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greatest silver strike, they captured each other's
hearts and sought their wildest dreams.*

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SILVER WINDS

GARY MCCARTHY

SILVER WINDS

Gary McCarthy



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SILVER WINDS
A Bantam Book / February 1983

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For information address: Bantam Books, Inc.

ISBN 0-553-23127-8

Published simultaneously in the United States and Canada

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

H 0987654321

SEPARATED BY A DREAM

"Fay, tell me about your dream—is it all just money and applause? They're nothing but trappings."

"I need them," she said. "They're important to me."

He was shaken. "But surely they aren't enough!"

"What else is there?" she cried. "For me, I mean. Oh, sure, you can become the great engineer. And so you build monuments—lasting monuments out of wood or iron and mortar. And for a hundred years, your work will stand for all to see and praise. When *I* perform there is *nothing* left for tomorrow. When the applause dies, it's over until the next time."

She stepped back, her eyes glistening with fire and fury. "Know this, Glenn. I'm in it exactly for those 'trappings,' as you so arrogantly put it."

Glenn took a deep, ragged breath. He thought we were both air.

She slapped him. Hard on her cheeks when she sobbed.

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LL1-2/83

1

Julia Matson felt sick again this morning as she bought the Wells Fargo ticket, but it didn't matter. Nothing physical could compare with the pain she felt remembering. She closed her eyes; his face appeared and his touch seared her skin like a crimson brand that all others would recognize and, in the seeing, despise.

Julia stood by the stagecoach door and prayed the driver would soon tell her that she could climb aboard and leave San Francisco forever. Had she been able to afford ship's passage, she would have fled across the world in exile, but that was impossible. What little money she had left would have to suffice until . . . Until what? Julia bit her lower lip and knew she wasn't going to cry with people watching.

She was going to run before they learned the truth, which was even now being whispered among the city's most influential. How they would snicker, Julia thought. It would feed their gossipy tongues for weeks.

"Ma'am?"

Julia looked up, and something in the expression of the stage driver said she'd not been keeping her thoughts well-hidden.

"You all right, ma'am?"

"Of course," she said, far too quickly. "I'm concerned about the schedule, that's all. If I can't leave at once, I'll have to make other arrangements. Please. I want to go."

"I've talked to the man who hired this special run I'm making. He knows the passes may be closed but he's offered the company a thousand-dollar bonus if I can get it through. And I will, because I get a third if we make it. The gentleman must be rich and in a powerful hurry to become even richer. Name's

Bevis York, and he's bringing his daughter, Miss Holly. I told 'em what you said and Mr. York agreed to let you come. Mostly, though, it was on account of his daughter."

"Thank you," she whispered, almost sagging with relief.

He nodded hesitantly, acted shy for such a powerful-looking man. Then he turned and limped away to climb up onto the driver's seat. For the first time she noticed he was dressed in buckskin clothes.

"Julia, wait!"

She pivoted, feeling her stomach twist up as if there was a knife inside. Then she saw him, racing across the street, dodging wagons and yelling her name. A low moan escaped her lips and she wrenched open the stage door, knowing they couldn't leave without the Yorks being aboard. She threw herself inside, falling hard.

"Julia!"

"Go away!" she cried. "Leave me alone!"

"No! We've got to talk this thing out!"

She tried to speak, tried to say something and couldn't as she felt him lift her to the seat.

"Julia, I'm sorry. I didn't know they were coming. My wife swore she'd never leave Philadelphia."

She whirled, raking at him with her fingernails, wanting to tear and ruin his handsome face. She screamed at him, "William, you never told me about her. You used me with lies!"

"Stop it!" he yelled. And when she didn't, he slapped her hard. "I did love you!"

"I hate you. You're just like all men. Vicious and conniving and a liar."

An arm, thick and heavily muscled, encased in soft leather, blurred inside the coach and clamped down on the wrist that was drawing back to strike her again.

There was a cry of pain and then she felt William Allison lifted and saw him pitched out into the dirt. The driver roared something in a language she did not know, and when the derringer suddenly appeared in William's hand, the roar ended as bone cracked.

William Allison, who had probably never felt so much as the hurt of a blister, screamed in agony and rolled and roared with hurt as Julia gaped in shock.

"My name is Clayton James," the stage driver told her as he gently closed the door. "I can't abide a man who hits a lady."

Clayton James glanced back at the writhing figure and his face was taut and cold. "I apologize for not stopping him quicker, ma'am. You're in my coach and you're my responsibility. Won't happen again."

