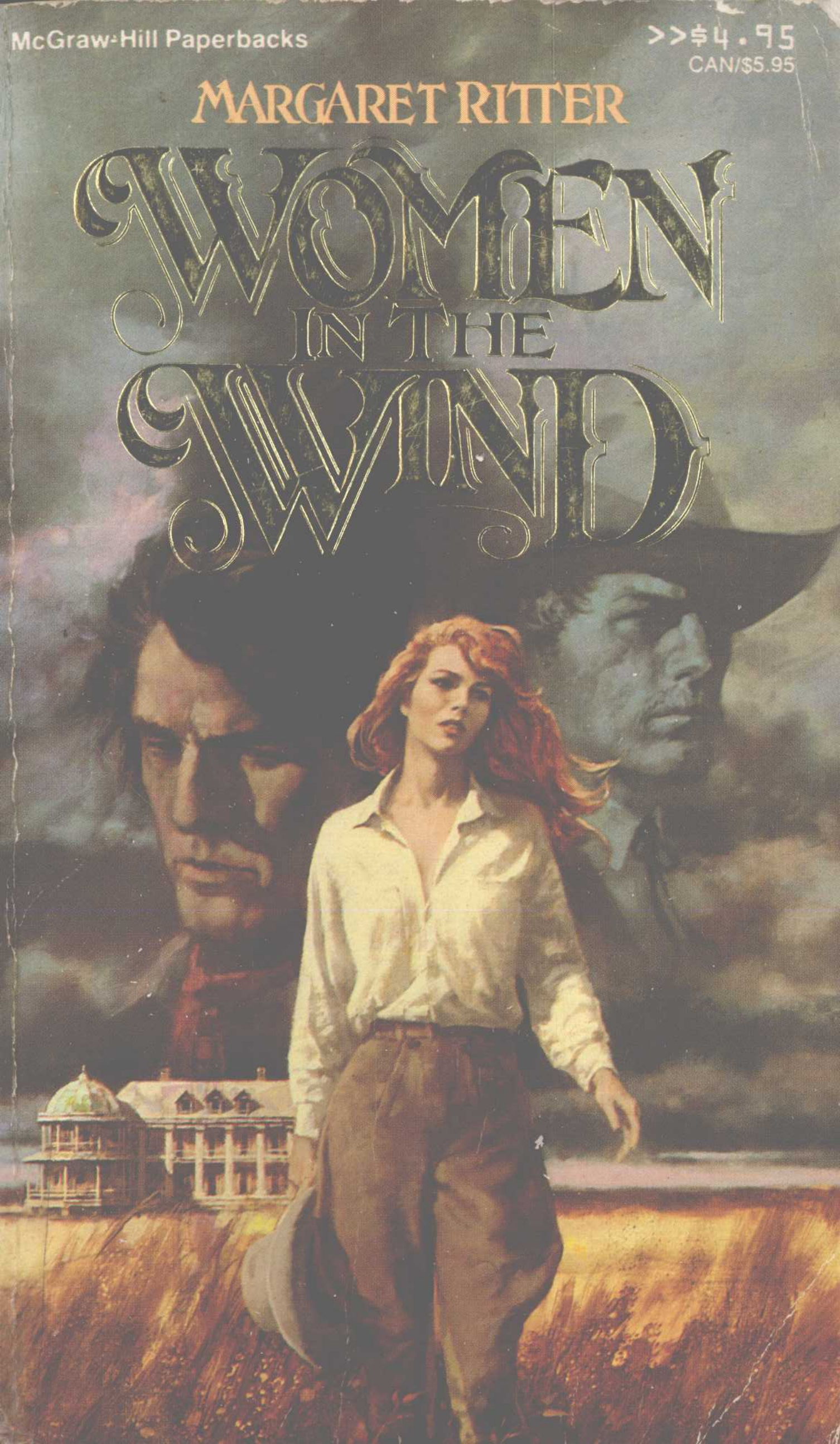


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MARGARET RITTER

WOMEN  
IN THE  
WIND





# Women *in the* Wind

Margaret Ritter

McGraw-Hill Book Company

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Reprinted by arrangement with Simon & Schuster

First McGraw-Hill Paperback edition, 1986

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 AG AG 8 7 6

ISBN 0-07-052982-5

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Ritter, Margaret.  
Women in the wind.

