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B E T T I N G  
W O M A N



*A Novel of Madame Moustache*

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*For a little-known woman of history.*

Born as Simone Jules, reinvented as Eleanor Dumont,  
and largely remembered as Madame Moustache

# PART 1

Simone Jules





## *Chapter 1*

1849

### **San Francisco, California**

I HAD ARRIVED; ready to start anew, with nothing but two trunks, a mouth of deceptions, and my broken memories. Opportunity whistled through San Francisco, where its gold was discovered accidentally, unexpectedly. One could've said the same about my coming here.

Unexpected.

I stepped from the ship to the congested pier, not as Simone Jules, daughter of Phillippe and Adélaïde, sister to Patrice, but as Simone Jules, unknown.

At once, my sea limbs failed me. A young porter was all too eager to lend an arm, his cheeks reddening at our contact.

*“Merci.”*

The boy, perhaps fifteen to my nineteen, blushed further, presumably at the exotic nature of my French, a novel response to the language commonly used in my *La Nouvelle-Orléans*. Already, the thought of the birthplace I'd fled nearly caused me to retreat onto the charter ship I'd only just exited. Instead, I took a steadying breath, my ribcage pressing against my corset's boning and the few remaining bills I'd hidden there, and gently patted my turban, concealing my unclean hair, to ensure its place.

“Is your husband fetching your trunks? If not, I’d be happy to do so,” the porter offered. The question was innocent enough, yet guilt flooded me like a failing levee. Every day of my six-month journey, waves of doubt and guilt had rocked me more than the Pacific. But here I was, alone, without my fiancé, on the threshold of reinvention. Wasn’t that why most people came here, no matter where they were from?

On the boat, I had listened intently; secretly playing a game with myself to name the different languages I overheard, relying on my studies as a child. And now, on the dock, I saw men with dark skin, light skin, and shades in between. The land that stretched before us was once known as Yerba Buena, an outback settlement of the Spanish. It had been renamed San Francisco three years ago, after a U.S. flag was raised here. Then, only last year, precious metal was found in its foothills and rivers. Thus, all of America, and even many around the world, rushed to the shores of this boomtown.

The dreams of my fellow passengers seemed as plentiful as the gold. As the only woman aboard the ship, I had kept a safe distance and eavesdropped on their words.

One man said he had no mind for mining, but he’d run a laundry. Those digging would need their clothing cleaned, would they not?

Another, arguing the same for whiskey, planned to open a saloon.

Countless others were dead-set that bonanzas awaited them. All those men who had tried their luck and left penniless were doing it incorrectly, apparently.

They said the population swelled from only hundreds to tens of thousands.

They said with enthusiasm how the gambling halls and saloons didn’t close for the Sabbath.

They said with less enthusiasm, but a competitive spirit, how there were dozens of men to every available woman. With

only myself to blame, I now fell in that category, a realization that made my neck prickle with unease.

I answered the young porter, “No, it is only me.”

“Miss.” He scratched his hairline, averted his eyes. “Are you certain this is a suitable place for you”—the boy quickly added —“as a refined woman, such as yourself? A husband offers safety.”

“I understand your meaning. Yet”—I winked, feigning a confidence I didn’t fully embody after months of insinuations and advances from the men—“it is only me, as I’ve said.”

His cheeks flushed again. “Please, let me call you a carriage and see to your belongings.”

On his thin arm, his jacket oversized, the porter navigated me away from the bustling bay. The rising summer sun warmed my back, a gentle push toward the shoreline, littered with wood shacks, makeshift tents, and was that a boat, on dry land?

I asked the boy, who spoke hesitantly and too softly to overcome the bibble-babble of men, horses and dogs.

“Louder, please.” I leaned closer to him, and I felt his body tense before his chest rose with a breath. “She was brought on land and converted to a warehouse.” How inventive; I noticed a doorway cut into the oaken hull. A sign read REST FOR THE WEARY AND STORAGE FOR TRUNKS. “See there,” my wide-eyed porter continued, “now they’re erecting a hotel on top.”

“Fascinating,” I said, the word punctuated by the men’s hammering. I’d never seen anything like it. *La Nouvelle-Orléans* was more established; the fourth largest city in America, even owning railways that weren’t pulled by horses. I considered, “But why is the ship on land?”

He shrugged, though it was clear with his smile he was pleased to be well-informed and informing me. “Her crew abandoned her for the mines, so she was only clogging up the bay. Plenty more out there. Hundreds. They become buildings,

get broken down for lumber, their sails used for tents.” He shrugged a second time.