She nodded mutely, felt herself being steadied by his simple, uncluttered statement of fact.

"Can we go now?" she breathed.

"Yes, ma'am. I'll tell Mr. York we can't wait any longer. I'll make him know I've a timetable to keep. A stage to handle."

He turned, then changed his mind. "Ma'am. I didn't hear anything and . . . and your lip is bleeding some. Shame to see on one so beautiful as you."

Julia watched him limp over to the man she'd loved and drag him erect, then propel him away with a hard shove. Several minutes later, an angry Bevis York clambered heavily aboard, threatening to insist on a new driver.

But it was too late, and as the stage jumped forward and gathered momentum, Julia's glistening eyes saw William Allison as he disappeared from her life forever.

Somewhere ahead lay the mighty Sierra Nevada Mountains they'd have to cross, and maybe the snows would block them. But nothing could stop the hurting she felt and the seed of William's which multiplied deep inside her like a terrible reminder of her sin.

More than a hundred and thirty miles to the west, Glenn Donovan's eyes stung with grit as he rounded the mountain and faced the blasting, icy wind which raged downward from the Sierra peaks. The wagon tracks he followed were blown dirt-clean of wheel marks until only the rocks underneath could hold. The blizzard waited, seemed to beckon him with gray, twisted fingers of cloud toward a fate which had made the Donner party a name to be remembered for its frozen depravities.

Glenn twisted around until his back was to the wind. His numb fingers scrubbed the tears from his eyes and he pulled his collar higher. Behind him, the gale moaned off the peaks. Soft it was, a pleading. Come higher, it called. Higher!

He shivered at its sound and peered down into the treacherous gorge of the American River, a river which plunged its way back to Placerville, the town he'd left two days earlier, then erupted itself into the broad San Joaquin valleys below. Down in that protected womb of grass and rolling hills, the American

would merge with the Sacramento and grow warm and languid under the sun as its temper softened and it rolled out to San Francisco and the ocean beyond.

Maybe he should turn around now. Go back and wait until the blizzards slept for another year and made their peace with the mountains. He could return to San Francisco and work for the engineer he'd grown to admire deeply this past winter. Work for Philip Deidesheimer for a couple more months until the passes were safe.

But could he? Beyond the mountains was a new strike that he'd heard whispered as being rich beyond description. A mountain of silver! Solid information on its true wealth was difficult to obtain because, like all new strikes, the discoverers had tried to keep it a secret from the world. But, with California teeming with the played-out and hungry forty-niners, such a find could not be hidden for long. Even now, San Francisco and the gold camps were girding themselves for an onslaught over the Sierras after the first spring thaw. In another two months or less, there would be a wave of miners crashing eastward. Glenn knew from hard experience that no matter how vast the wealth, the mountain of silver would already be claimed.

To wait was to lose all chance of making a stake. He'd reached California too late to find gold. Years too late. But now, now he had the opportunity to reach this new discovery before the hordes. And he would, if these mountains didn't kill him first.

Glenn swallowed as his pale blue eyes stretched out toward the San Joaquin. Yes, there was life and warmth. Food and protection. He wanted to go back and knew he should, but could not because he had a dream that was even stronger than fear of the Sierra blizzard. Comstock wages would buy that dream; he'd go away to become an engineer. Then he'd return and build a railroad over these towering mountains and help to unite a continent and tame a frontier.

Glenn faced back into the wind, and lowering his head, he plunged on, a lonely figure bent halfway forward and sometimes staggering as the gusts played their tricks and jerked him from side to side.

Ever higher he crept. The air was thin and he concentrated on moving one boot in front of the other and not thinking of the cold. Up on top, they said the snow was like a shivering, bottomless cloud where you might step off the trail and just

disappear. Drifts a hundred feet deep, they swore, and some never melted, just grew mean and dirty in the summer with their bleeding and sulked in the darker valleys until winter came again.

By late afternoon, the feet were dragging, the legs unfeeling, and he knew he could go no longer. Rest. Make the blizzard wait until tomorrow or blow itself away in the night. He looked for shelter and found it almost at once in the rocks close by. It was a cave with a flat rock overhang and a dry floor. Granite walls framed three sides, and far back he saw a blackened fire ring where others had cooked and huddled for protection.

