October 1848

Lena fetched water and wood, stirred the fire, splashed water on her face, got coffee going, and made salt pork and mush before sunrise.

Max hitched Charlie to the wagon. Loaded dried and salted fish. He packed the beaver hides, *we need a good price for these*, water, and grain for Charlie, bread, cheese and dried meat wrapped in a cloth for himself. And coffee.

Lena carried the squash and apples in the skirt of her old calico apron and stacked them in the wagon.

Max added a bag of shelled corn for the Dragoons' horses, his mind figuring money. The payment was due.

A quick kiss. Max and Charlie pulled out. Lena knew worry rode with them. Worry dampened her along with the light drizzle from low-hanging clouds.

At $1.25 per acre, they bought two; the land provided. They cut timber, built the one-room cabin and small barn, built fence, and added a loft for the kids.

Lena milked the cow, separated the milk from the cream, and placed the bucket at the edge of Middle River to keep it cool. She walked through the garden, gleaning grains, gathered eggs, made bread, and fed the chickens.

Where is he?

Lena worried as she peered into the semi-darkness. She strained to hear the wagon or see a flicker of light in the north.

She was nervous. Unsettled. *The kids and I will be fine.*

The kids had been Wildin' out after school.

"Mom! Some pumpkins today. Johnny's dad was mending fence. He saw teepees by the old Ioway village. Miss Baxter said settle down. It's October. Indian Summer. They're here to honor their dead. Nobody settled down."

Lena couldn't settle either. She should be calming the kids down. Her imagination was going wild.

She ran out to hang the lantern at the gate.

Please Lord. Protect my family tonight.

Her favorite time of day was sunset with its comforting *day is done* rhythm. Not tonight.

She tended the fire to re-heat supper for Max.

What's that noise?

She opened the door. The wind pulled the door away from her. A shape covered her face and sealed off her mouth when she gasped.

I'll smother. Die. A muffled scream, "Run kids, run."

The kids tumbled out of the loft. They were terrified. Mom was on the floor screaming, kicking, hands ripping and clawing.

Lena felt small fingers pulling.

She fought back.

We're doomed. Max knows I love him.

"Mom, was it an Indian? Did you see him?" Her youngest screamed.

"Settle down, Mom. Stop fighting. That gust of wind blew the apron skirt over your face." The older, calmer boy grabbed her hands.

She dropped them. Embarrassed. The apron skirt fell from her face.

No Indian. She had frightened herself silly.

The noise? Charlie's harness as he jogged in the gate.

"It's about time," she huffed, fear turned to anger, relief.

Max could never understand.

The kids would tell the funny story of Mom and the Indian for years.