It was impossible not to notice the volume of vessels, their masts—sometimes bare—jutting into the sky. I hadn’t realized many were crewless. Though I didn’t blame the desire of these men to scoop gold from rivers when the alternative was to complete a return journey to New York. Or in my case, to *La Nouvelle-Orléans*.

It had been several weeks into my voyage around the whole of South America when a fellow passenger had complained of a quicker route, one that left from New York’s port, sailing south, before travelling seventy-five miles up Panama’s Chagres River, then twenty-five miles on mules through the jungle, with its insects, poisonous snakes, and potential for yellow fever and malaria. But once the perils of Panama were crossed, there was the Pacific, with only forty-five hundred miles to San Francisco.

For those fortunate souls, their voyage was shortened from six months to four weeks; lessening the time spent with rats and weevils, with rancid butter and already breathed air. It reduced the threat of scurvy and cholera, with many passengers not surviving our trip. On my longer voyage, I still found unnerving how an unlit candle, while we crossed the equator, melted in my hand. And also, how the winds as we rounded the tip of Cape Horn had done their darndest to pull us toward the Antarctic.

I’d have preferred that alternative, quicker course. However, I didn’t know the route via Panama only originated from New York’s port. Had I known—and had I not impulsively fled my birthplace—I would’ve made the necessary preparations and taken the necessary week to travel the seaways north and sailed from there. The men had said the route was double the price at four hundred dollars. During my escape, when I emptied Papa’s safe, I had procured less than that.

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Soon, though, I'd have more than enough, as I assumed my family's estate had been sold in my absence. No longer mine. Another family filling its rooms with laughter and love, as we'd once done. I'd be forced to stomach that information in the coming weeks, after I posted a letter to my family's lawyer and received his response.

"Here we are," the porter said, stopping at a carriage. "I'll only be a minute to get the trunks from your cabin."

"Very well." What was a minute more, after it'd taken me those long six months to arrive, and when my future had been set in irrevocable motion, only four months before that, when I had come of marriageable age?

## *Chapter 2*

Ten months earlier  
*La Nouvelle-Orléans*

HURRYING, while trying not to appear hurried wasn't the easiest of tasks. Not when each step felt infused with champagne bubbles. Not when my left hand, in particular my ring finger, felt heavier. Not when I couldn't wait to gabble with my sister about it all.

The backward glance I gave my minutes-old fiancé couldn't be resisted. David stood, handsome as ever, outside our carriage, watching me, happiness written upon his own face.

Truth be told, I hadn't expected David's proposal this afternoon. My twin and I had been introduced to society only last night, at the start of the Carnival season. David wasted no time in claiming me. His grasp had been so sure and so steady as he helped me from the carriage after our ride. When he dropped to a single knee, I thought he wasn't equally as surefooted. But no, it wasn't clumsiness that left David in a position to tilt his head back and ask me his life-changing question.

"Simone," he had said. "Last year, I became the victim of a cliché, love at first sight. But that's truly how it was for me. Now"—he grinned—"don't dampen my sentiments by saying it took you longer to fall. I know I stumbled through our first meeting."

"I was smitten from the start," I had assured him, and now I fell deeper into a memory of our first words, the very first time David had come into Papa's shop.

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“We’re closing soon,” I had called out from behind the counter, without looking up from the books. I’d already reconciled the register and moved the money to the safe. Finishing the books was my final step before going home.

The response I received wasn’t quite words, but a noise. I looked up, but he quickly turned, showing me only his back. He sidestepped around the store, from one jewelry display to another. He fidgeted, wiping his palms down his trousers.

It’d been a long day. The sun would set soon. But I took pity on him and his nerves, plain as a pikestaff. “Are you shopping for anyone specific?”

He turned. Pleasing to the eye. It took me by surprise, with his light features, almond-shaped eyes, and a neatly trimmed beard. His dress indicated he came from a respectable family. His cravat was straight and snug. Perhaps too snug with how he forced a swallow. “Not yet.”

I found his response obscure, which I supposed was his point, as he followed it with a sly smile.

“Well, please let me know if I can be of any help.” I nodded to the door. “That is, before we close.”

“Actually ...” He took a giant step closer, the movement exaggerated. “I should be truthful about why I’m here.”

