

Travel Winds of Moon Driver Ranch

Nancy Sharon Martin

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With *Travel Winds of Moon Driver Ranch*, her sequel to *Viajeros*, author Nancy Sharon Martin revisits frontier life in post-Civil War Arizona. The Prittchett House, “a grand hotel” in the town of Bowie, is again central to the narrative. Owner Millie Prittchett serves both the community and travelers along the Sante Fe Railroad.

Ross Bender, the town’s lawman, has been driven to the bottle, mostly by his unrequited love for Millie. Bender wants to leave Bowie, and after a particularly ugly bout of drinking, he is rescued by his friends only to take off for California the next morning, believing that Millie is lost to another man. Millie, however, is confused by her choices and sets out in pursuit of Bender. In Millie’s absence, local banker Jack Pepper, thinks he can finally control Bowie, and he wants Prittchett House for his own. Simultaneously, Tyree Stockton, owner of the Moon Driver Ranch of the book’s title, has returned home after working for the army. Astounding everyone, he is no longer demanding and hard-hearted. An experience in the mountains has changed him for the better.

Pepper, who is elected mayor, has brought a schoolteacher to town, a young woman named Jasmine Tate. Unwittingly, Jasmine has been groomed to join Pepper’s conspiracy by the nefarious Rosa Franco, former owner of the Gilded Cage. Amongst much deception and coercion, and with Millie out of the picture, Pepper succeeds in taking over Prittchett House, but only temporarily.

The author populates her story with the kinds of classic characters readers will recall from the golden age of cowboy movies. The plot is complex and satisfying in its redemption of Jasmine. Tyree could be a hero out of a Louis L’Amour novel, but Martin weaves her narrative with an ensemble cast rather than a distinct hero. The narrative sometimes bogs down, especially since the author relies almost totally on exposition, with minimal dialogue or scene setting. An example is when the townspeople try to take back Bowie from Pepper, Franco, and the other bad guys without much shoot-’em-up action.

Although it offers little gun smoke, fans of the western genre may find *Travel Winds of Moon Driver Ranch* of interest. However, there is little to appeal to those who fancy a heavy dose of the affairs of the heart. It’s also worth noting that the cover illustration features a young woman in a western hat wearing aviator-style sunglasses—a deceptive image, given the book’s time setting.

Nonetheless, author Nancy Sharon Martin certainly knows and loves the people and landscape of Arizona, and that love shows on nearly every page. With *Travel Winds of Moon Driver Ranch*, she offers an old-west tale as it might be told around a campfire.

GARY PRESLEY (February 20, 2012)

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