I. title.

[PS3568.I827W6 1986] 813'.54 86-2879

ISBN 0-07-052982-5 (pbk.)

This novel is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Women  
*in the*  
Wind

DEDICATED TO MY MOTHER AND TO THE MANY PEOPLE  
WHO HELPED TO MAKE THIS BOOK POSSIBLE,  
WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO PAT AND TONY MYRER,  
TED RITTER, AND HERMAN GOLLOB.

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*in the*  
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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MARGARET RITTER was born in Oklahoma and has lived in New York, Madrid, and London. She has worked at the MacDowell Colony and the Bread Loaf Writer's Conference. She is at present living in Europe doing research for a new novel.



# Chapter 1

On a blustery February evening in 1905, Reanna Lovell stood before a pier glass in the guest room of her cousin Lucy Marr's house in Washington, D.C., waiting impatiently for her mother to finish adjusting the skirt of her new green, watered-silk gown.

As she studied her reflection she found it unfamiliar and very unsettling. Her long, red-gold hair, which she usually wore loose or in a thick braid down her back, had been piled up on her head in an elaborate, formal style. She'd been corseted and laced until she could scarcely breathe. Her already fine complexion had been dusted with rice powder, and she'd been liberally sprinkled with eau de violet.

At last her mother stood back and surveyed her daughter with satisfaction. "You look lovely, Reanna."

"I feel like Florinda."

Mrs. Lovell looked bewildered. "Florinda was a horse."

"A filly, Mama—my filly. And when we couldn't afford to keep her, you bought her a lot of expensive new tack, show-groomed her and sent her to the fair to be auctioned off to the highest bidder."

Mrs. Lovell shook her head sadly. "I don't understand you, Reanna. I never have."

Reanna's eyes blazed with anger. "That's really why we're here in Washington, isn't it? To get me a husband."



"Reanna, I never said that."

"No, you told me you and Papa and I were coming to visit Cousin Lucy because she was lonesome for the sight of Virginia homefolks."

"Cousin Lucy and Mr. Marr are tickled pink to see us."

"You said you were getting me all these new dresses because you didn't want me to feel like a country cousin come to town."

"Your papa and I spent far more than we could afford because we wanted you to have pretty things. Most girls would be grateful for new dresses."

"I'm not most girls, Mama, I'm me. And the plain truth is you got me tricked out and brought me up here in hopes that, now Cousin Lucy had her own lumpy daughters married off, she'd help you trap a husband for me."

"That's so unkind." Her mother's lower lip trembled and she put one hand to her heart. "I only want what's best for you."

"Best for me, Mama, or for you?"

"You must marry sometime!"

"Why?"

"What else could you do?"

"I could earn my own keep."

"How? Be an old maid schoolteacher or a librarian? Be sensible; every girl wants a husband."

"I don't." She lifted her chin in a gesture of defiance.

"You wouldn't have any of the boys at home. You made fun of them; you laughed at them and drove them away."

"I laughed at them because they were silly and stupid."

"Well, this is different. Mr. Marr is very high up in the Department of the Interior. He's asked a lot of eligible men here tonight. You'll have the opportunity to meet men of substance and position—men who can give you all the things you should have."

"What is it, Mama, that you're so determined that I have?"

"A husband who will give you a home, children and security." She dabbed at her eyes with a lace-trimmed handkerchief. "Security is important for a woman. I know. Your papa is a fine man but he's a dreamer. He's never been practical. He's never been able to provide for his family as he would like to have."

"Papa's a gambler."

Mrs. Lovell gasped. "Reanna, I forbid you to talk like that about your papa."

"It's true, Mama, and you know it. I love Papa with all my heart. He's the most charming, adorable man in the Old Dominion, but he'd put his last dollar on the turn of a card. He mortgaged the farm to buy gold mine stock because some sly trickster told him it would make his fortune, and then he had to sell off land to pay up his debts. The farm gets smaller every year. I have eyes in my head, Mama. I know we're nearly broke."

