**A Woman’s Courage**

*The True Story of*

 *Larcena Pennington Page*

by

Genevieve Anderson & Colin Cox

**Logline**

During the Hell storm that erupts amongst the three cultures forming the emerging state of Arizona; the former Mexican empire, the Apache territories, and the ‘manifest destiny’ European invasion, a pioneer woman - whilst ward to a young Mexican girl - is kidnapped by Apache warriors, stabbed sixteen times, and left for dead in the snow-covered mountains.

This is the true story of the grit it took for that pioneer woman to drag her muscle-ripped, skin-shredded body out of those life-sucking crags, and how the Mexican girl, aided by a young Apache woman, ultimately saved her life.

**Synopsis**

After the burial of their mother, the PENNINGTON – [father ELIAS, children: LARCENA, JIM, CAROLINE, GREEN] - leave Texas and head their wagons for California. Trailing through Arizona, they lose their cattle to a raging river, and rustling Apache. Forced to take refuge, they accept a contract, from the local cavalry commander CAPTAIN EWELL, to provide horse fodder, and repaired uniforms.

After a ferociously bloody battle, defending a trail of pioneer wagons, Captain Ewell and his company of FIRST DRAGOONS capture six APACHE WARRIORS [including NANTAN VICTORIO and the scout BACOON] and imprison them in a makeshift jail at Fort Buchanan.

Resigned to remain in Arizona, when Larcena is hit by the ravages of malaria, the Pennington accept an offer from Captain Ewell – now deeply enamored of Caroline – to take up residence in the palatial hacienda of the deposed Mexican governor. Their new neighbors are the wealthy logger HUDSON KIRKLAND, his partner, the recently widowed CHRISTINA QUIROZ, and her daughter MERCEDES QUIROZ.

When Kirkland asks Larcena to tutor young Mercedes, he also introduces her to the handsome logger JOHN PAGE. John’s passion for Larcena becomes quickly apparent, and following a whirlwind romance, with a few bumps in the road, John and Larcena are married. Mr. and Mrs. Page set up their new abode, with the young Mercedes a frequent overnight guest.

With her brother Victorio, and the Apache prisoners, withering in captivity, the formidable medicine woman, LOZEN, hatches her plan to rescue them. Led by NANTAN ESKIMINZIN, four Apache warriors [KURAK [bear], LUPAN [grey wolf], ASKADODILGES [hides his feet], and CUCHILLO [knife], leave the village and head for the mountains.

After he returns from a several-week sojourn at his logging business, the desperately lonely Larcena urges John to take her with him next time. Convinced by his wife that it will help her malaria, John accedes. When Mercedes then begs to go, they tell her she must get permission from her mother.

Cristina refuses to let Mercedes go, until John and Larcena swear ‘on my life’ oaths that no harm will come to the girl.

On the trip up the mountain, Larcena is struck down by fierce fevers and confined to the back of the wagon. Though his business partner, RUSSELL, fervently warns John it is madness, Page decides, for the sake of his wife, to stay in the forest that night. As the group set up their camp, hidden amongst the nearby trees, Eskiminzin and the four Apache warriors watch them.

At sunrise, John - leaving his pistol under the pillow of his sleeping wife - and Russell, head up for the logging mill, whilst Mercedes, and Dante the dog play by the stream.

Hearing a piercing scream, the aroused Larcena thrusts her hand under the pillow. Cuchillo bursts into the tent and grabs the pistol from her before she can fire it. Fighting like an enraged wolverine, Larcena defies Cuchillo’s attempts to subdue her. Admiring her courage, Cuchillo finally overpowers Larcena, lifts her into the air, and carries her, screaming and kicking from the tent.

Eskiminzin and the others hold down Mercedes as Dante races off into the woods. They rip up feather beds and hurl flour through the air. They are startled when Cuchillo emerges from the tent with Larcena and announces he is going to make her his wife.

Ready to move out, Mercedes screams as she is lifted onto Kurak’s back. Weakened by malaria, Larcena’s struggles to keep up with the group. Cuchillo prods her with his lance as Eskiminzin carves their path, and Lupan, in the rear, looks out for search parties following them.

On the trail, Larcena makes unseen footprints in the virgin soil off the path as she surreptitiously tears pieces from her apron. She signals for Mercedes to do the same.

Returning to find the destroyed camp, and Dante frantically barking, Randall races back to the logging camp. John and Randall then race horses back to the hacienda to tell the Penningtons and Cristina what has happened. Cursing Kirkland, Cristina collapses.

Kirkland, and a search party, head out to Fort Buchanan. Captain Ewell joins them with a platoon of his troops.

Mercedes nurses Larcena by the fire as, apart, the five Apache warriors debate killing the sick woman who is now endangering all of them; Cuchillo is vehemently against it.

The following day, John and Russel gain on the Apaches as they find the pieces of Larcena’s and Mercedes’ aprons.

Warned by Lupan they are coming, Eskiminzin gives the signal for the lagging Larcena to be killed. As they strip her of her dress and boots, Larcena slides down the slope of the mountain. Lupan and Askadodigles, racing after her, stab Larcena sixteen times with their lances. As Larcena’s fall is broken by a large pine, Lupan ‘finishes the job’ by smashing her in the skull with a rock. Believing she is dead; they leave her body hidden by the tree. Askadodigles takes up her boots and wears them.

The sun setting, John and Randall, following the trail of footprints and apron scraps, come to the ledge above which Larcena lies hidden below. Dante barks.

