turned toward the two women. “Grace, think you can handle Angela’s paperwork and orientation alone?”

She smiled. “Absolutely.”

Angela stifled a sigh of relief. *I don’t need to start a new job spooked by Kent.*



After they finished the paperwork and toured the offices, Angela glanced at the time.

“It’s after five.” Her eyes wide, she turned to Grace. “Hope I haven’t kept you overtime.”

“Not at all.” She smiled. “Want to look at the apartment? See if you like it?”

“I’m sure it’s fine, but I should mention I have a cat.” Angela studied her. “Is that a problem?”

Grace laughed. “That’s why I wanted you to see it. I have a cat too.”

“Uh oh. Think there’ll be any territorial disputes?”

Grace shrugged. “I doubt it, but you know cats. We’ll just have to see how they get along.”

Angela turned to her as they left. “Should I follow your car to the apartment?”

Her eyes twinkling, Grace chuckled. “It’s a fifteen-minute walk.”

“Perfect.” Angela grinned. “Then how ’bout I drive and you navigate?”



Five minutes later, Grace guided them into the complex's parking lot. As they stepped out of the car, Angela took in the view of the two-story, red brick buildings surrounding a central courtyard with a swimming pool. Flowering crepe myrtles and palm trees shaded them as they walked upstairs.

As Grace let them into the living area, a Maine Coon cat came running to greet them. Purring, meowing, she rubbed against their legs, obviously glad to see them.

"Niña likes you." Grace smiled as she bent to scratch the cat's head. "She's a people person."

"I can see that." Angela chuckled as the cat sniffed her shoes. "Uh oh. She smells my cat, Frank. Let's see how this goes." Niña sniffed Angela's feet and ankles and then, purring, rubbed against her calves. "I think the cats will get along just fine."

Angela leaned down to pet Niña's long, silky coat.

"Would you like the tour?"

"Sure."

Wearing a tongue-in-cheek smile, Grace gestured to the small table and two chairs. "This is the dining room." Pointing at the couch and coffee table, she grinned. "This is the living room, and over there's the gourmet kitchen." With a lighthearted laugh, she indicated the efficiency kitchenette and then patted the bar. "Here's the breakfast nook." Then she pointed to one door as she opened a second. "That's my room, and this'll be your room if you'd like to move in."

Angela stepped into the bedroom, noting the two windows, bed, desk, chair, bureau, closet, and half-closed door. She opened it and found a full bath, small but sparkling.

Turning around, she grinned. "I'll take it. When's it available?"

Grace smiled. "Is today too soon?"

"How 'bout Saturday?"

“Perfect.” Grace gestured toward the breakfast bar. “Pull up a stool. Can I get you an iced tea?”

“Yes, thanks. What’s your job with the team?”

“I’m a grant writer, like you, but also a paralegal with a cultural heritage perspective. I’m Native American, Jumano.”

“Jumano? Is that a tribe?”

Nodding, she set two glasses of iced tea on the bar. “Though Grace is my English name, Gomda is my Jumano name.”

“Gomda.” Angela rolled the name off her tongue. “What’s it mean?”

“The wind.”

“I like it.” Angela smiled, wondering if a name infused a person with certain characteristics. Run like the wind. Candle in the wind. Restless wind. Blowing in the wind. Get wind of. Second wind. Wayward wind. Throw caution to the wind. Gone with the wind. “What did you mean from a ‘cultural heritage perspective’?”

“As a paralegal, I do the legwork. I prepare the legal documents and grant proposals.” Grace grinned. “But I also research the archaeological sites and work with landowners and agencies to protect the historical resources.”

Angela nodded. “Sounds like it keeps you busy.”

“It does,” Grace chuckled, “but since I’m doing what I love . . .”

“It isn’t work.”

Grace nodded. “Someday, I hope to be a keeper of the treasures.”

Arching her eyebrow, Angela studied her. “What’s a keeper—”

“An archaeological steward. I want to preserve Native American traditions, keep alive what’s left of my tribal histories, anthropological sites, artifacts, and human remains.” As she gestured with her hands, her dark eyes lit up. “It’s not only my history, *my people’s history*, it’s the history of Texas. I want to protect it, preserve it, so other people can learn about it, learn from it.”

“You’ve certainly found your element.” Angela nodded. “I’m envious.”