He unslung his heavy pack and let it drop to the ground. Then he exited the shelter, moving quickly while there was still light. With the threat of new snow on his mind, Glenn hunted firewood and carried an armload of damp branches, then stacked them neatly out of the weather. Only one task remained, and that was to get water that he could boil for warmth. In his pack he found a battered coffeepot and debated whether or not to go down to the river. It all depended on whether or not it snowed. He shook his canteen. Almost empty.

Outside, the wind had strengthened and he wasted no time crossing the stage road and descending toward the river, following a game trail through the rocks and trees.

He moved well, his eyes instinctively judging the best path, the surest step. Glenn didn't hesitate to admire the scenery, the tortured river which squeezed through rapids below. He'd seen it before, and always as a prospector down on his luck, searching for a trace of gold in the quicksilver western rivers of the Sierras. Except for this past winter, he'd spent two years trudging the worked-over goldfields, all the way from Rich Bar to Chinese Camp down on the Tuolumne River.

A rattle of gunfire jerked his attention upriver and he froze when he saw a buckskin break from the trees across the water and pound along a narrow river trail. The horse seemed to falter with each stride, as though it was exhausted and about to fold, which wasn't surprising since it was carrying double.

Seconds later he saw the pursuers, and the gunfire grew in intensity. The trail ended at the water. Glenn watched as the rider swung the horse around, and the smaller figure behind hung on tightly. Then the man in the saddle reined back and spurred the buckskin into the river. It landed with a splash, and slowly the current seemed to grab hold and the horse began a slow spin.

Glenn began running down the slope. There didn't seem like much chance anything could survive the rapids, but if they did, he wanted to try to save them. Especially the smaller one, who must be a boy.

At the water, he found a high rock and scrambled on top as he saw them coming. The man was a dozen yards out in front, but he was drowning and his strokes were feeble, his head barely above water. And he was far out in the river as he swept by. For a moment their eyes locked; then the struggling figure seemed to strike something submerged and rolled under the foaming current. But in that last second, Glenn hadn't seen fear, only anger.

He looked upriver and saw the horse and rider, and all at once he realized it was a girl fighting for her life in the water. Then the horse rolled, and for a heart-stopping moment its legs waved like broken tent poles. After what seemed like an eternity, the thrashing buckskin righted itself, with the girl dangling, her fist wrapped in the animal's mane.

Glenn peeled off his coat and boots as he watched the two careening down toward him. He waited until they were just above the rock, then dived into the water. The impact was stunning and the water ripped the breath from his lungs and drove icy needles through his chest until he thought his heart would rupture. Cold terror possessed his brain and he drove fighting to the surface, swimming frantically. The girl saw him, and when his fingers gripped the stirrups, she threw an arm out as the horse struck his legs and churned him back underwater. He tried to grab the animal, but it was thrashing so wildly he became entangled in the reins, and the harder he fought, the more they seemed to wrap, until he couldn't breathe.

The girl surged forward, tore at his neck, and pulled him close to the saddle. Then the horse's body jolted and he felt it scrabbling for footing. They clung to each other as it pulled them out of the American River.

For several moments he lay facedown on the gravel. Then he began to shake. He made himself push up from the rocks, and he saw the girl only a few yards away. Quickly he crawled to her side and rolled her onto her back.

"Are you all right! Miss, answer me!"

Her lips moved but made no sound except for a ragged breathing. Glenn knew she was probably very near dying, and that if he didn't get her warm and dry, she stood no chance of surviving the night—nor did he.

He tried to lift her but she stiffened with pain and he placed her down quickly.

"Miss, we can't last down here. It's almost dark, and in wet clothes we'll freeze to death."

She opened her eyes, and even though they were pain-glazed, he saw they were beautiful. Deep blue and exceptionally large, with long, tapering lashes.

"Did you hear me?" he asked, bending close.

She nodded. "What... what about my brother? Dade. Where's Dade?"

"I'm sorry. He's gone."

"Dead?"

He nodded and saw her bite her lips. Lips purple with cold. After a moment, she opened her eyes again and looked into his face. "My leg is broken."

Again he tried to lift her, saying, "I'll look at it up above."

Her fingernails bit into his shoulder. "No," she whispered, "you've got to do it here! Set it straight before I move."

"I've never done it before. Anyway, there's no time!"

She was crazy. Out of her head with the cold and pain. He pushed away, intent on getting the horse and packing her into the saddle. She didn't realize they were in danger of freezing.

He started to get up, but she wouldn't let go. "Please!" she begged. "All my life I've wanted to be a stage dancer. If you take me out of here like this, I might become a cripple! Don't be afraid of setting the leg. I'll tell you how. I've seen it done before."

