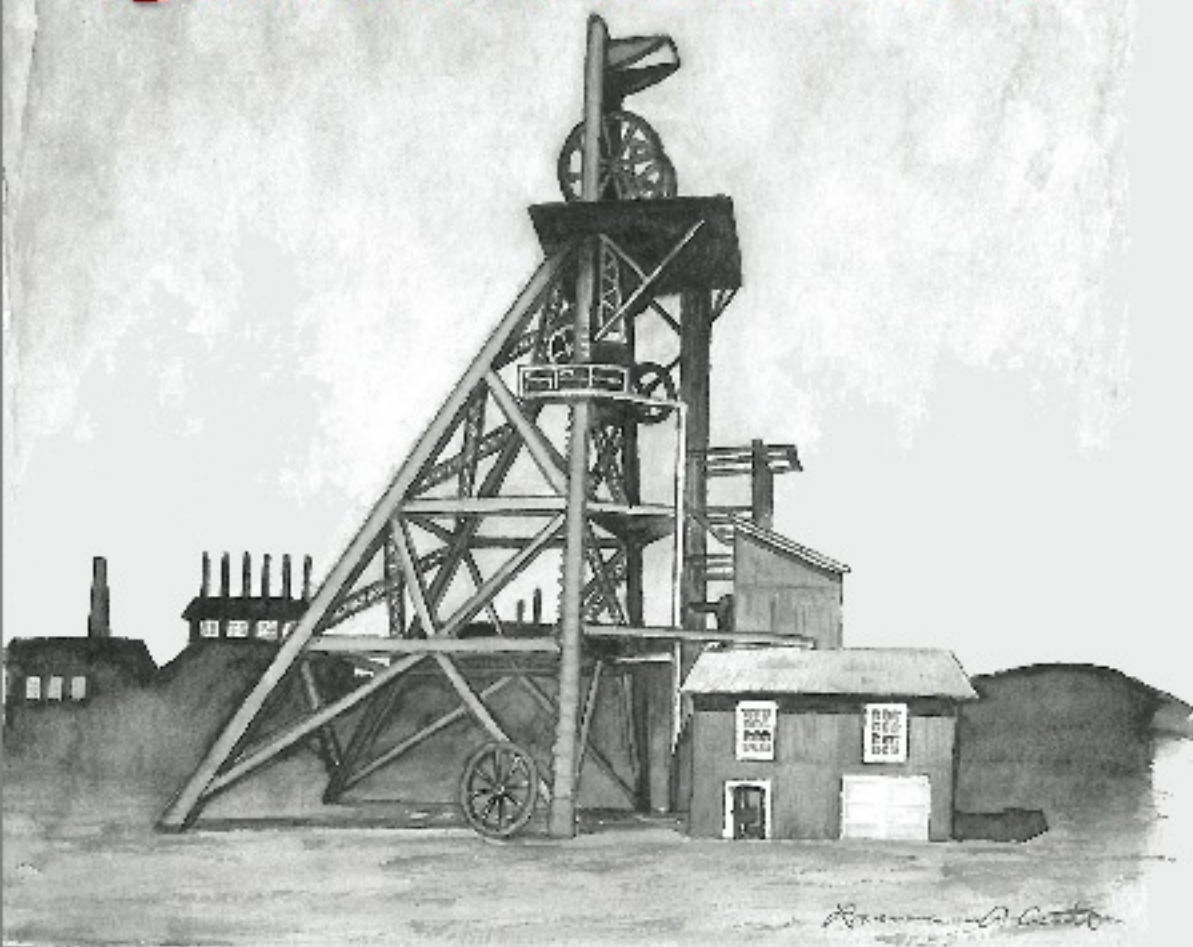
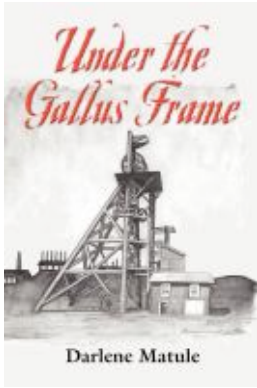


# *Under the Gallus Frame*



**Darlene Matule**



*Under the Gallus Frame* is the story of Marija, who is forced to leave her sweetheart Gus in Croatia in 1889 to marry a selfish, violent man in the rough-and-ready mining town of Butte, Montana. She transforms herself from an illiterate immigrant to owner, with a re-emerged Gus, of a thriving business and Matriarch of the Bartolji family. Her four children become leaders in The Company, The Miners' Union, The Church - and a hopeless drunk.