“Why?” Grace watched her.

"I graduate from UTSA Friday." Angela gave a dry chuckle. "You'd think I know what I want to do with my life, but I don't. You seem so passionate, so sure of what you want to do with yours." Pressing her lips together, she sighed. "Compared to you, I feel immature, juvenile."

Grace leaned back on her stool, seeming to mull over her words. "I wouldn't say I know what I want to do as much as I've been *called* to do this." She turned to Angela. "Does that make sense?"

Angela nodded. "But I'd like to hear your reasoning."

"I've known I was Jumano as long as I can recall. It was always understood but not discussed in the family. I was never taught about my heritage."

Angela frowned, wondering why, but did not interrupt.

"While I was earning my paralegal certificate at Sul Ross, I met the director of the Texas Inter-Tribal Native Coalition. He inspired me to learn more about the Jumano and Apache peoples of Texas."

"Apache?"

"The Jumanos intermarried over the centuries with Apaches and Hispanics." Grace met Angela's eyes. "I'm bilingual in English and Spanish. Even my surname's Spanish: Lujan. Probably half the Jumanos live in Mexico, and many of us share an Apache legacy."

Nodding, Angela absorbed it. "So what happened after you started studying your heritage?"

Grace's eyes took on a glow. "Once I began to identify with other members of the tribe, I started getting involved with oral histories, and that led me to the Lady in Blue."

Angela blinked, processing. "Lady in Blue? Who is she? What does she have to do with the Jumanos?"

Folding her hands around her knees, Grace gently rocked on her stool.

"During the 1620s, the Lady in Blue appeared to the Jumano people throughout West Texas and eastern New Mexico. She taught them about the cross, triune God, and baptism."

Angela furrowed her brow, trying to recall Texas history. "I've attended Texas schools all my life, but I've never heard of this missionary."

Grinning, Grace shook her head. "She wasn't a missionary. She was a cloistered nun, living in Ágreda, Spain."

Shaking her head, Angela squinted. "Then what do you mean she appeared to the Jumano people in the Southwest?"

"Have you ever heard of bilocation?" Before Angela could answer, Grace added, "If it happened today, it might be called astral projection."

Angela thought. "Wasn't Padre Pio supposed to have appeared in two places simultaneously?"

Grace nodded. "That's what the Lady in Blue did roughly three hundred years before him, between 1620 and 1623. When she was eighteen, she took the name María de Jesús and became a novice at the Conceptionist Poor Clares of Ágreda, Spain. They wore blue cloaks, and they never left the convent grounds."

Angela gave a dry laugh. "You mean she never set foot out of the convent?"

"Not after she took her vows. They were a contemplative order." Grace's eyes twinkled. "She never left the grounds, although, she did leave the *ground*. Countless nuns and lay people saw her levitating during her trances."

With a half-smile, Angela studied her. "You're kidding, right?"

"No. She led a life of prayer, penance, and fasting." Grace's somber eyes stared back. "In fact, during prayers in her cell, she'd fall into trances so deep, she'd levitate for hours."

"No disrespect intended," Angela chose her words carefully, "but how do you know that? Is there any proof?"

"Some of the sisters watched her through a peephole. Once they even saw an orb of light above her head." Sipping her iced tea, Grace's eyes sparkled. "It was during those trances that María bilocated from Spain to New Spain."

“New Spain: Texas and New Mexico.” Beginning to absorb it, Angela nodded. “So that’s how West Texas fits into all this.”

“María had always wanted to be a missionary, but during the seventeenth century, that wasn’t a career path open to women. Instead, she found a unique way to travel to the American Southwest, especially to the Jumano tribe of a one-eyed leader named Capitán Tuerto.”

Angela listened politely but could not help chuckling. “I’m sorry, but how could they ever prove such a thing? Especially back then without videos or at least photographs.”

“When the friars questioned the Jumanos about the appearance of the Lady in Blue, they described her as wearing a sky-blue cape over beige and brown robes. Recognizing the habits worn by the Conceptionist nuns in Spain, the friars showed the Jumanos the painting of an elderly nun in a blue Poor Clare habit. The natives all agreed the woman was dressed similarly, but she was too old to be their Lady in Blue.”

“Without phones or even telegraphs, they had such slow means of communication,” said Angela. “It must have taken months for letters to cross the Atlantic to verify these reports.”