I closed my ledger and folded my hands on top of it, forcing a look of calm. Papa had left for the day. My sister held no interest in the work and came in only to socialize. I was alone in the shop. Nerves prickled. “I do prefer honesty.”

“As do I. You see,” he said, “I’ve seen you at the docks a number of times.”

His cheeks reddened, obvious even on his already flushed skin. The day was warm. I guessed he was of Irish descent. Many came to Louisiana decades ago because of persecution. Those who could emigrate—who had the resources to manage the journey—became financiers, doctors, attorneys, or worked in printing, journalism. Others, who lacked the resources,

came to the American colonies as indentured servants, taking on roles of farm laborers or domestic servants or the rare apprenticeship with a craftsman.

He went on, “The fellas down at the docks said how you worked at your father’s shop. One said your name was Simone?”

After a pause: “Yes.”

Encouraged, he said, “Well, this was the fifth store I tried.”

I laughed, for a multitude of reasons, one of which was that this young man meant me no harm. He meant to woo me. Which, he couldn’t, not until my coming-out party. But I daresay I liked his purposefulness. His gumption. Many of those Irish immigrants I’d mentioned had swiftly integrated into *La Nouvelle-Orléans’s* society by marrying Creoles. Perhaps it was their assertiveness as well. Still, I teased him, “I’m not certain you’re supposed to admit that you went to such great lengths.”

He met my smile. We seemed of a similar age, seventeen or so. “I know I should’ve waited for a proper introduction, but I truly do need a watch. For work,” he added.

“Let me guess, a businessman?”

He nodded. “Port trade.”

“Another guess, your first job?”

“First one of consequence. Is it that obvious?”

I laughed. Papa would approve of his line of work. I did, too, but I hadn’t wanted to show this boy too much approval. “I’d be happy to help you find a watch. Tomorrow.” Reticule and shop keys in hand, I rounded the counter and led him toward the door. “As I said, we are about to close.”

“Tomorrow, then, when your father is also here. I’d like to see you again.”

I stopped myself from returning the sentiment. Instead, I offered, “Very well. But on one condition.”

He fidgeted once more. “Of course.”

“First, you must tell me your name.”

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He closed his eyes at his mistake, missing my smile. “David Tobin.”

And soon, I thought as I emerged from my memories and neared my family’s front door, I was to become Madame Tobin. I entered my home and went straight for the parlor to tell my sister of David’s proposal. Patrice’s head turned, from where she sat at the card table.

She knew in an instant—and so did I—that we shared identical news.

“David,” she whispered.

“And your Charles,” I responded, awe in my voice.

I ran to her and we clasped our jeweled hands. We fell into a fit of giggles, as if we were five years old again sharing a secret no one else knew. I hadn’t realized our oldest girlfriend Sophie was also in the room until she spoke. “You mean to tell me you both received proposals this very day? How delighted your mother will be.”

Maman was delighted, indeed. In fact, she threw herself into preparations straight away, beginning by telling every soul in the French Quarter who possessed ears about the engagements of her shining jewels. Maman never told us who was born first. “That matters little,” she had said. “What matters is you’re a pair. You complete one another, see?” She named us as such: Patrice’s name meaning *clear-sighted* and mine *one who hears*.

That night, we dressed for sleep, but we both knew sleep was far off. Patrice moved from her bed to mine, lying so close we may’ve been adjoined. She spoke into the darkness, “This must be a dream.”

“Do you think the boys were in cahoots, proposing like that?”

“Papa says they were not. They came to him separately. But they surely didn’t waste any time, both proposing the first night possible after our party.”

I smiled at the ceiling. "Can you imagine all that's to come?"

Patrice squeezed my hand. "We'll live side by side."

"Perhaps add an interior door between our two homes."

Her head nodded next to mine. "That'd surely make things simpler. Our children can come and go, as if it's one big home."

I asked, "Two children?"

"Each. *Oui*."

"They'll have brown eyes."

"Brown hair."

"Our olive skin," I said.

"Shouldn't we factor in the appearances of our husbands, too?"

"*Non*."

She laughed and I felt her roll to her side to face me. "And it's all to begin on our wedding day. We'll have it together, won't we?"

"As if there was ever a question of that."

As winter progressed, so did our wedding plans, set for the spring. I was continually overjoyed at the *idée fixe* of a joint wedding with Patrice. However, a better word than *sulky* couldn't have been found to explain David's reaction to the mirrored proposal, and more so to the double wedding.

"But don't you wish the day to be special for us?" David asked me. He'd called on me, and now wandered my parlor, his distraction evident.