## Under the Gallus Frame

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# **UNDER THE GALLUS FRAME**

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## Chapter Seven

Just before 6:00 a.m., she awoke that April Saturday morning, her wedding day. She had until 7:30 to herself, time to make the final preparations to end her maidenhood.

Rising from the pallet by the stove on which she'd slept since her arrival, still in her voluminous flannel gown, she filled the tin bathtub, drew her nightdress over her head, and stepped in. Smiling, she immersed herself in the tingling hot water. Having tied her hair in a knot at the top of her head, she sunk, neck high, into the water and relaxed for several minutes.

Then, remembering all she had to do, she sat upright and lathered herself with sweet-smelling amber soap. With a quick dip of her body into the water, she rinsed the foaming bubbles from her person. Rising, she towed dry and began putting on the many layers of starched linen proper young women wore beneath their floor-length dresses.

Brushing her long, flowing tresses the habitual one hundred strokes, she parted her hair down the middle, front to back, with practiced hand, and braided first one side, then the other. The thick, luxuriant ropes of hair wound around her head, formed a crown-like circle of braids.

The shrill mine whistle sounded as she fastened her braids with the last of thirteen long wire pins.

She knew Viktor would shower at the mine, scrubbing off the layers of dust and dirt accumulated during his shift. In minutes, he would be home.

She had left enough time for her private ceremony—the moment she donned her wedding dress. As she drew the yards of silk and lace over her shoulders, adjusted the puffs of the sleeves and smoothed the skirt, she could not help thinking of her mother and six sisters who had worn the dress before her. All had had times of joy and times of sorrow. She always thought she would be blessed with complete happiness. Now she knew her destiny would follow in the footsteps of her predecessors, into the unknown.

*Under the Gallus Frame*

Her beloved August, incarcerated in Rijeka, would not be her groom. But, determined to mold a good life in America for herself and for her future children, she carried on.

The woman, whose name had legally been Marija for less than forty-eight hours, looked ahead to a new life, lived with a new name. “It *will* be good”, she vowed.

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“When’s breakfast?” Viktor asked as soon as he came in the door.

“I didn’t cook,” she said. “You know the priest said we couldn’t eat or drink before the wedding. You were supposed to start fasting at midnight. We can’t receive Communion at the wedding Mass otherwise.”

“Of all the goddamned nonsense,” he swore as he began stropping his razor against the long strip of leather to hone it into cutting sharpness. Every contact of metal and leather announced his resentment toward the priest and the church rules.

She sat quietly, trying not to wrinkle her heirloom wedding dress.

*Please, dear God, make him happy. Make him gentle,* she prayed in silence.

His quick temper concerned her.

*Dear Lord, please let my wedding day be calm, serene,* she entreated.

She promised to be meek, bride-like, and submissive, as Croatian culture dictated. She would play her role to perfection.

As soon as Viktor came out of the bedroom, dressed in his only suit, his brother Bronko arrived to take them to the church. When she walked outside, Marija saw Bronko’s wife in a shiny black horse carriage, holding the horse’s reins.

“Where did you get this?” she asked.

Bronko answered, “Thought it was only fitting my brother and his new bride be driven to the church in style. I’ve rented it from the livery for the day.”

Viktor helped her into the carriage. The four rode the few blocks to church in silence.

She could not help remembering two other journeys she had made in horse drawn vehicles. She bit her lip to keep it from quivering. Soon she would be the wife of a man she did not love. But she could not, would not think of August now.

A surprising number of people were in the church for the Bartolji wedding. None of the faces were familiar to Marija as she walked down the aisle on the arm of her almost-to-be brother-in-law, Bronko. Kneeling on the wooden *prie-dieu* placed at the foot of the altar, the bride and groom heard the Mass. The Latin words were the same as those spoken in her faraway home across the ocean. Comforted, she heard the familiar chant:

*“Kyrie eleison. Christi eleison. Kyrie eleison.*

*“Pater Noster, filius Sanctus.”*

Finally came the time for the exchange of wedding vows. The priest said in his Irish brogue, “Marija me dear, do you promise to love, honor, and obey your lawfully wedded husband?”

Although she did not understand, she answered in the two English words she had been told to say, “I do.”

In wonder, she listened as Father O’Malley used the exact same words in saying the Mass as her parish priest had used in Sveta Ana.

*“Dominus vobiscum. Et cum spiritu tuo.”*

The familiar words soothed. They wrapped loving arms around her, enveloping tense muscles, giving ease.

The church service made her feel at home in her new country. *This is where I can come for solace*, she mused. Silently she thanked her God for his wedding gift to her.

