





# AVENGING ANNIE

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## Carmenica Diaz

*We ran through hills and forest  
As two under a spell  
He was a city boy Floyd the outlaw  
And I thought I knew him well.*

*Long after that great summer  
When I first came into my fame  
And 'the avenger from Oklahoma'  
Was added to my name  
The avenger I became.*

Avenging Annie (Andy Pratt)

Avenging Annie  
Carmenica Diaz  
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### **Note from the Author.**

This story was inspired by the song “**Avenging Annie**” by **Andy Pratt** and the chapter titles are actual lines from that song. I thank \*\*\*\* for giving me the disc.

I had never heard of the artist before but every time I heard the song, it seemed to hint at a TG story. It’s a song that has been around for a while and Andy Pratt’s version is the definitive one and, in my opinion, brilliant.

If you do a search for the lyrics, you will see they are different from the ones I quote at the end of this book. The version in the Appendix is the correct one (except for two words) as I took it from the booklet with the Andy Pratt CD.

The lyrics on the web destroy the meaning of the song. For example, the web quotes a line as “like a worn out shoe” when it is “just like your woman loves you”. A world of difference.

Place names were mostly figments of my imagination and this story does not stick entirely to the song. I apologise to all Americans for all the historical errors I have made but this is *just* a story and I hope the characters and the plot generate your forgiveness.

I must admit, this story almost wasn’t published due to some silly misgivings – perhaps even nervousness.

I hope you enjoy the story of Avenging Annie. As Greeley says, ‘*that Annie Parker was a hell of a woman!*’

*C.D.*



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## Prologue

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Hamilton Jones looked at the old man distastefully and then discreetly held his spotted handkerchief to his nose. The thick smoke from the long pipe the old man insisted on smoking was making the journalists eyes water and his weak sinuses ache.

As soon as he had walked in the room, the old man had lit the pipe, endured a long coughing fit and then stubbornly sucked on the pipe again.

*I have to get this over with as soon as I can,* Hamilton thought, *I can't bear this smoke!*

The last place Hamilton wanted to be that day, was in *this* hospital to interview a relic from the last century!

His editor, Thomas Greeley, had been adamant and Hamilton had endured the long trip to the next state in search of a story of the previous century.

‘It’ll be a good yarn, Jones,’ the editor had boomed. ‘A lot of folk are interested in tales of the old west. It wasn’t that long ago that outlaws ran wild over this territory and if this fellah is really Baldwin, he’ll be able to spin some real yarns!’

‘But we live in a modern world, Mister Greeley,’ Jones protested, ‘we should look to the future. I could write a piece on the mechanical benefits of our modern world. We have electricity now, a new modern world is...’

‘I know all that and with change happening so darn fast, Jones, folk like to remember gentler times.’

Hamilton Jones snorted at that. ‘Hardly gentler, Mister Greeley, if this man *is* Bullets Baldwin, he was nothing but a common criminal...’

‘A bank robber, Jones, he ran with the legendary Avenging Annie and she was our version of Robin Hood! Why, people still talk about what she did! Folk round these parts remember the tales of her and the gang. Bullets Baldwin was part of that gang and part of history.’

Greeley stared out the window and poked his thumbs into his belt.

‘Times have changed so darn fast,’ he muttered. ‘Lord, we’re in a new century! The old west is gone and soon will be nothing more than a memory. You young folk will know nothing of those great characters.’

Hamilton sat patiently while the editor stared into the past.

‘The Younger boys, James gang, Butch and the Hole in the Wall gang and, of course Avenging Annie! All

gone, all vanished and there won't be anybody left to remember them.'

The young reporter had to appear respectful as Greeley had reported the famous gunfights and range wars of the last century. It was said he was shot once or twice himself! And then, of course, was that old story about how Greeley had once met Avenging Annie.

'Bullets Baldwin,' Greeley said softly, 'the last member of Avenging Annie's gang. Folk around here will eat up stories about *that* gang. Did I tell you, Jones, that I travelled with her once?'

'Yes, sir,' Jones sighed, 'you did.'

*Please, not that story again!*

Hamilton was convinced the editor was a little loose with the truth on *that* story!

'What a journey that was,' Thomas Greeley said softly, 'I'll never forget how brave she was and how...well, that's another time.'

Greeley turned and pointed a finger at Jones.

'You get on down there across the border, get into that old folks home and talk to him; make sure he really is Bullets Baldwin!'

Jones nervously played with his hat.

'How will I know, sir, that he is whom he claims to be?'