I watched from a settee as he flipped through one of Papa's books and countered, "I can't reason how sharing the day with Patrice will make ours any less special."

David's idle flipping of pages continued and the tip of his tongue poked from his mouth while he thought. With a thud, he returned the book, then sat beside me. David took my hands, fingering my engagement ring. "I understand you are close with your sister."

“My twin.”

Nearly every memory of mine was intertwined with Patrice’s. Even now, the simple act of sitting on this settee had the ability to rouse the recollection of Patrice and I—identical from bow to toe—perched here, our matching petticoats surrounding us like clouds, while we giggled and watched Maman play cards with friends.

“Yes. Only, Simone, I see our wedding as the start of *our* life together. Can we not have it for ourselves?”

The honest answer, no. Maman’s planning had progressed too far, the wedding within the month, and she saw nothing greater than her two jewels shining together. I didn’t disagree. Our dresses, nearly identical save for embellishments we’d chosen separately, already hung in our bedroom. But I also didn’t wish to bring the hammer down on my fiancé’s wishes too abruptly. I fibbed, “I could try to talk to Maman. I didn’t realize the ceremony meant such a great deal to you.”

“How could it not?” He checked his watch. David was set to meet a stagecoach for an out-of-town business endeavor. I had plans, as well, but to meet my family at the opera. I’d yet to change. “If the wedding is shared, does that not set precedent?”

“For what?”

He was slow to answer, “For everything.”

“David, dear, I’d like to understand your worry, but it’s eluding me. *Dis-moi.*”

His right eyebrow rose slightly higher than his left, as it so often did when I spoke French.

I clarified, “Please tell me. It’s obvious this is important to you.”

“Couldn’t we marry first? I proposed first.”

“By mere minutes, if at all.”

He licked his lips. “Our future is important, is all. The wedding, the shop—”

“The shop?”

Papa’s grandfather clock chimed, announcing the quarter hour. We both turned to look at it, as if the device was also saying, *you’ll both be late*.

“David,” I said, “what does Papa’s shop have to do with proposing first?”

“Because ...” He dropped his head, then met my eyes. “I thought it was to become ours.”

I nodded. Papa had told us as much over brandy one evening. Then, it dawned on me. “It’s not about our wedding being special, is it? It’s about whoever marries first. You’re huffy over whether or not you still gain to inherit the store. You’ve always showed such a great interest in it.”

Naturally, he’d come by the store to see me. But he had also joined Papa in his workshop. They had put their heads together. They tinkered over gears. They appraised merchandise. Quite simply, they talked shop. Patrice’s Charles never did the same, his interest in medicine. Patrice’s interests also lay elsewhere. So why David felt this concern caused nothing but my irritation. I stood from the settee and David reached for me. A quick step thwarted his efforts. “You wish to marry first,” I said into the window’s panes, seeing only his reflection. “You believe that if Patrice and Charles marry first—or even at the same time—then Charles may get a portion of the family store.”

“Simone, I—” He let the remainder drop like a leaf. “Please don’t ever think I pursued you only for your Papa’s store.”

“I never did.” Our courtship had consisted of laughter, stolen kisses, and entertaining banter. But now I wondered if he had proposed so quickly only for his own gains. In an attempt to secure his stake in Papa’s shop. And even to achieve the next level in our intimacy. Once we’d been promised to each other, neither of us had wanted to wait until the wedding. With a sigh, I faced him. “We’ll continue this

conversation later. We both have someplace to be.”

Like a puppy that'd been kicked, David accepted my dismissal. He'd be doubly sorry if he missed his coach; his business ventures clearly were important to him. And I turned my attention to what was important to me: my family and our evening at the opera. I dressed as quickly as possible, already minutes late, and ventured toward the *Théâtre d'Orléans* off Bourbon Street.

I was rounding Jackson Square, still two blocks from the theater, when I heard the sounds of commotion. There was shouting. Unrest. Over the buildings, a glow lit up the darkening sky. It was all happening in the direction I was going. I hustled my heavy skirts and quickened my pace, my heartbeat matching my stride. The air thickened as my breathing labored. Others hurried alongside me. We eyed each other with curiosity, but no one spoke, as if not wanting to voice the horrible event awaiting us. Or, more likely, give voice to which building, in particular, was in flames.

As I overtook a hotel, the last obstacle obscuring my view of the theater, my worst fears were realized. Smoke poured from the eight upper windows of the *Théâtre d'Orléans*. Its arched entrances spewed flames.