*“Eta Missa est,”* said the priest.

The Mass was over.

The marriage began.

Right after the wedding, Bronko drove them to the rented hall for the reception. There were more people there already, laughing, singing, carousing, than there had been at the wedding.

A mustached, black-haired young man stood on a platform, accordion in hand. His fingers flew up and down the keyboard, simultaneously moving up the bass. The bellows opened and closed in rapid rhythm. His rich tenor voice sang the ballad, *Mariana*.

*Under the Gallus Frame*

Long tables were laden with the culinary efforts of many households. Giant tom turkeys, filled with stuffing, graced overflowing platters. Home-cured hams, baked and sliced by wives of Viktor's friends, sat side by side with trays of sliced homemade bread and crocks of freshly churned butter. In the center of one table sat a pig, roasted whole, with a bright red apple stuffed in its open mouth.

Other tables held homemade sauerkraut and *sarma*, bowls of potato salad and sweet potatoes. Pickles, beets, and hot peppers filled dishes of every shape and size. Huge platters held sliced *povitica*, the intertwined circles of crust and honeyed walnut filling oozing with their rich goodness.

A barrel of homemade wine and a keg of Butte beer stood side by side, their spigots pulled open far more often than they were allowed to remain closed. Guests lined up for homemade *sljivovica*.

The din from the reception could be heard a block away. Two more accordion players arrived. Dancing began.

Tender ballads were replaced by fiery polkas and brisk round dances. Couples danced to the ever-increasing rhythm of the toe-tapping accordionists, round and round until they were dizzy. When one group collapsed on the sidelines, another replaced them.

Tots of eight and nine, twelve and thirteen danced along the edges, imitating the grownups.

As the liquor flowed, the volume of sound increased. Inhibitions flew out the window as the wine, beer, and *sljivovica* took effect.

In one corner, two tables stood side by side. Men gathered, armed with cards and silver dollars, to test their luck at poker. Tempers flared as stakes got high. From time to time, shouting matches developed between winner and loser, their voices lubricated by liquid refreshment.

Watching their husbands gamble, wives felt knots grow in their stomachs as they saw the pile of silver dollars in front of their man being pulled across the table by someone else's husband, the winner of the moment. Instead of silver dollars, they envisioned sugar and flour, coffee and chocolate, the food the lost money could have bought. They



saw new shoes for the seven-year-old whose big toe protruded from a hole in his only pair. But no wife chastised her gambling husband.

As wives did not work outside their home, they had no status. Men received pay slips and silver dollars for *real* work accomplished. Wives merely fed their families on the money left over after gambling shrunk their men's paychecks. They washed mine dirt out of grimy overalls using corrugated washboards. They scrubbed floors on their hands and knees with water heated on woodstoves they stoked. But since they did not contribute monetarily to the household, they could not complain how the man of the house spent his money.

Young girls congregated together on the sidelines, waiting for the young men of their choice to ask them to dance. Eyes down, girls quit talking as the boys strutted over like peacocks, waiting for the tap on their shoulder and the words, "Come dance with me."

Chosen ones wiped moist palms on their skirts before touching the equally sweaty hands offered them. Girls not picked began talking once again, proving they couldn't care less. This ritual prepared them for the day when, as married women, they joined the circle of wives who then watched their poker-playing husbands.

The participants in the feast varied from carefree to careless, from careful to caring. While a celebration for the newly married pair, the party proved to be a confrontation for many long married couples. A happy time; a hilarious time; a horrendous time, depending on the individual.

Marija enjoyed herself. Almost everyone at the reception, and there seemed to be hundreds, talked her language. All wanted to visit with to her. The newest member of the Croatian community, they asked her about the old country.

"Did you know my brother Anton? Sister Neva? Cousin Mira? Have you been to Dubrovnik? To Ljubiana? To Opatija? What is your recipe for *povitica*, wine, sauerkraut?"

Instantly accepted by the mere fact she married one of their own, she found many friends. Not having ventured farther than the nearby, corner store by Viktor's house, owned by a crusty old man from County Cork, she had no idea so many people in Butte came from Croatia.

*Under the Gallus Frame*

She asked where they lived, not having seen any of their faces in her short walk to the market. They told her. East Butte. Meaderville. The Flats.

When she asked how their husbands made a living, she found, to a man, they all worked in the Butte mines.

“How many mines are there?” she asked.

They counted them one by one: The High Ore, the Orphan Girl, the Anaconda, the Mountain Con, the Parrot, the Neversweat, the Badger, the Leonard, the West Colusa. She lost count.

“Who owns so many?” she asked.

