

## 2012 ENDING:

No, Harriet couldn't be on the front lines in battle. God had given her two legs and had let her keep them. But she was here with Calahan on the couch, his head now in her lap. No one knew and no one would know. Her plan took shape when she remembered the old Ohlone legend about the Indian who escaped from his prisoner chains at a California Mission by cutting off his foot. He had then become a leader of the resistance. Or that hiker who fell into a ravine and had to cut off his hand to get out from under a boulder, who became a popular stand-up comedian. She pictured members of his audience recalling his jokes in bed or at bus stops and laughing out loud. Men and women cutting their limbs in order to save themselves. People sculpting themselves like artists. With Calahan's morphine, she wouldn't feel anything. She would do one and then the other. She fondled Calahan's crew cut and remembered how steadily he navigated her that first night at Lola's, his warm hands on her hips and how each week now he seemed less enchanted.

Calahan would wake but his seven pairs of legs would be hanging uselessly in their closet, his eighth carefully placed on the other side of the room. He wouldn't be able to stop her. He would hurdle off the couch, place his hands on the floor on either side of his trunk, lift his muscular thighs up in an "L", and swing and hop on his hands, then scoot and roll across the floor, looking desperately for his Callahans or his cell phone. But it would be too late. And then he would leave her.

**The ugliness the media doesn't see. And the indescribable joy. The advantages don't take into account the suffering: frostbite in an avalanche, the lathe malfunctioning at work, tires tripping the mine; the physical pain and the humiliation. But she could do it, hero or villain, if only to live happily ever after, which was not a crime. The snow, Harriet noticed, had let up, just flurries of flakes, which were hard to see.**

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## 2013 ENDING:

Given the option of replacing perfectly good human legs with immortal ones, the more difficult decision was to opt out. She put a blanket over Callahan on the couch, drawing it up to his neck.

I'll be your militant Queen, she had said. God had given her two legs and had let her keep them. But she was here with Callahan on the couch, his head now in her lap. No one knew and no one would know. The history she taught was the history that inspired her. The Ohlone Indian who escaped from his prisoner chains at a California Mission by cutting off his foot. The Irish scout who fell into a ravine and had to cut off his hand to get out. Men and women cutting their limbs in order to save themselves. People sculpting themselves like artists. With Callahan's morphine, she would be able to bear it. She would do one and then the other. She had already tried it on animal bones she'd gotten from the butcher. Quick and easy. She fondled Callahan's crew cut, a Whistler's special, and remembered how steadily Callahan had navigated her that first night at Lola's, his sturdy hands on her hips.

She went to the kitchen and brought in Lily's backup generator. Callahan would wake to the sound of the electric saw but she would have placed his Callahans on the other side of the room. His other pairs would be hanging uselessly in her closet. He wouldn't be able to stop her. He would hurdle off the couch, place his hands on the floor on either side of his trunk, lift his muscular thighs up in an "L," and swing and hop on his hands, then scoot and roll across the floor, desperate for his prostheses or his cell phone. But it would be too late.

**She was ready to make the sacrifice, if only to live happily ever after, which was not a crime. She tied the two electric cords tightly around each thigh and leaned against the front of the couch waiting for them to turn purple. Then she cut. Callahan woke. Blood was on the wall. One foot every 2500 years, the river forged deeper into the rock. Patience with mountains is one thing, Callahan had said. But patient with our human fate? She cut some more. Callahan cried out. She did not want to wait. In a week, she would have legs with her favorite cowboy boots already attached.**

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2015 ENDING:

Same as 2013

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2019 ENDING:

All of Fremont County would be waiting for Callahan – at least the half that wasn't locked up and a few lucky prisoners cuffed to security guards. But Callahan would not come, an absence the town would never be able to explain. They might imagine him, off to the side of the track, poised like a strange bird. But something had already changed inside them. That afternoon, when the gun went off, and their able-bodied men shot off their starting blocks, they might look at each other on the bleachers, a bit more cognizant of their own frailties. Perhaps Canyon City had become a city after all, or at least a larger town, a town with a sense of humor and largesse.

Harriet and Callahan dozed on and off through the morning, occasionally touching each other experimentally like children playing doctor. "You're wearing your Harriets," Callahan teased during one of these sessions. He was laughing, but it was true. At noon, he sat up and announced he'd like to take her to Gunnison, to the site of Buckhorn Mine. He wanted her to see it. She laid out his lidocaine and gabapentin on the kitchen counter, while he unscrewed his Callahans and attached his Two Buck Chucks. After dressing and enjoying a light lunch, Callahan helped her onto his motorcycle and they sped into the high desert, which spread for miles to the north, south and east. To the west, the Sawatch Range rose up, a giant sunlit wall. She leaned into Callahan's back, tightening her grip around his waist, as if they were one person.

**Before turning west onto Highway 50, Callahan pulled into the Royal Gorge Bridge**

**look-out, setting his boots down to anchor them so they could take in the view. A gaggle of tourists snapped photos. Callahan put a hand on Harriet's knee, a knee she knew she would keep. The 1,260-foot bridge looked white in the midday sunlight, its giant aluminum chains slung between castellated steel girders, marring the landscape, but beautiful, too, even exquisite, the Arkansas River a thousand feet below. Its construction in 1929 had seemed an impossible feat, Harriet's grandmother had told her, and yet here it was, the tallest bridge in the world, linking what had taken three million years to sever.**

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2020 ENDING:

On the day of the fair, all of Fremont County, but for the fifth locked up, would be waiting for Callahan, even a few lucky prisoners cuffed to security guards who had made a special request. In a makeshift press box, a handful of journalists from Denver and Pueblo would be standing at the ready, cameras and notepads in hand. But Callahan would not come, an absence the people of Cañon would never be able to explain. They might imagine him off to the side of the track, poised in his Cheetahs like a strange bird. Or try to conjure him crouched with the others before the gun went off, even picturing the blur of his blades speeding around the track. But something had already changed inside them. That afternoon, when the gun went off, and their able-bodied men shot off their starting blocks, they might look at each other on the bleachers, a bit more cognizant of their own capriciousness and frailties. Perhaps Cañon City had become a city after all, or at least a larger town, a town with a sense of humor and largesse.

Meanwhile, Harriet and Callahan, wearing his eighth pair of legs, dozed on and off through the morning,

“You’re wearing your Harriets!” Callahan joked after one of their lovemaking sessions.

“I guess so,” she said, playfully kicking his shin.

“Ouch!”

They both laughed. With love, came pain.

At noon, he sat up and announced he’d like to take her to Gunnison, to the site of what had once been Buckhorn Mine. She laid out his lidocaine and gabapentin on the kitchen counter. After dressing, he helped her onto his motorcycle in his Two Buck Chucks and they sped through the high desert. Harriet leaned into his back, tightening her grip around his waist, as if they were one person.

**Before turning west onto Highway 50, Callahan pulled into Royal Gorge Bridge look-out, setting his boots down so they could take in the view. A few tourists were snapping photos. The 1,260-foot bridge looked white in the midday sunlight, its giant aluminum chains slung between castellated steel girders, marring the natural landscape, but beautiful, too, even exquisite, the Arkansas River a thousand feet below. Its construction in 1929 had**

seemed an impossible feat and yet here it was, the tallest suspension bridge in the world, linking what had taken three million years to sever.