

## Excerpts from *Outrageous, The Victoria Woodhull Saga, Volume 1: Rise to Riches*

### From Chapter 9, Birth—An Ending

I summoned all my strength, but could not sit up. I was too weak. A glowing green light filled the room and I felt a strong hand gently push my back and guide me to sit up enough to pull the baby toward me and leaned back to think. I needed something sharp to cut through the rest of the umbilical cord where Doc had started. The nick was slowly dripping out my baby's life. The sound of it became my only focus, my entire life reduced to the drip... drop... drip... drop of the coppery-smelling fresh blood plopping onto the already soaked pillow beside my ear.

Nothing was within reach. I was too tired and drugged to try to stand up. I shouted as loud as I could muster, "I'll kill you!"

I felt along the slimy, blood-soaked umbilical cord and found where Doc had started to cut it, but for some reason had stopped. Was he trying to kill my baby? Did he know that it would definitely kill me? Was this his final act of neglect?

I could not get up. My strength was draining out of me and my baby lay cold and dying, drip... drop... drip... drop.

Half-crazed and with tremendous effort, I leaned up. I slid the sticky wet cord through my teeth and bit down on the umbilical cord, my cheeks filling with blood. It was tough, sinewy, and would not yield to my teeth. I kept biting, gnawing, and chewing on the thick cord. At last, a few strands of the cable broke off.

I put the cord between my molars and bit down again. I could feel drops of blood sluicing down my throat. Obsessed, I again gnawed, twisted, and bent the cord up and down, side to side, gnashing my teeth, grinding them as hard as I could. My jaw tired. It was too much. I had to switch the cord to the other side of my mouth and do it all again. I was losing strength, but I knew for certain that if I could not stop that deafening drip... drop... drip... drop, I would lose my mind. I would lose my newborn baby and I would surely die.

After excruciating effort the cord got thin enough. I put the bleeding cable between my front teeth and bit with all my might into the last strings of sinewy cord, grinding my front teeth back and forth, spitting the blood out between bites. Finally, it gave way with a spurt of blood into my mouth. I spit it out. More blood dribbled down my chin and onto my soaked nightshirt. My strength ebbed away. With my last reserves of will, I tied off the rope-like cord leading into the belly of my baby. I clamped down with my molars and pulled tight as I could with my hand, pleading with God that it was tight enough.

My last conscious act was to open and lower my nightshirt enough to bare my left bosom. I squeezed it until it leaked droplets. Exhausted and falling backward, I rolled over to

face the infant on the pillow and pulled it to my milk-stained left breast. The cold, blue lips latched on, seeking the milk, sucking hard. I passed out.

### **From Chapter 10, Manslaughter**

I held my frail sister, gathered my young ones, and approached the steps to the Fox River House with trepidation. I took in the two large signs with three lines each that framed the walkway up to the steps.

TENNESSEE CELESTE CLAFLIN  
CHILD WONDER!  
MAGNETIC HEALER AND MEDIUM TO THE SPIRITS  
and  
DR. RUEBEN B. CLAFLIN  
THE AMERICAN KING OF CANCERS  
WITH HIS SON DR. HEBERN CLAFLIN

I knew there was trouble waiting inside, but even I was not prepared for the horrors that the old building housed. Ever since the pungent smells of the various immigrants who lived in the tenement in Chicago where Byron was born, I had become sensitive to odors as a herald of the secrets buried or hidden in a place. Upon entering the one time hotel lobby, the fragrance of the *eau de toilette* did little to mask the familiar stench of sweat and sex. That smell of different cheap perfumes announced to me that my father, Buck, was continuing his predisposition to operate a whorehouse. These familiar smells could not overcome or evade the one smell that permeated the entire dwelling like a dark shroud... the smell of death.

I halted my forward movement and turned to run away, but Tennessee clutched at me and leveled her eyes to mine. She watched me dry heave, trying not to vomit my disgust onto the floor. My little sister braced me and with a firm hand on my back pushed me across the threshold and opened the doors into a drawing room to the right of the lobby.

### **From Chapter 11, The Valley of the Shadow of Death**

The silence within the dense fog was deafening. We could only see a few feet in any direction. The fog blinded and protected us at once. I looked into Tennie's eyes and knew her thoughts. There were too many voices calling out... wailing, despondent, pleading voices of young boys, virgin men, fathers and grandfathers... not the living ones, but the

wandering ones, the ones who had not yet found their way to cross over. I climbed in front and untied the reins from the open buckboard wagon brake.