Grace nodded. “Word spread slowly, but eventually the news of María’s New World appearances reached Ágreda, Spain.”

“How did they take it?” Angela scratched her head. “Had María ever mentioned anything about her ‘travels’?”

Grace raised her eyebrow. “Keep in mind, this was during the height of the Spanish Inquisition, but she described the lands and people she visited in her trances, saying she had taught the tattooed natives about Jesus and urged them to be baptized.”

“Tattooed?” Angela glanced at her.

Nodding, Grace’s fingers made swiping motions across her cheeks and chin. “They tattooed stripes and dots on their faces. Sometimes over their entire bodies. The Jumanos were buffalo hunters and nomads who traveled over present-day Texas and New Mexico, trading buffalo skins, salt, obsidian . . . and news.”

“Where in Texas?”

“Near San Angelo and Paint Rock.”

Angela shook her head. “I’ve never heard or read any of this before.” Narrowing her eyes, she appraised Grace. “How can they be sure this happened?”

Grace swallowed a smile. “Every year from 1623 until 1629, the Jumanos made a three-day pilgrimage from San Angelo, Texas, to Isleta, New Mexico, a small pueblo outside Albuquerque.”

“Wait a minute.” Blinking, Angela tried to recall the dates. “Hadn’t you said María bilocated from 1620 to 1623?”

Grace nodded.

“Then why did the Jumanos wait until 1623 to start making pilgrimages to New Mexico?”

“That’s when her superiors ordered her to end the visions.”

“This was during the Inquisition.” Nodding, Angela grimaced. “What happened to her?”

“María respected their decision. Her visions faded and eventually stopped, but during her last bilocations, she told the Jumanos she couldn’t visit them anymore. That they needed to ask the priests near Albuquerque to baptize them and establish a mission in San Angelo.”

Angela crinkled her forehead. “Did the friars listen to them?”

“Not for six years.” Grace shook her head.

“Why not?”

“Mostly, they were understaffed.” Grace shrugged. “They had only a few priests to cover several thousand miles.”

“Then how did they ever prove the Lady in Blue ‘visited’ the Jumanos?”

“María had described her visions during her confessions. Her narratives were so realistic, her religious instructor suggested she record them. She wrote of angels carrying her to foreign lands, and she transcribed dictations inspired by the Virgin Mary, which she collected into a set of volumes entitled *Mystical City of God*.”

Angela thought for a moment. “That title sounds familiar.”

“It should. It’s a classic,” said Grace. “Then María’s religious instructor wrote to the Archbishop of Mexico. One thing led to another, and several Franciscan priests were sent from Spain to verify María’s reports. As a result, they approached the Indians with an open mind.”

“So they built a mission?”

“Eventually, but before that, two priests visited their village, where thousands of Jumanos greeted them, carrying a large cross and asking for religious instruction. After they said Mass and baptized them, the priests healed their sick. For twenty-four hours, the priests prayed over them as they made the sign of the cross.”

“Seriously?” Angela studied her. “Did it work?”

“According to all records, the sick, lame, and blind Jumanos were healed.”

Angela thought back to the San Antonio missions. “Then the first Texas mission established was in San Angelo in 1629?”

“Not exactly. The baptism and healing occurred in 1629. It wasn’t until 1632 that two friars established the first Spanish mission along the Concho River.”

“I’d thought San Antonio was the first city in Texas to have a mission.”

Grace shook her head. “San Antonio’s Mission San Francisco de la Espada is often listed as the first since San Angelo’s Mission San Clemente lasted only six months. It wasn’t until 1690 that Mission Espada was built—and that was in East Texas. It wasn’t moved to San Antonio until 1731.”

“Why did the San Angelo mission last only a few months?”

“I’ve read several theories.” Grace counted them off on her fingers. “The friars were reassigned to East Texas because of skirmishes with the French. I’ve read the mission was abandoned because it was so far from Isleta, New Mexico, and I’ve read it was abandoned because of hostile Apaches.” She shrugged. “Who knows?”

Angela leaned back on her stool, shaking her head. “I’ve lived within two hundred miles of San Angelo nearly all my life, and yet I’d never heard any of this.”

“There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy.” Grace smiled. “And that’s why cultural heritage fascinates me.”