They answered, “Mr. Meader, Mr. Heinze, Mr. Daly, Mr. Largey, Mr. Clark.”

She asked, “Are they all rich?”

“Everyone who owns a mine is rich.”

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Viktor, who felt half-starved after foregoing breakfast, proceeded to try a little of everything offered on the bountiful tables. Upon filling his stomach, he joined the group by the *sljivovica* table and did his best to catch up with those who had arrived first. Viktor had a tremendous capacity for holding his liquor. His glass kept making the rounds from his mouth to the bottle in rapid rhythm.

As he looked across the hall and saw Marija talking animatedly with friends and countrymen, he felt a surge of envy. *I should be the one talking to her. After all, I own her now.* He fingered his mustache. Watched her. Wanted her.

Warm for April, the concentration of energy from so many people made the hall hot as July.

He saw her red cheeks, flushed and appetizing as a ripe plum. His eyes dropped to the creamy whiteness of her neck, the ample swelling of her breasts beneath the silk and lace, the tiny waist he could surely span with his two hands.

*What am I doing standing here eating and drinking?* he asked himself. *This is my wedding day. There are far better things to do.*

Crossing the hall, Viktor put his arm possessively around Marija's waist and gave her a squeeze. She surprised him when she jerked away.

Not having touched her since that first day, Viktor felt he had used more than ample caution. Married, she had no excuse. She belonged to him. He meant to have all of her. He squeezed again, a bit harder, more insistent.

As he stood before the woman now called Marija by his edict, his manner demanded intimacy.

The crowd sensed the change in atmosphere. Each judged according to their personal feelings. Some saw passion; some saw submission. Some saw happiness; some saw apprehension. Some saw love; some saw hate.

"Dance! Dance!" the crowd shouted.

Holding Marija's right hand in his, Viktor placed her left on his shoulder. Then he took possession of her body right in front of all present. He fondled her hip as if no cloth separated his hand from her skin.

"You are mine, Marija," he whispered as he whirled her around the floor to the strains of now solemnly gentle, romantic accordion music. Not a practiced dancer, this night Viktor guided his bride around the floor as if he were the expert he appeared.

Buoyed by the rhythm of the bridal couple's dancing, the three accordion players changed tempo, going directly from a waltz to a bouncy polka. Viktor took only a few steps of the new dance before he found himself entangled in Marija's train. He stopped in mid-step and led her to the sidelines. Together they watched the expert dancers move about the dance floor in surefooted circles.

Just then the photographer arrived. Using a backdrop depicting a lace curtained window, he sat Viktor in an ornately carved chair with the palms of his large hands engulfing its arms. He placed Marija on Viktor's left, her short train fanned out in front. Then he draped her hand on Viktor's left shoulder. The innocent touch aroused Viktor. He squirmed in his chair.

"Don't move," directed the photographer, putting his head beneath the black cloth to check his lens placement.

*Under the Gallus Frame*

“Ah, just fine. Hold it.”

The light flashed. Marija blinked.

“Once more,” ordered the photographer

The light flashed again. Marija coughed as a puff of smoke from the camera entered her throat.

Viktor rose as the photographer said, “Once more.”

“That’s enough. It’s time for us to go home.”

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Marija came to her first conjugal meeting with Viktor a virtual innocent. While having observed the mating habits of farm animals all her life, her education in marital love consisted of the sometime hysterical ravings of her married sisters and the embarrassed, factual pre-marriage instruction of her mother.

Her personal experience with August had been passionate but chaste. Their kisses were long and searching, with parted lips and darting tongues stirring a fire of anticipation throughout her entire being. His caress had followed her gentle curves, lingering on her swelling breasts, and firm buttocks, but the fabric of her ample clothing had always been between his hands and her body.

Marija walked into Viktor’s house. She felt alone, though her husband stood beside her. A wisp of fear seeped into her mind. *What will it be like? Will it be as horrible as some of my married sisters said? Will it hurt? Or will it feel good like the Radovich sisters used to say when they bragged about how many boys they’d been with?*

Still in her white wedding dress, she waited for the end of her maidenhood.

Without so much as a tentative caress or a loving kiss, Viktor gave his first order. “Take it off.”

“What?” she asked, eyes moving from stove to table. Confused, she said, “I don’t see anything to take off.”

“The dress. Take off the dress.”

*It is beginning*, she thought as she fumbled with the tiny buttons fastening the back of her dress. *Please help me, dear God*, she prayed in silence.

It seemed to take forever before she finished unbuttoning the final button. She stepped out of the rustling silk, folded it carefully, and draped the dress over a nearby chair.