"All right. All right," he soothed, trying to knock down her rising hysteria.

Glenn scooted down and grabbed her ankle; he was shivering so badly he squeezed it tightly in order to keep his grip steady.

"What now?"

"Grab my knee."

He was staring at the purple mass of distended tissue and wanting to look away.

"Grab my knee!"

He grabbed it hard.

"Now pull!"

He tried. Tried twice, and each time she cried out in anguish.

"Dammit," he swore, "it ain't working! My hands keep slipping. I don't want to hurt you anymore."

She raised up on her elbows, breathing fast. For several moments she studied the leg. Then she pulled her dress up and bunched it between her legs and pointed at the spot. "Place your foot *here*."

"Miss, I can't—"

"You have to! Do it. Put your foot there and grab my ankle. Throw your back to it! Hurry!"

He placed the broken leg between his own, knowing she was right and he had to do it the way she said or it wouldn't get done at all.

"Ready?" he whispered.

She nodded, her eyes round with fear yet bright with resolution. There was a trembling in her voice when she said, "Mister, no matter what I say when you do it, keep pulling until it's straight. Maybe you'll have to . . ."

Glenn couldn't bear to see her wait. He felt shamed by his own fear and so he threw his weight backward in one violent lunge, and when he did, her scream was like a blade plunging into his heart. Then it broke off inside him as she lost consciousness. The bone snapped back into position; he felt it almost pop into line.

Very gently his fingers smoothed along the broken place until he was satisfied. She couldn't hear him, but Glenn talked to her anyway.

"I'm sorry. But it's straight now, honest it is, and I'm getting us out of this gorge alive. You're too brave and young and pretty to die. I'm getting you outta here, and someday I'll watch you dance on that leg. I *mean* it."

He caught the buckskin. It hobbled painfully, but that couldn't be helped. If the animal died trying to pack the girl, then that was the way it must be.

Glenn bent to lift her, then caught himself in time. Maybe he hadn't known how to set a fractured bone, but he did know enough to splint one. If they survived, this girl was going to walk straight and dance. She'd paid the price and deserved to.

He sliced a rein off the bit and found two pieces of flat driftwood by the river's edge. Then he splinted the leg and hoisted the girl across the saddle and tied her with the saddle strings. Glenn hoped she didn't revive until after they reached camp. It was going to be a nightmarish climb in poor light—if he got out fast enough. He pushed out the fear that maybe she'd never regain consciousness and die from the shock and cold.

"Come on, horse! Move!"

The animal balked. It looked half-dead itself. "Come on!" he shouted, yanking on the rein.

It hobbled forward, and Glenn's eyes began to trace the steep mountainside. He had to find the fastest way up. Already the canyon was dark in shadow. To be caught on this tangled mountain in the dark was a sure death sentence.

It seemed to take hours, but somehow he managed to find the rock shelter as the blizzard raged in on them. Glenn tied the buckskin in a thick stand of ponderosa pine which he hoped would give the animal some protection.

Then he carried the girl to shelter, lurching wearily through the deepening snow.

It was almost totally dark underneath the rocks and his hands felt like chunks of ice as he fumbled in his pack for matches. The first one snapped in two and he hurled it out into the wind.

"Steady," he said through clattering teeth.

The second match spluttered into life but died when he touched it to the moist firewood. Three more extinguished themselves in the same fashion.

Glenn expelled a cloud of breath and shivered violently, as much out of fear as the cold. Two matches left—two chances at survival. He bent very close to the firewood, rubbed his hands together furiously, trying to bring some life to them, as though it might somehow alter the final outcome. He tried again. The match flared boldly and he touched it to a small branch, then blew softly on it. For a few seconds it seemed to take life, to bite at the wood and spark. Then it failed.

Glenn shuddered and heard the girl behind him moan. He reached for the last match, and a silent prayer echoed inside. As he started to pull it against the matchbox, he hesitated, then froze, knowing it wasn't any good. For a moment he rocked with indecision; then he whirled to his pack until his fingers located the books. He worked blindly now, totally without light. Each of his books was a beloved friend; each had a separate voice, a different and familiar touch, and represented a vision of what he hoped to be. Glenn deftly pulled out the volume he knew was entitled *Structural Evolution of European Bridges*, by Arthur Kurzeil, a German and one of the most brilliant structural and stress engineers in the world. Glenn had studied the man's