Vaguely visible in the fog, Buck was running from body to body to see if there was a ring or any metal of value. He ransacked the trouser pockets looking for coins. He opened mouths to see if any teeth had been replaced. If so, he knocked the false tooth loose with the butt of his pistol and pocketed it. He did all this covered in sweat and with a look of crazed zeal. Buck would eagerly descend to the bowels of abomination for a trinket. It was disgusting.

As the sun started to penetrate the dense fog, it shifted and lifted slowly, limb by limb, body by body, grouping by grouping, to unveil the carnage and devastation of the battlefield. With each expanding exposure, everywhere the eye could see, carcasses of men and horses were strewn in an unholy geometry that splayed shattered limbs in unnatural angles. Diabolical configurations numbed our minds and challenged our sanity.

The fog continued to lift, the last cropping of this verdant valley fully revealed. The Grim Reaper had scythed a bumper harvest. Detached heads, severed hands and arms, shattered legs, an isolated foot, littered the field like shards of broken glass, with whole bodies marred by bullet holes and splattered in dark brown blood.

With the rising temperature and the growing vileness of the vision, the smells of death and decay attacked our senses. The smell of blood, the remnant, acrid smell of exploded gunpowder, and the putrid odors of rotting flesh fused together to assault our nostrils. Once there was full light and the heat of the day rose up, the humming sound of flies feasting on carnage, occasionally interrupted by the sharp, cackling sound of a murder of crows and vultures, attacked our ears. I felt bile rise from my stomach and up to the back of my mouth, but I knew that if I vomited, the others would follow. Then we would all have to dismount from the wagon and abandon the illusion of being separate from what surrounded us.

I swallowed hard. Of the fallen, some uniforms were blue and some were gray. The colors no longer mattered. Now, they all wore death.

I took out a small glass bottle with a cork stopper. I had prepared this bottle from a formula that Rosie had taught me back in San Francisco. She told me that European physicians used it in large, conical, mask inhalers when they had to deal with the black plague. Rosie said it would ward off any disease or infection. I crushed, boiled, concentrated, and combined distilled rose petals, clove, lemon, cinnamon, eucalyptus, oregano and rosemary to create the oil. It had a potent smell, which gave us some hope that it would work to keep disease out of our bodies. At night I rubbed our feet and throats with a drop of Rosie's formula.

I dampened a kerchief with a few drops and breathed in the powerful smell, then handed the cloth to Tennessee to do the same. She rubbed it onto the sides of her nostrils and on her upper lip, took another deep breath in, and then passed it back to Utica and Mama Roxy.

I took the reins in my hands and raised them to start the horses. They resisted, their eyes wild and their nostrils flaring with the stench of the carcasses surrounding us. I whipped the reins, and they jerked forward in a slow, cautious, funeral march.

We had rolled about fifteen feet when a shot rang out and Buck shouted from behind the wagon.

“Move forward and I will shoot you dead!”

I didn't turn around or engage the madman that was my father. We could be far away by the time he reloaded his pistol. I simply snapped the reins again and the wagon slowly began to roll through that valley of death.

Cursing and yelling, Buck ran to catch up with the wagon. I quickened the pace enough to force him to fling himself onto the wagon, but not fast enough to actually leave him behind. Although I mightily wanted to be rid of him, he might have had another loaded gun. With a loud bump that jostled the wagon from side to side, he landed flat on the platform on his stomach and at the feet of Mama Roxy and Utica.

“One day I'll just kill ya and be done with ya!” Buck yelled at me and stood to hit me from behind. I snapped the reins hard and he tumbled back down to the floor amidst a tirade of cursing, the intention of which was to send me to hell.

We were already there.

### **From Chapter 12, Loving Freely**

Five long days later, James Harvey Blood came to my chambers unaccompanied. Upon opening the door our eyes embraced. Soon my eyes closed as he passionately brought his lips onto mine. We kissed in the French manner, our tongues dancing and playing. We synchronized our breath. I felt his inhale fill my belly with fire and spread along my spine down to my toes and up to the top of my head. Our passions flared, but James restrained himself to the point of being exquisitely tender and gentle.

We shared an intimacy from a different world. He patiently let me undress him. He helped me remove all my garments, while placing little kisses on each new spot of skin. I lay on my back, and when he mounted me, I felt a union previously unimaginable.

As we continued, I surrendered entirely, merging completely with my lover. I welcomed the intermittently tender, delicate, fast, powerful, ravenous, intense, hard, soft, slow, and every other possible manner of motion. For the first time in my life, I was an equal with a man, almost desperately innocent, guilty, and completely in love.