Viktor sat down and leaned so far back that the two front legs of his chair rose, as if in anticipation. He put his hands behind his head and ordered, "Keep on. I want to see what I've bought."

Although the late afternoon sun blazed in the west window, filling the small kitchen with its warmth, Marija felt a chill akin to undressing for bed in an unheated room in the middle of January.

She dropped first one petticoat. Hesitated. Then another.

"Can't you hurry it up? We don't have all day."

Fumbling with the buttons, she drew the chemise over her head. Her cheeks burned a bright red, belying the goose pimples on her now exposed creamy white breasts. No one had ever watched her undress since she was eight or nine and her mother still filled the tin tub for her weekly bath. Her mother had been far more interested in spotting dirt than staring at her hardened brown nipples as she saw Victor doing.

Looking toward the door as if expecting a reprieve from the final disrobing, she paused for a second. But seeing Viktor about to blurt out another order, she breathed in deeply, bent down, and lowered her pantaloons. She caught her foot in the second leg as she was taking them off, almost losing her balance.

Viktor rose.

*God, help me*, she prayed.

Circling Marija, Viktor licked his lips.

"Take off that ridiculous piece of cloth you call a veil. Loosen the pins from those braids. Undo your hair."

Marija obeyed. The movement of doing something, anything, alleviated some of the embarrassment she felt standing in front of this strange, leering man, her husband, as she undressed.

Too soon she finished. She stood waiting, not a stitch of clothing covering her virgin body.

It might all have been different had Viktor come to the marriage bed with loving endearments and gentle caresses. Tenderness evoked passion in Marija, not force, not demands.

In the deep inner recesses of her being, Marija still loved August. She still harbored romantic dreams. She wanted to be loved, needed human closeness. Yet, she knew her future life, be it good or bad, would rest in that combination, Viktor and Marija, man and wife.

She waited.

“Come here,” he ordered as he pointed to the bed. “Lie down.”

She obeyed. In a moment, he was on top of her.

His mouth covered every inch of her body. The thick mass of his beard, grown back since morning to a sandpaper stubble, scratched her tender breasts and smooth neck. His hands were everywhere. Probing. Prying. His fingernails, rough from his work in the mine, scratched her body in several places. She moaned, but did not cry out.

The reality of their joining proved worse than her wildest imagining. Her initial embarrassment, when she stood stark naked and shivering while her husband inspected her with the finesse of a farmer choosing a heifer to breed, had ceased. The mating proved to be as one-sided as a fight between the village bully and a cripple.

He moved constantly, until there was no part of her body he had not possessed. She wanted to scream. *Won't you ever stop? Get it done with!* But screaming was luxury forbidden a wife.

Finally, his probing reached a crescendo of motion. He pounded her, driving his hammer against her vulnerable, pain-ridden body again and again and again. Then, abruptly, he stopped. After sighing in apparent satisfaction, he rolled off her, turned over on his stomach, and fell asleep.

She lay still. Vanquished. Feeling something on her face, she lifted a finger and found tears streaming down her cheeks. As she brushed them aside, she felt a new warmth beneath her. Looking down, she discovered, to her horror, her monthly sickness had come. Or so it seemed. She hurried out of the bed and did what she had to do.

Twice again before morning, he reached for her and repeated the ritual of love, so new to her, so satisfying to him. By the third time, the pain began to ease.

In the morning, she found the bleeding had stopped as quickly as it had begun.

## Chapter Eleven

Years passed as years do. Work at the mines peaked and slowed. The company hired men, and laid men off. New immigrants from across the ocean came from Ireland and England, from Italy and Greece. They arrived from Dubrovnik and Rijeka, Ljubiana and Split. The Croatians who settled, mainly in East Butte, formed a tightly knit clan.

Although Vik Bartolji did not live with his fellow countrymen, he worked with them. As a hardworking, old-time miner who had the respect of every boss on the Hill, Vik found jobs for as many of these new arrivals as he could.

“The job I can get you. I can tell you who to see. I can put in a good word for you,” he told the travel weary men. “But fuck up once, and you’re on your own. You’ll either make a widow out of your missus or an asshole out of the bastard who got you on the job in the first place. Your wife may be better off without you giving her a new Bohunk bundle every year, but I’m not about to be made an asshole by anyone.”

Life working as a hard-rock miner in any one of the dozens of mines on the Hill proved to be a challenge for the immigrants. It did not take long for the new arrivals to learn two lessons; the streets were not paved with gold as the unscrupulous agents had told them, and the silver dollars they earned required backbreaking work in some of the worst imaginable conditions.