Mrs. Lovell was silent, her eyes wide with shock. When she could collect herself she said, "You can be very hard, Reanna."

"I'm only telling the truth. And the truth is I don't want to get married."

Mrs. Lovell sighed. She felt as she often had before, that she'd been outwitted by her stubborn, willful, difficult daughter. "Then tell me, if you don't want to marry, what do you want?"

"I want—" Reanna began earnestly, "I want something *more*. I don't want to be some man's property. I want to live my own life, not just barter it away for security and let it slip by, little by little, so that one day when I'm old I'll wake up and find my chances to have my hopes and dreams are all gone." She stopped, hoping that her mother would understand at least a part of what she was saying, but she saw that she might as well be talking to the wind.

From below stairs there came the faint sound of musicians tuning up their instruments. Cousin Lucy's musical evening with supper afterwards was about to begin.

"It's time we went down." Mrs. Lovell pressed her lips together in a thin line and sighed. "Please, Reanna,



be sensible. You won't have a chance like this again to meet suitable men. For my sake, make an effort to be agreeable to them." Tears glistened in her eyes.

Reanna bowed her head and sighed. "All right, Mama, for your sake I'll try."

"And remember to stand up straight, and for heaven's sake, smile."

As they descended the stairs Reanna wanted to scream, not smile. There must be some way to have control of her own life. She was filled with a passion to live, to find adventure, to meet some great, unknown challenge. She could not, would not, willingly exchange those longings for the promise of security, a fine house and a husband who would keep her in a golden cage. She couldn't face the prospect of sitting silent in some proper parlor window watching life passing her by.

She knew how it must please her mother to see the admiring look on men's faces as they came into the drawing room. Even her father beamed and nodded his satisfaction that it was his daughter who was the center of attention, but his pride did nothing to comfort Reanna.

She grudgingly allowed her mother to parade her around the circle of eligible men. She was presented to a young lawyer with damp hands. She smiled. She was introduced to a sallow doctor already going bald. She smiled. She smiled when she was thrust toward a rich old widower whose belly was so large she thought he must have to order extra links for his watch chain. She smiled until she thought she would choke on her smiles. And then, like a bounty from providence, a man walked into the room who was utterly different from all the others.

It was more than the clothes he was wearing that made him stand out, although they were singular enough. He had on a money-weight Stetson, pointed-toed boots and a whipcord suit that had not been tailored in the East. Instead of a cravat he wore a string tie caught in a silver clasp set with coral. He was a striking man: tall, spare, flagrantly masculine compared to the tame men in this



room. He had a full, sandy mustache that drooped at the ends, and when he reluctantly handed his hat to Cousin Lucy's maid, Reanna saw his hair was even more fair than his mustache. But it was his eyes that were truly startling. They were a pale turquoise that seemed to have faded to that particular shade from squinting into a bright sun. The lines around his eyes betrayed his life in the out-of-doors. She felt sure he could see everything, even from great distances. His gaze swept the room and fixed on her with a look that was frank in its approval. She felt flattered and it occurred to her, as she watched Cousin Lucy sweeping down on him, that she was drawn to him not only because he was different but because for some reason of his own he disliked being in that room as much as she did.

Andrew MacClaren was not pleased to be there. He felt as out of place as a bull in a sheep pasture. He had been in Washington before on Chickasaw tribal business, but this was the first time anyone in the Department of the Interior had ever asked him home to meet his wife and friends. Why now? It didn't sit right, but then nothing about this trip had gone to suit him.

He'd been in Washington for over a week, trying to get an appointment. He'd been given the runaround, shunted from office to office, and when he finally had gotten an appointment it was for tomorrow morning at eleven with a man he'd never heard of. Just one hour before noon to conduct his business—that was cutting it mighty fine. Then, by chance, he'd run into Marr by the Capitol and Marr had asked him to dinner. Why? What was his angle? Andrew couldn't figure it, and that made him even more wary and suspicious than he usually was.

Andrew had always been a cautious man by nature. He hadn't survived in this world by being open and trusting. He certainly didn't trust any of these Washington boys; smooth, educated bastards, they knew every twist and turn of the law and they had used them all since the country began to get control of Indian land.