'You're from back east, a smart young fellah,' Greeley said with a broad grin, 'or so you keep telling me; you'll figure something out.'

Greeley had turned back to the window with his memories and Jones had reluctantly begun his journey across the state and into the next.

Now, Jones sat in a rickety chair watching an old man puff on his pipe.

‘Mister Baldwin,’ Hamilton asked with a tinge of nervousness, ‘you claim to be Horace Baldwin, better known as Bullets Baldwin who was a bank robber in the no-mans land in 18...’

‘No claims about it, young fella,’ Baldwin said, rocking gently. ‘It’s a fact.’

‘But, how...’

Baldwin turned to look at Jones, his eyes remarkably alive in that grey bearded face.

‘Do you think I don’t know my own name?’

Jones looked away and pulled some papers from his carpetbag.

‘I’d like to check a few details...’

‘Details?’ Baldwin said in a flat voice and Jones suddenly saw the old man’s eyes were cold and dead. ‘You calling me a liar, son?’

Although the words were said quietly, Jones suddenly felt very afraid.

‘No...no,’ he stuttered, ‘but there are many impostors that have, in the past, claimed to be historical figures...such as...you...sir...’

Baldwin chuckled at that.

‘Well, I ain’t no impostor or whatever you calls it.’

‘I’d like to ask some questions, sir, if I may.’

Baldwin shrugged, blowing pungent grey smoke into the air.

‘Where were you born?’

‘New York City, the same as Annie. I found out later we were born a few blocks away from each other in Brooklyn. Course I’m probably fifteen years or thereabouts older than her.’

‘Horace Frederick Baldwin is your full name?’

‘Yep. Now you can see why I preferred Bullets!’

He laughed in that brittle voice which suddenly dissolved into a hacking and deep cough. As he spluttered into a stained rag, Jones turned his head as he thought he saw blood.

Baldwin recovered and wrapping his threadbare dignity around himself, smiled crookedly at the young man.

‘I expect you got a lot of questions, son?’

‘Yes sir.’

Hamilton asked all the usual questions – date of birth, first bank the Avenging Annie gang robbed – and Baldwin knew them all.

However, Jones needed to be sure so he decided to test the old man.

He rummaged through his papers and asked his subtle question.

‘Were you there the day Annie was shot? It was when the gang robbed the Farmers Home Bank at Hope...’

The old man gave Jones a hard look and firmly shook his head.

‘Never robbed any bank in Hope, young fella and Annie was shot at Salvation Wells.’

He sighed and sucked on the pipe.

‘That was a darn mess. We should never have tried it. Was never the same without Floyd and Jesse. We were forced into it and that Riggs fella was a low down...’ He stopped and smiled. ‘Is that the right answer to your trick question, son?’

Hamilton nodded and took out his notepad.

‘Yes, it is. Well, I have to say you appear to be who you claim to be, Mister Baldwin.’

‘Ain’t that a relief,’ Baldwin chuckled, eyes twinkling, ‘thought I might find out I wasn’t me!’

Hamilton ignored the gibe and said primly, ‘you can tell me your story.’

‘Am I getting my money for this?’

Baldwin locked eyes with the young reporter.

‘I need the money for a headstone, son,’ he explained. ‘I seemed to have made a habit of giving my money away. I don’t want to be buried in no paupers’ grave!’

‘You’ll get your money, Mister Baldwin, Mister Greeley has authorised the payment.’

‘And you’ll take care of the burial?’

Jones sighed.

‘Yes, Mister Baldwin that will be catered for...’

‘And the headstone as I want? I wrote it down but you’ll have to fix the spelling and stuff.’

Jones nodded.

‘It’ll be done.’

‘Give me your word, son,’ Bullets asked in a soft voice.

Jones looked into those old eyes, swallowed and said softly, ‘you have my word.’

Baldwin nodded and stared vacantly at the wall for a moment, remembering a time long gone.

Then he began.

‘I was hightailing it through the Creek Nation after a little misunderstanding about a horse. These sodbusters claimed I stole it but that’s another story. A hot summer was in the offering and I fell in with John Henry. That was a mistake but if I hadn’t, I wouldn’t have met Annie...’

Thomas Greeley finished reading and dropped the paper on the desk. His feet were on the desk and he relit a fat cigar, the match spluttering against his cowboy boots.

‘Good writing, son; it took me right back,’ he said a little wistfully. ‘The folks will like that yarn. God darn it, that Annie Parker was a hell of a woman!’