At the start of a shift, the men were lowered into the bowels of the earth in four-sided, metal cages, packed together as tightly as the strands of hair in their little girl’s pigtail. During the descent, the cage careened downward at a rapid speed, like a boulder dropped from a fourth floor window.

Each mine had many levels, with drifts going off in several directions from each landing. If the Butte Hill could have been cut in half, exposing the core, it would have resembled a giant anthill.

But the miners saw no ants in their eight, ten, and twelve-hour days, deep beneath the surface. The only animals in sight were teams

*Under the Gallus Frame*

of mules. These poor creatures spent their entire lives in the deep caverns beneath the city, pulling ore carts, filled to overflowing, to the hoists to be lifted to the surface. At least the miners had lives outside, above ground. But then, mules were only dumb animals. No one really gave them a second thought.

Men put shoulder behind shovel to lift the mountainous piles of ore into the cars. Men inched their way down the drifts, chiseling holes in solid rock, tamping in dynamite, hoping they had figured right, and when they blasted, no one would be hurt. Men shouldered the weight of the massive timbers used to shore up the tunnels after the blasts had lengthened new drifts.

Each man carried a black metal bucket down into the mine every day when he went on shift. *Bucket* became synonymous with lunch in Butte. At lunchtime, the miner tried to find a piece of timber to sit on. In that pitch-black cavern, lighted only by the carbide lamp on his helmet, he gulped down sandwiches, pasties, and baked goodies fixed in the wee hours of the morning by wife, mother, or rooming house cook. Since many miners were bachelors, boarding houses added a lunch bucket service to their monthly fee.

Sanitary facilities were nonexistent except for the honey bucket. A special metal attachment to the ore car, the miners used it as seldom as possible. Rarely emptied, the smell all but asphyxiated anyone within five feet.

Temperature down under could never be predetermined. While one drift might be icy cold, a miner could turn the corner and feel as if he were on the equator at high noon on the Fourth of July.

Water seemed to come from every crevice in the mines. It dripped, seeped, splashed. But the lack of light proved to be the hardest thing to stand, day after day, year after year. The carbide lamps each miner attached to his head reeked of fumes, sputtered at will, and generally did not spread light very far in the bargain.

Vik told the newcomers, "Don't bother taking the job if you're scared of the dark. You've never seen dark like you will down in the mine when your light goes out. And go out it will, come hell or high water.



“Maybe you forgot to load up your carbide lamp before going on shift. Maybe one of those underground creeks just starts hitting you on the head and puts it out, but sometime, somehow, you’re going to be in the dark. There’s no moon or stars to lighten that hole up for you.

“If you remembered to bring your flint, you relight your lamp. That is if it’s still dry enough. If not, you inch your way back until you run into another miner or make it to the ore cart. I recommend you pray all the way that you’re going the right direction, and I’m not a praying man.

“I remember one day I was hung over when I went on shift. Head ached like hell! Couldn’t eat the lunch my old lady made for me, so I lay down on one of the timbers to see if that would help.

“But no, the ache got worse. They’d been blasting up the drift all day. Pretty soon it started sounding like a thunderstorm in my head.

“All at once I opened my eyes. My light shined straight up. I could see the top of the drift start to crumble. Time stood still. I couldn’t move, even though I knew all hell was breaking loose.

“Don’t know how I did it, or how long it all took, but I yelled at my partner, ‘Joe, get out of here! It’s coming down!’ Then I ran for the main tunnel like I was dodging bullets.”

“Did you make it?” the greenhorn asked.

“Goddamn it, I’m telling you about it. You think maybe I’m a ghost?” Vik could not believe the stupidity of some of the newcomers.

“My partner Joe also made it. But the two poor bastards who were blasting that day didn’t do as well. The rock crushed one poor bugger so bad they had to take him out in a canvas bag. The other had his leg caught under a big chunk of rock and ended up with a peg.”

Vik’s stories did not stop the men fresh off the train from New York. Around the turn of the century, the Croatians, Serbs, and Slovenians came in droves from the troubled Balkan area. They called themselves Austrians since the Austro-Hungarian Empire ruled their homeland.

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*Under the Gallus Frame*

Across the rolling gray ocean, thousands more came, tired and nearly penniless. Some brought hungry wives and snotty-nosed children. They came with dreams instead of money, with hope instead of sausages. They could not pay to go back. And, why would they want to? What they had come from was worse than nothing at all. Times were hard in the old country.

There were too many sons to live off family farms, farms that never quite produced enough to take care of more than the most primitive needs of the prolific families.