For a moment, I couldn't bring myself to go any closer. A horse-drawn fire truck arrived. Men scurried. They extended a hose. They pumped. I stood on wobbly legs and watched as the water streamed toward the arched entryways. Their efforts seemed to only enhance the flames, where it flicked. The fire danced. The fire, I realized now with a horrified gasp, wasn't letting anyone in or out of the doors.

Someone brushed my shoulder as they ran past. I stumbled, continued stumbling, until I was running. “Monsieur,” I called after him. “Did the people get out?”

He didn't answer. I called to whoever would listen, “Where are the people who were inside?” Frantically I searched the

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faces for one identical to mine, for my parents', for Charles's. I saw neighbors. I saw other business owners. I recognized a girl from the charm school I'd attended. I put my weight on them all and asked if they'd seen my family. No one had. My former classmate clutched me back and blathered on, but I couldn't comprehend her words beyond how her maman also had attended this evening.

Clutching each other, we searched. But the faces and clothing outside the theater weren't dirtied by soot or ash. Those faces only displayed sheens of sweat. Hands covered their mouths. Tears leaked from their eyes. One woman was on her knees, praying. I had a mind to join her, to pray and plea that my family had arrived late as I had. My family couldn't be inside, where no one was bursting free.

With an ear-splitting pop, the theater's insides gave way. The finality of the sound released a sob and turned my bones to butter. I went limp in my classmate's arms and collapsed on the cobble.

## Chapter 3

MY HEAD SCREAMED AT ME, from when I had crumpled outside the theater and from all it had endured in the few days since. Sophie sat patiently across from me in my parlor. My friend's face held a sorrowful expression, but with a forced smile. It was as if she wanted to comfort me and uplift me simultaneously. I appreciated her efforts.

On my side of the card table, I shuffled a deck, performing the second-natured motion. Card playing preceded the majority of my extensive schooling, learned from years of watching Maman play *vingt-et-un* with friends. She'd take bets, deal the cards, sip on champagne. It was all in good fun, though she regularly had provoked her friends' card totals to go beyond twenty-one to cause them to lose. I regularly had done the same.

Today, I only shuffled. I couldn't bring myself to deal, not with Patrice's chair empty. Staring at the upholstered chair, it was as if it was the first time I had ever seen it. Had I ever played without my sister? I must've. A time when either she or I was ill? But I couldn't remember such a moment.

"Simone," Sophie said, her voice gentle. "How are you feeling today?"

"Tired," I said simply. I tended to have trouble sleeping at night, resembling Maman in that regard, but now sleep was even harder to find. Sleep was plagued by the sound of a deafening pop.

Sophie nodded, using the time to perhaps find the correct words. "I can imagine. Yesterday was...."

A wake, a burial at St. Louis Cemetery, a houseful of people continuing to pay their respects for my deceased family and for me—the newly created orphan who’d skirted death for something so frivolous as tardiness. Now here I was, upon Sophie’s insistence, attempting something habitual.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I thought a game would lift your spirits.”

Her motives weren’t unjustified. But I’d lost my *joie de vivre* and I wanted nothing more than to be elsewhere, anywhere but in this room of reminders.

Beside me lay Papa’s last will and testament. The papers were read to me this morning. I’d known Papa intended to pass his business to me, but today I saw his wishes, in black in white. The shop was to be transferred to David Tobin, Simone Tobin.

As it was, his directive was premature. I was still Simone Jules. Only, Simone Jules was a daughter and a sister. Simone Jules wasn’t set to become Madame Tobin for another twenty-three days, in the same moments that Patrice took Charles’s name. Children were to follow. A shared future was to come, that no longer would. Who was I now, I wondered, if not the Simone Jules I’ve always been and not yet Simone Tobin, the wife, the mother, the shopkeeper?

I knocked the deck of cards against the table, the thud consuming the ticking of Papa’s grandfather clock. I once found comfort in the steady din of it. Now it roared in my aching head, sounding too loud.

Sophie opened her mouth, but the electric doorbell chimed. My head snapped in the sound’s direction. Yesterday, I had asked for the wires to be snapped, cut, whatever needed to be done to make the noise stop. The mourners and sympathizers meant well enough, but the noise. Oh how that noise had taken on a life all its own.

*They’re dead.*

*They're dead.*

It appeared the doorbell had been put back together. The butler now stood at the parlor's doorway. "Mr. Tobin is here."