That first time, when he was about to leave, James sheepishly reached into his pocket and brought out bills. Seeing my eyes widen, he quickly spoke his intention: “This is not a payment. I only wish to show my sincere gratitude and respect the consultation.”

“James,” my voice sounded husky from the passion, “money shall not pass between us, except what we earn together.” I closed my small hands on top of his big one, folding the bills into his palm. He nodded his agreement and then dropped to one knee and, looking up at me with tears brimming his eyes, kissed my hands. In that moment, he also kissed my heart and soul, which would be forever his.

Finally, my thorny stems blossomed and unfurled into beautifully elegant, fully opened roses. I felt that with James in my firmament, a man who wanted to listen to all that I had to speak, I became unflinchingly proud and confident of my body, mind, spirit and soul for all to behold.

### **From Chapter 22, Torn Assunder**

Before I realized it, I was standing and everyone was looking at me. I looked around and peered into the surprised, curious faces in the room. I tried to say something, but I was overwhelmed by the realization that I had never spoken my thoughts, or feelings, amidst such august people. I tasted bile at the back of my throat and felt my heart racing.

I made a choice. Instead of getting lost in my apprehensions, I focused on the roiling anger in my gut and the pain I felt in my womb. I wanted my thoughts spoken. I wanted to be heard. I turned to Mr. Frederick Douglass and addressed him.

“Good Mr. Douglass, you are a man of high education and broad experience.” I stopped and look around the room and nodded at each one present. “In fact, all of you are.” ...

“I must ask you if there is anything that I could do or say that would fully convince you that I completely understand and appreciate your circumstance?”

“Were I to tell you that I can fully imagine the pain and suffering of the lash whipping on my back and tearing my skin away, would it assuage your pain? No, sir, I think not!”

“What if I were to proclaim, with God as my witness, that I see all the ugly, craven, and disgusting indignity, opprobrium, injustice, and inhumanity with which my race has treated your race? Would that make your circumstance any less intolerable? Respectfully, no, sir. I think not! ...

“With your incredible ability at persuasion, could you convince me that you know what it feels like to be raped by your father at age nine, sold into prostitution to feed your family and later by your husband? To be repeatedly used and abused as an object created solely for the pleasure of men? No, sir! I think not!” ...

“Mr. Douglass, I stand before you both naked and unabashed as a child of God to tell you openly and without hesitation, that I will never be able to fully understand your plight as a Negro male. It is not within my powers.” I looked directly into the eyes of the powerful advocate before me. I appealed to his humanity and begged of him. “I ask you, most

educated of men, will you not confess, with the same innocence and revealed truth, that you will never understand the circumstance of being a woman?"

### **From Chapter 23, The Gold Scandal of 1869, Too Big to Fail**

I was dumbfounded. Yet, there it was, a single check for Seven Hundred and Ninety Thousand dollars! I didn't know what to say or think. The Commodore gestured around the room. He pointed at my inability to voice a single word and exulted to the assembled crowd.

"Well, I've finally found the way to make 'er speechless!" He beamed his radiance upon me. "Ininit enough, girl?"

Everyone in the room laughed. The men laughed to accommodate the Commodore, the women out of nervousness. I tried to clear the fog from my head. I thought I'd better sit down, but held tight onto Tennessee instead. Finally a thought came to me.

"What is Woodhull, Claflin, & Co., a Registered Brokerage?"

The Commodore's voice cracked, like thunder in a storm. "Ye all see, takes 'er but a moment to find her sea legs!" He laughed along with everyone else. "I didn't deduct from your funds for costs. The company is owned by you and Tennessee, equal shares, if you'll sign the agreements on the table. Ye ladies are the first brokerage firm in the history of the United States that is founded, funded, and owned by women alone. Heaven help us!"

Applause broke out. Tennessee could not support my weight. Colonel Blood helped me sit down. I looked up at our benefactor and started to weep openly. Tears of gratitude and joy streamed down my cheeks and I tasted the sweetness of salt on my lips.

"Now, now, young lady, ye are the principal of a registered brokerage firm now. Ye need to know we men feel helpless when one of yer kind starts weepin'. We don' know what to do. Now, now, no more tears."

"We'll use the firm to help women gain financial strength." I declared.

"Aye, I'm sure ye will." Cornelius Vanderbilt smiled his big broad smile and gently patted me on my shoulder like a kind father. "Besides, we've work to do tonight and I'll be needin' yer help and that of yours, Miss Tennessee Celeste Claflin."

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