While the conquering royalty of the Austro-Hungarian Empire built castles for their mistresses on the Adriatic Riviera at Opatija, the masses went to bed with the rat of hunger gnawing at their bellies, dressed in clothing patched upon patch.

Other countries had their stories and their problems. The unwanted came to Butte by the thousands.

They viewed a job that paid a man a silver dollar a day to be a miracle. A rented miner's cabin, with four walls of mud-filled logs and a weed-covered dirt roof, they considered a palace. A stew, filled with three bite-sized pieces of fresh meat and chunks of potatoes, turnips, carrots, and cabbage so thick it was hard to stir, tasted like manna from heaven.

The men from Ireland remembered the famine, and they stayed. The men from Italy remembered the devastating earthquake, and they stayed. The men from Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia remembered the centuries of oppression by the Romans, Turks, and Hapsburgs, and they stayed. They might call themselves Micks and Wops and Bohunks, but Butte became home. They developed a patriotic zeal about the town that spanned four generations and defied reality.

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Vik Bartolji's peers admired him. So did his bosses. Whether he worked as a mucker, shoveling ore into the cars, or if he wrestled with timbers in the newer sections of the mines, Vik put in a full day's work.

In the ten years he worked in the Butte mines, he had made a lasting impression on his superiors. It did not get him more money for a job well done, but it kept him working when other, less industrious men were laid off. Still, when it came to promoting someone from the gang to shift boss, they mentioned Vik's name, but he never got the job.

"Too much of a boozier and womanizer," they judged. "Besides, he doesn't need the extra bucks. He isn't married."

Vik surprised them all when the pretty blond baggage came for him from the old country.

"Aha! The Prince of Bachelors is giving up his throne. They'll fly a red flag at half-mast at Lulu's door the day that son of a bitch ties the knot. Those girls are going to have to start working for a living down on Mercury Street instead of lying back and enjoying it."

The tirades went on and on. In actuality, many of the staid married men, whose wives whined for feminine finery or new shoes for the kids or lace curtains for the windows, were jealous of Vik's free and easy life and lack of responsibilities. The self-righteous bemoaned his moral laxity and almost constant absence from Mass.

But they needed a new shift boss at the Steward, and the best man for the job was Vik Bartolji.

Joe Pat Kelly had been foreman for almost eleven years. He kept tabs on his men as a mother hen keeps track of her chicks. While he was head usher down at St. Mary's and father to ten Irish stair-steps, the oldest of whom had just entered the seminary, Joe Pat divorced his own moral code from his on-the-job requirements. While he would not let his sixteen-year-old daughter within ten feet of old Vik, he trusted his working integrity implicitly.

As the men came up the cage at the end of the day shift one cold January evening, Joe Pat stood in the below freezing Montana winter, waiting for Vik. Even though he wore a heavy wool mackinaw lined with sheepskin, fleece-lined gloves, and a battered brown felt hat pulled down over the tops of his ears, Joe Pat felt the cold in his bones.

He paced back and forth, trying to keep his circulation going. His breath condensed as it hit the air. It looked as if he was puffing on a fat cigar, though Joe Pat was one of the very few Butte miners who did

not have the tobacco habit in any form. The lower edge of his trim mustache had iced over in the forty below zero weather.

“Might have known he’d be the last to come up,” Joe Pat muttered to himself as he paced. “We’ve got our money’s worth out of that Bohunk.”

Vik finally emerged from the cage. He looked up in surprise when the big boss approached him. He only had a nodding acquaintance with the man, so it came as a shock when Joe Pat said, “I’d like you to drop by the office for a few minutes.”

Struck more by the curiosity of it than any other emotion, Vik followed the older, taller man to the mine office, thankful to get out of the cold.

A potbellied wood stove stood in the corner beside Joe Pat’s cluttered roll top desk. The boss opened the stove and shoved in two more pieces of wood from the stack he kept nearby. The fire crackled. Warmth radiated through the room, steaming up Joe Pat’s glasses.

Taking off his round, wire rimmed spectacles, the boss reached for his handkerchief and rubbed the steam from the lenses as he said, “I suppose you wonder what you’re doing here.”

Then he opened a cupboard door and drew out two shot glasses and a bottle of Jack Daniels. He poured drinks, handing one to Vik.

“I’ve heard good reports on you, Bartolji. To a man, your shift bosses have nothing but praise for your work. As you know, we’re expanding all the time. It’s come to the point we need more shift bosses. I’d like to offer you that opportunity.”

Vik stared at the older man and said, “You’re shitting me.”

“Hardly. What I’m doing is offering you a chance to really make something of yourself. You’re a married man Bartolji, a father. You owe it to your family to do your best for them.”