The law that had brought Andrew to Washington now

was one that forbade the Chickasaw to lease out their tribal land for grazing without the permission of the Department of the Interior. Permission to lease out his pasture land was something Andrew had to have. His and his family's livelihood depended upon it.

So he'd gone to Washington, hat in hand, wasting precious time when he should have been on the spring cattle drive. It galled him to have to come begging for what should have been his by tribal right. No amount of fine victuals or polite conversation at Marr's was going to satisfy him. He'd only accepted the invitation hoping to get a line on what kind of man he was going to be up against tomorrow.

And as he stood there in the doorway looking at all the fine people, he had the uneasy feeling that by asking him into the parlor these Washington boys were somehow setting him up for the kill. His hostess, Mrs. Marr, was already smiling at him and sweet-talking him into the room like a steer into the slaughter chute.

"Come, Mr. MacClaren, there are some people I want you to meet," Mrs. Marr said.

Andrew seriously doubted any of the people in the room wanted to know him. To them he was a country hick with manure on his boots. Some day that would be different. Some day he would come to this town to call the tune and watch them dance. At last Andrew and Mrs. Marr were coming toward the girl he'd seen from the doorway. She was all in green with a lot of red-gold hair piled on top of her head. She was easily the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. She was certainly the highest bred. Standing next to her was a woman obviously her mother. It never failed to amaze Andrew that an ordinary-grade cow could produce an outstanding calf. It must mean that the bull had some mighty fine bloodlines.

"Minnie," Mrs. Marr was saying, "may I present Mr. Andrew MacClaren. Mr. MacClaren, my cousin Mrs. Lovell and her daughter, Reanna. Mr. MacClaren is here in Washington from way out in the Indian Territory and we must do all we can to make him feel at home."



While her Cousin Lucy was talking, Reanna couldn't help noticing that Mr. MacClaren kept looking at her. His frank stare made her flush. She didn't know exactly where the Indian Territory was. For all she knew of geography he could have come from the moon, but her mother, who liked to keep up with current events and belonged to the Salmagundi Club, brightened at once.

"Oh yes," she said, "our club just had a paper read to us on the Indian Territory. Very exciting; one day there was nothing out there but a lot of Indians"—she waved dramatically toward the conservatory as if it were the frontier—"and the next day you settlers lined up, a gun went off and you all rushed to get your homesteads. It must have been a truly stirring event." Mrs. Lovell was almost breathless when she had finished and she looked quite pleased with herself at having been so knowledgeable. Mr. MacClaren did not laugh out loud but Reanna saw that his eyes were a mighty bright blue and the corners of his mustache twitched. When he spoke his voice had a decided western drawl.

"I'm afraid that was the Oklahoma Territory you ladies heard about, Mrs. Lovell. I'm from the Indian Territory, south of the Canadian River."

Mrs. Lovell looked bemused, as she always did when contradicted. "But aren't they the same," she challenged him, "the Oklahoma and the Indian Territory?"

"No, ma'am." He answered respectfully, but her mother was still not satisfied.

Undaunted, Mrs. Lovell tried another attack. "But you *are* a settler out West?"

"No, ma'am, I'm a rancher and a mercantile man, but I've talked to men who made the run and they say there was nothing like it, not since God created the world. That took the Almighty seven days, while out there men made the cities in one."

This was too much for Mrs. Lovell. She wasn't sure if Mr. MacClaren had blasphemed when he had invoked the deity or if he was making fun of her or possibly both. When she looked to her cousin Lucy for help, Mr.



MacClaren once more turned his gaze on Reanna. Reanna wished her mother would disappear, and she blushed scarlet, for she felt sure that he could in some way read her thoughts.

Fortunately Cousin Lucy came to the rescue. "Mr. Marr says it is only a matter of time now until the Oklahoma Territory and the Indian Territory join and ask for statehood."

"The Five Indian Nations have not agreed to it." Mr. MacClaren grew serious with no hint of his former good-humored indulgence. His eyes had gone cold as glass.

