

KISSING KIN by Karen Hulene Bartell

EXCERPT

Grandma's bedtime stories echoed through my mind as I sped west on I-10. At an early age, family history had merged with myth until the name Fort Lincoln was as legendary as Avalon or Middle Earth.

But when the snow-covered peaks loomed closer, their reality was undeniable. Maybe her stories weren't tall tales...

And what about her proverbs? "Idle hands are the devil's workshop." I winced. No job and no prospects. Mustering out after a five-year Army stint, I had to ask myself: What next? Where next?

Cody slipped into my thoughts, but I dismissed him, refusing to romanticize our breakup.

A troop of cavalry soldiers galloped toward me from the nineteenth century, but a second glance proved the images were metal cutouts--two-dimensional illusions that resembled an officer and guide leading two columns of cavalymen.

The silhouettes evoked tales of my great-great-grandfather, Ben Williams. Beginning his military career as a scout, he'd been field promoted during combat, then commissioned as Second Lieutenant at Fort Lincoln.

I smiled, proud of our similar career paths. Maybe Grandma's stories influenced me more than I realized.

Leaving the Interstate, I turned south. Road signs noted towns that sounded familiar from family stories but seemed as mythical as Camelot or Tintagel Castle.

Closer now, the mountains' features came into view. No longer mere outlines on the horizon, each craggy palisade and butte towered over the highway.

Fluffy hoarfrost transformed the landscape into an icy spectacle, with flaky, crystal shards overlaying each leaf and every blade of grass. A frozen fairyland! Just the way Grandma described it. Inspired by the raw beauty, I straightened my shoulders. Maybe I'm viewing my discharge the wrong way. Instead of adrift, maybe I'm free...