“Listen, I work hard at this mine. Work my ass off most days. I earn every dollar you pay me.”

“I’m not saying you don’t. Quite the contrary. What I’m saying is, you can earn more. When you start calling the shots, instead of doing what someone else tells you, then you’ll not only earn your money, you’ll earn a helluva lot more of it. Besides, you’ll *be* somebody.”

“I’d be a somebody all right. I’d be one big son of a bitch, that’s what I’d be. No one likes his shift boss.”

Seeing fire start seething in his boss’s eyes, Vik went on. “No offense meant. But I’m just not the type to be a boss.”

Vik downed his whiskey. Joe Pat refilled both glasses.

“I know this is a surprise, Vik. I don’t need an answer tonight. But I want you to think about it. Don’t you want to be able to hold up your head and say you did the very best you could for your family?”

Vik downed the second whiskey, shuffled about a bit, one foot to another.

Joe Pat poured another round and said, “To your success. Cheers.”

“*Ziveli*,” said the miner.

“Think about it,” Joe Pat said again as he lifted his glass. “Just think about it, Vik.”

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Mick Gibbons, Kathleen’s husband, stood waiting for Vik when he came out of the mine office.

“Trouble?” he asked.

“Big trouble,” Vik answered.

“My God, did they fire you?”

Vik laughed, “Hell no. They offered to make me a shift boss.”

The look of concern on Mick’s face turned to surprise. As the significance of his neighbor’s words sunk in, envy emerged.

“God, what I’d give to be a shift boss,” said the fragile Irishman. “If I didn’t have to do all that shoveling every day, maybe my lungs wouldn’t hurt so much, and I wouldn’t have to dump so many shifts. God, I wonder what they pay a shift boss. Did they tell you, Vik?”

“Old man Kelly didn’t say, and I didn’t ask. They couldn’t pay me enough to turn into a rat. Everyone hates his shift boss.”

“Well, if they asked me to can the work and start bossing, I’d take them up on it so fast the gallus frame would shake like a tornado hit.”

“Don’t give me that shit, Mick. Just think of what you’re saying. Those things are so strong nothing could move them. You’re ridiculous! Quit whining about being a no good shift boss.”

Irish temper rising, Mick retorted, “Don’t you tell me what to do. I’m not taking that crap off of you. You’re not a bachelor anymore, Vik Bartolji. You’ve got responsibilities, whether you like it or not.

“You know goddamn well your wife could use the extra money you’d get from being a boss. And it wouldn’t have to stop there. You’re young yet. You’ve got a good head on your shoulders, even if you don’t use it very often. You could be somebody if you tried.”

Vik spat in the snow in disgust. “It’s my life. I call the shots. No one’s going to tell me what I should do and what I shouldn’t do. Mind your own business, you old harp.”

Vik never told Marija about his offer of a promotion. If Kathleen Gibbons had not asked when Vik was starting his new job, she would never have known.

“Would he make more money?” Marija asked her friend.

“Much more,” answered Kathleen.

That night Marija asked her husband, “Are we rich?”

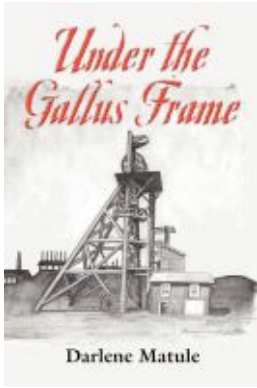
“Rich? You must be joking. No, we’re not rich.”

“Then why didn’t you take the new job you were offered at the mine?”

“Whose big mouth has been flapping? Those Gibbons? It’s about time they started minding their own business. I’ve got a good notion to order you never to go down there again.”

“Oh, Viktor, don’t get upset. I just thought maybe we were rich enough. I don’t know about money in America. I have no idea how much you make a week because you don’t tell me. How can I learn if you don’t teach me?”

“I tell you everything you need to know, which much isn’t. As long as you put a decent meal on my table every day and keep this house running the way it should, you’re not in trouble. But remember, I make the rules around here. I’m boss in my own home, and that’s it.”



*Under the Gallus Frame* is the story of Marija, who is forced to leave her sweetheart Gus in Croatia in 1889 to marry a selfish, violent man in the rough-and-ready mining town of Butte, Montana. She transforms herself from an illiterate immigrant to owner, with a re-emerged Gus, of a thriving business and Matriarch of the Bartolji family. Her four children become leaders in The Company, The Miners' Union, The Church - and a hopeless drunk.

## Under the Gallus Frame

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