Coming to, Larcena, barely alive, cannot call out to them. Her many wounds bleeding, her skull fractured, she passes out.

Seeing Larcena’s shoe prints further up the trail, they believe she is still with the Apache.

Ewell devises a plan to cut Eskiminzin off before reaching the canyon where the captain believes they are heading.

John and Randall resume the hunt in the mountains.

Eskiminzin outwits them all and takes a different path back to the canyon and the Apache village.

In vision-blurring pain, Larcena, her wounds congealed by the ice around her, awakens. With immense effort, she cups snow in her hand and crushes it to her lips. The rising sun thaws her body. In excruciating agony, she drags herself onto her knees and begins to crawl over the jagged rocks.

Unable to track Eskiminzin, Ewell returns to the prison pen at Fort Buchanan and forces Victorio to give him Bacoon to scout them.

Eskiminzin, and the four warriors, return to the village with Mercedes. He tells Lozen Larcena is dead. His daughter, LILUYA - who has just passed through her puberty rite into womanhood - befriends Mercedes.

Larcena crawls, inch by excruciating inch, across the skin-tearing rocks heading for the landmark she knows points to her way out. Warm during the day, freezing at night, she survives on handfuls of snow, grass, mushrooms, insects, and the raw meat and blood from a rabbit.

Despondent, Cristina mounts her horse and rides - Caroline with her - to hunt for her daughter.

Having warned Ewell they will be killed if they go with him, Bacoon enters the canyon. At the village, he tells Lozen they will all be hanged if Mercedes is not returned. Lozen instructs Bacoon to bring Ewell to her. The scout returns to the ‘white eyes.’ He informs them Larcena is dead. The Penningtons are gutted. John, refusing to believe it, flees, determined to find his wife. Ewell goes with Bacoon to the village.

Larcena, suffering greatly, continues to drag herself across the mountain, overcoming encounters with snakes, bears, and javelina as she does.

Though warned by Lozen not to befriend the girl, Liluya teaches Mercedes about a strong root used for healing.

Negotiating with Ewell, Lozen demands all six prisoners for Mercedes. Ewell refuses. He gives Lozen four days to return Mercedes, or he will hang her brother.

The Apache prisoners are exchanged for Mercedes. Life goes on. But John still refuses to believe his wife is dead and continues to search.

After weeks of dragging her body across the punishing terrain, a skeletal, flesh-hanging Larcena drags herself back to the camp from which she was taken. She crawls to the stream and matts together a handful of the spilled flour. Stoking a small fire, she cooks the cake, and devours it. She crawls to the road. Seeing smoke, she takes off her blood-stained, tattered petticoat and waves it in the air. A LUMBERJACK comes across her, but not recognizing her as human, he raises his rifle to shoot her. She calls out, “I’m Larcena Pennington.” He rushes to pick her up.

Back in Tubac, the local doctor gives Larcena no chance of survival. Refusing to accept it, John puts her in a wagon and takes her to a doctor in Tucson.

Mercedes tells Cristina to take her back to the Apache. There, she asks for the medicine that will save Larcena. Lozen refuses, asking Cristina and Mercedes, “How do you not hate the White Eyes?” Liluya convinces Lozen to give Mercedes the healing root.

Mercedes returns to Tucson and gives the root to the skeptical doctor. John demands he use it. They wait and pray. The next morning, Larcena opens her eyes.

**Characters**

**The Pioneers:**

**Pennington**

Larcena [20’s] – the gutsy, tough-minded, passionate hero of our story.

Carolyn [20’s] – younger sister to Larcena; a kinder, gentler version.

Jim [20’s] – eldest son; pragmatic and fiercely loyal to family.

Green Pennington [18] – youngest brother, with all the youngest son traits.

Elias Pennington [50’s] – patriarch, strongly religious, pious man.

**Ranchers and Loggers**

John Page [20’s] – charming, principled logging mill owner; Larcena’s devoted husband.

Russell [20’s] – John’s loyal partner and best friend.

Kirkland Hudson [40’s] – the local logging magnate; Cristina’s partner, stepfather to Mercedes.

**The Mexicans :**

Cristina Quiroz [30’s] – fiercely passionate widow of

ex governor’s son; Kirkland’s partner, mother to Mercedes.

Mercedes Sais Quiroz [11] – highly intelligent and caring girl; Cristina’s daughter.

Don Antonio Gadara [30’s] – son of ex-governor; Cristina’s brother-in-law.

**The Apache :**

**Village**

Lozen (30’s) – brilliant medicine woman, tough, determined, unrelenting leader of the Apache.

Liluya (14) – an exquisite young woman of great kindness. Eskiminzin’s daughter, on the verge of womanhood. Wise and compassionate beyond her years.

**Western Apache Black Rock Warriors:**

Nantan Eskiminzin [30’s] – a skilled warrior and Apache leader.

Kurak (Bear) [20’s] – a mild-mannered, caring, Tonto Apache.

Lupan (Grey Wolf) [20’s] – a skilled tracker; a touch paranoid.

Askadodilges (hides his feet) [20’s] – the jester of the Apache.

Cuchillo (Knife) [20’s] – romantic and passionate.

**Prisoners**

Nantan Victorio – a fierce warrior and leader of the Apache; Lozen’s brother.

Bacoon – taciturn, excellent scout.

**The U.S. Cavalry**

Captain Richard ‘Baldy’ Ewell (40’s) – commander of Fort Buchanan and the local authori; an excellent officer.

Sgt. DeLeon – multilingual, Filipino, a soldier’s soldier.