"But surely they will." Cousin Lucy seemed quite determined on the issue. "The Indians should be all in favor of statehood. It is, after all, to their advantage."

Mr. MacClaren looked thoughtfully at his boots. "That's a matter of opinion, Mrs. Marr. The Five Civilized Tribes each have tribal governments that must vote on the matter." And Cousin Lucy, sensing that things were not going to improve, took Mrs. Lovell away on the pretext of overseeing the punch bowl and left Reanna with Andrew MacClaren.

They stood in total silence for what seemed to her an eternity. She had never been at a loss for conversation before but now she could think of nothing to say. He was no help. She soon realized that if they were to talk at all she must begin.

At last she said, "It must be very different out there in the Indian Territory." And after a considerable silence in which he seemed to weigh and compare every factor he said, "Very different."

She waited to see if he was going to offer any further comment. When it became apparent that that was his total contribution, she began again.

"I'd like to see the West some day."

"Most women find the life too hard." He regarded her as if he were measuring her against all the other women he had ever known.

"Does your wife like it?" she asked, avoiding his gaze.

"I don't have a wife," he said, "if that answers your question."

This time her blush rivaled the red in her hair. She hadn't been very subtle and her penance was another silence between them. It made her angry to be so transparent, to be rebuffed at every attempt to make conversation. Most men talked of nothing but themselves. He seemed to be a monument to silence, hewn out of granite. In a last effort to draw him out she asked, "Why do most women find the life so hard?"

"There aren't many comforts for the ladies," he said, "and few of the necessities. They don't like being isolated out there with nothing but the wind for company. Things are better now than they used to be. We have neighbors and a trading town within a day's ride, but that's still not what you might call close. The climate is the worst. You can't count on it two days hand running. We have a saying out there, 'If you don't like the weather, wait a little minute.' Mostly it's the wind the women don't like."

She was stunned by the length of his reply. At last she had found a topic he could speak on. "I like the wind," she said, and for some reason her heart beat a little faster, as if she stood on the threshold of the unknown.

"It's easy to say you like the wind when you're safe indoors." His eyes narrowed as he stared her up and down. "You don't look like you could stand up in a strong gale."

She lifted her head in defiance. "I'm very strong, Mr. MacClaren. I daresay I'd survive."

"You'd never last a week out in the rough."

"I'm not some fragile city girl," she snapped. "I grew up on a farm."

Suddenly, without warning, he took her hand and turned it palm up as if to read her fortune. "You've never done a day's work in your life."

"I haven't worked in the fields, if that's what you mean. But I could if I had to."

He smiled and let go her hand. She couldn't tell if he



was amused or if he was mocking her. "A girl like you will always have servants to wait on her. You wouldn't find that kind of easy life in the Territory."

"There would be other things to make up for the hardship," she said stiffly.

"What, for instance?" It was a direct challenge.

"Freedom, adventure. Being a part of a new world." She was pleased with her answer, but he only smiled that maddeningly superior smile.

"You think you want adventure, but that's only a young girl's romantic dream. Grown men and women have gone out there with nothing but their dreams, and they didn't last long."

"I would last." She spoke too loudly and heads turned. She was surprised by the force of her reply.

"You don't have any idea of what you would be up against." His smile vanished. "I've seen women driven mad by the wind. Their faces blank, their minds wiped clean." Something in the tone of his voice made her realize that if she pursued the matter she would be walking on forbidden, dangerous ground.

"If it's so hard, then why do you like it, Mr. MacClaren?"

The tenseness and anger in him subsided as he answered. "It's my land, my home. I like the open range and the wide sky. I don't want neighbors breathing down my neck. I like to be free to do as I please." To Reanna the idea of being free to do as she pleased was irresistible. When he found his tongue Mr. MacClaren could paint a picture in words. It was obvious that he had a passion for his country.

"You must be anxious to go back." She needed no reply from him to tell her that there was nothing in this room or in this city that could compare to that country far beyond her sight or imagining. She'd been drawn to him at first because he was different. She'd spoken the truth when she had said she would like to go out to the West. Now she found she not only wanted to see the land, she wanted to see it through his eyes. She had heard what he had said about the hardships, but she