David's hurried entrance into the room saved me from deciding if I desired to see him or not. With him out of town, I hadn't since we bickered. "Simone." He rushed to me, lifting me by the elbows and into his arms. He smelled of springtime perspiration and day-old clothing. "I came as soon as I heard. Your family ... all those people..." His head shook into mine. I shuddered a breath, willing myself not to cry. Not to feel the guilt of my own accidental survival, unscathed, beyond a burn in my throat and the gaping fissure in my heart. But my heart still beat. For what, I didn't feel certain.

"Simone," David repeated. He pulled back, ran a thumb down my cheek. "I'm sorry I've been unable to be with you these past days."

It was fine; I held no resentment that he was conducting business a town away while my life came undone and foreign to me. I messaged him the information, and based on his arrival time, he'd come straight away. Even still, I wasn't able to look at him, and not because we had quarreled. It was because I couldn't see David without seeing Patrice's Charles.

It made little sense. David was light where Charles was dark. David's eyes were blue, Charles were a gray. David was a shorter height, closer to my own, while Charles was tall, towering over my sister.

But even while it felt senseless, the rationale was built—layer by layer—by the fact that David was still here, while Patrice and Charles were not. How would I ever be able to stand at an altar meant for four?

I turned away, fingering my engagement ring, and went to the window. I peered out at a horse and carriage, a couple arm in arm, another row of three-story homes, but my gaze remained unfocused. My breath clouded the window. "I need

air," I declared, my voice's volume too high.

David crossed the room in giant steps. "Simone?"

I looked from him to Sophie. "I'd like to go alone," I said with a slight raise of my palm. "There's no need to worry; I'll be back before twilight."

Outside, humidity hung in the air. I began walking, any which direction; it mattered little. It was the docks at the Mississippi where my feet led me, a place I so often had gone with Papa, him overseeing the unloading of jewelry, silverware, and other goods he purchased for the store. With a mind for numbers, I had helped him take inventory and keep the books. I'd been his assistant as he assembled the gears in his clocks.

I quickened my pace, an aimless escape, not stopping until my stomach hit a stack of crates. My hands flung on top. I dropped my head to my arms, my forehead coming to rest on the gold-dusted watch my Papa had given me for my eighteenth birthday. I held my breath, and wondered how long Patrice had held hers until the smoke filled her lungs. Until it took my twin's life.

"Mademoiselle," I heard.

The voice startled me and my remaining breath puffed free.

"Are you well?" a dockworker asked. I nodded, to which he was undoubtedly relieved to trade comforting a woman to continuing his work. With a gloved hand, he motioned to the wooden crate I had draped myself over.

"Of course," I said, stepping away, rubbing a hand over my watch and wrist. Without my family, I felt lost, misplaced, unsure of my own identity. But I knew one thing for certain: I was incapable of carrying on, as planned, without them. I wondered, "Where's the ship headed?" The dock was full of crates, of piled sacks, of trunks, of awaiting passengers.

"Gold Country."

"Out west?" I asked. I personally hadn't given the hulla-

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baloo of the most recent gold rush much consideration beyond the inventory it could've brought Papa, but every newspaper sang of the opportunity there, of the many people reinventing their lives, their futures, their beings in the mountains' foothills.

He smiled. "The Wild West."

The word *wild* jumped out at me. That word cut through my grief and spoke to me. My family and I had gone to the opera for as long as I remembered. It was refined. It was respectable. It was enjoyable, but there was nothing *wild* about it. Yet, that venture turned out to be gravely dangerous.

That evening stripped me of my future as Madame Tobin. And I couldn't remain in *La Nouvelle-Orléans* without my family as Simone Jules. But perhaps she could rise from the ashes elsewhere, in a new way.

I asked, "When does the ship leave?"

"Two hours."

I checked my watch—enough time to return to the house, to transcribe a letter to our lawyer, and to pack my trunks. But not enough time for the glimmer of an escape to a booming gold town and a new existence to fade.



### About the Author



JENNI L. WALSH worked for a decade enticing readers as an award-winning advertising copywriter before becoming an author. Her passion lies in transporting readers to another world, be it in historical or contemporary settings. She is a proud graduate of Villanova University, and lives in the Philadelphia suburbs with her husband, daughter, son, and various pets. Jenni also writes nonfiction and historical fiction for middle-grade readers. To learn more about Jenni and her books, please visit [jennilwalsh.com](http://jennilwalsh.com).