

IN THE GREAT QUIET

where the story began

It was in my grandmother's sitting room, a light-filled space of tall windows, her blue floral rocker, and an ivory fireplace, where I first heard of Minnie Hoopes. It was just us two. My grandma Verla is generous and whip-smart, but she's also delicate, orderly, polished. Not the sort you'd imagine racing off into the wilderness with a six-shooter strapped to her waist. I asked my grandma to repeat herself, as I'd never heard this family lore before.

Our ancestor did *what*?

She told me the story of her grandmother, and I immediately saw Minnie: A vivid, clear vision of a woman on a horse, red dust clouding, brown hair caught in the wind, expression full of such desire. I saw her. Glimpsed her motivation and personality—her yearning, her determination. I needed to know more. Her tale was inspiring and thrilling, but I wondered: Why on earth would she race off into the Wild West, *alone*? What was she running from?

People often ask why I write certain stories, why the need for this one and not another. My characters grab me. I'm struck by a visceral, almost tangible glimpse of a woman and a moment in time. Much of the time, my characters feel more real than even my closest friends. I write out of vicious curiosity. I was so unbelievably curious as to why a woman would do such a thing: race off into the unknown of the Oklahoma frontier. There was much to be gained, of course, but also—such risk. Minnie's story called to me as it's based on my ancestor and set in Oklahoma, the place that I've always called home. But I didn't long to write *In the Great Quiet* just because Minnie is my ancestor; I found her situation arresting and compelling.

When my grandma first told me of Minnie, I was writing another novel. And so, Minnie sat inside my mind for around five years, until I could return to her. *In the Great Quiet* was just an image, an idea, a hope, a deepest yearning, a patient hunger. I longed to uncover more about this ancestor of mine, and then, in 2019, with a stack of books, a pile of notes, and so many dreams: I began.



History, even though people might say otherwise, is an unstable, amorphous science. It's perspectives, theories, even dreams.

My background as a historian is in the history of mentalities, a specific approach to cultural history that uncovers how those of the past looked upon their world. I love to dig into *how* people saw their environments. I'm especially drawn to microhistories and chasing down the meaning of odd moments, little glimpses into the past that seemingly contradict the version of history I have in my head. I enjoy uncovering peculiar historical details: a woman carrying cayenne pepper for safety, the 1890s fashion craze of wristwatches for “sporty” women, the oral folklore women told round fires. Popular tales of the nineteenth century are woven into the narrative of *In the Great Quiet*—folktales, chapbooks, legends, literature. In reading the everyday stories and folklore of an age, you glimpse the pulse of the cultural consciousness, the trends of a certain time period. But of

course, a search for worldviews is not concrete or definable. We cannot help but impose our modern constructs on the past, and we can never fully uncover what it was like to live long ago. When we look at the past, especially the women of the nineteenth century, there's a tendency to imagine a proper, quiet, well-behaved woman. Well, this is not at all what I see. They weren't dimmed versions of women. People were just as alive, just as vibrant.

In my research of homesteading women, I sought out first-person narratives of the tenacious women of the frontier, such as journals and interviews. I read hundreds of first-person stories of life on the Oklahoma frontier. There are many rich accounts of pioneer women full of gratitude and hope, along with terror for life alone on the frontier. For women pioneers, homesteading was an extravagant gift. If they could just be brave enough, could just race fast enough—they could have land, of their very own, at a time when women had little autonomy. These stories, ripe with vivid emotion and wide-ranging adventure, all the iconic expansiveness and hazards of the Wild West, are where I situate this narrative of my family.

Writing a historical novel is chasing after figments, a haze of what once was. I hope you enjoy how I imagined the world of the 1890s and this possibility of how my ancestor navigated her circumstances and her time. Thank you for coming alongside me on this journey—it's been an honor. The tale you'll read is fiction. But a true woman of our past, Minnie Hoopes, lives again in these pages. She was my grandmother's grandmother, and this is her story as I've dreamt it.

Welcome on in, reader. I've a story for you.

—Laura Vogt, October 2025

A pioneer unwaveringly endures the Oklahoma frontier in an epic adventure about a woman haunted by secrets and searching for home.

A cannon booms at high noon, and the race begins in the Oklahoma land rush of 1893.

Amid the crowd is Minnie Hoopes. Tenacious and fiercely independent, she is determined to endure the brutal frontier and create a life of her own. Guarding her solitude, she distances herself from bordering homesteaders and finds peace under the starry nights of the vast frontier. But this is outlaw country, and Minnie soon has the blood of two gunfighters on her hands. After a renegade outlaw named Stot discovers her secrets, she forms an unlikely friendship with him. With each passing season, Minnie's past grows more haunting and threatens the future she has risked everything to build.

Based on the true story of the author's great-great-grandparents, this sweeping and transportive survival story explores a woman's connection with the land, her reconciliation with the past, and her elemental search for home against all odds.

Settle in, I've stories to tell.