He pulled his feet off the desk and fixed Jones with his good eye.

‘You sure this fellah is Bullets Baldwin?’

‘He knew all the historical facts, sir.’

Greeley nodded. ‘It has the ring of truth about it, that’s a fact but there is a bit of that dime store novel *Tales of the Avenging Annie*.’

‘There is an element of that, sir, but I guessed the readers will enjoy it.’

‘Yes, that’s a fact.’

Greeley stood and looked down at Jones who was perched on the visitor’s chair.

‘You don’t mention that Annie Parker was killed at Salvation Wells,’ Greeley pointed out. ‘There have always been stories that she didn’t go down in that gunfight, even though J. C. Holliday reported that he had killed her. It would be good to lay all that to rest. Did Baldwin confirm that Avenging Annie was killed in Salvation Wells?’

‘Ah, no...not really.’

Jones fidgeted with his notes, avoiding the other man’s eyes and Greeley watched him for a moment. Then, he smiled.

‘I’ve been a newspaper man for a long time, son, I’ve had people of all shapes and sizes try to lie to me and my nose tells me you are holding out.’

Jones sighed. ‘Baldwin spun some tall tales, sir, and I only reported those that could be verified.’

Greeley leaned over the desk and stared at the nervous young reporter.

‘Tall tales? He told you about the gunfight, though? You didn’t make this up?’ Greeley picked the papers up and shook them once.

‘I certainly did not make anything up,’ Jones said indignantly, ‘but I reported only the facts.’

‘But you don’t give a clear picture. God darn it, Jones! Did Bullets Baldwin tell you what happened to Avenging Annie?’

‘Well,’ Jones said as he loosened his stiff collar, ‘he kind of did...but it’s unverified...’

Exasperated, Greeley cut in. ‘Did he see her get shot?’

‘Yes sir, he did and I put that in the story as some of the townsfolk saw it as well and it was reported in the Tulsa Bugle...’

‘I know that, son! I know the official record!’

Greeley was becoming cross and pointed a finger at Jones. It was his favourite gesture and he liked to think it was like holding a six-shooter on the young man.

‘Did he see Annie Parker die?’

‘No, sir, he did not.’

Greeley sighed and sat down heavily.

‘I thought we’d have some corroboration of her death at last.’

Jones sat with his head down while Greeley put his boots back on the desk and studied them.

‘What *did* he see?’ Greeley asked after a moment and Jones shifted uncomfortably.

‘Well...’

‘Spit it out, god darn it!’

‘He claims he saw her ride off.’

Greeley sat bolt upright, feet coming off the desk with a bang!

‘He saw what?’

‘That’s what he said, sir, he said that Annie Parker was shot but managed to stay on her horse and rode off.’

‘Well, I’ll be...’ Greeley smiled at Jones. ‘That’s a good yarn, why didn’t you put that in the story? Folks will like to think she got away. I know it’s unverified as you keep saying but folks would like a small piece of hope. Hope is a little hard to find these days.’

‘Ah, because...Baldwin claimed...um...’

‘Claimed what? God darn it, Jones, it’s like drawing blood from a cactus! What did he say?’

Jones took a deep breath.

‘Bullets Baldwin claimed that Annie Parker is still alive.’

Greeley spun around in his chair, his face white.

‘And,’ Jones continued, ‘he knows where she is.’

The small ranch was on the top of the hill and the horse harnessed to the buggy, plodded steadily up the slope.

As Jones approached, he saw a woman standing on the porch, holding her grey hair in the wind while watching him come closer. The wind was in the trees and a flock of birds passed overhead as clouds, tinged with grey and blue, rolled and tumbled in the late afternoon sky.

Jones tied the horse's reigns at the water trough, removed his hat and walked hesitantly forward, feeling the old woman's eyes on him.

She was old by Jones's standards, there was no doubt about that but she still stood straight and watched him carefully.

The simple dress fluttered against her legs and her hands were deep in the pockets of the rough coat buttoned against the rising wind.

'Evening, ma'am,' Jones called. 'Are you Mrs Caldwell?'

The woman said nothing, just watched him with those big dark eyes.

Jones tried again.

'I'm Hamilton Jones, I'm a reporter for the...'

'Reporter? What's that?' her voice was slow and soft but the wind carried it to Jones.

'I write for the newspaper,' Jones said proudly, stepping closer.

She looked at him keenly and he stopped.

'You carrying a gun, Mister Jones?'

Jones was shocked.

‘A gun? Me? Goodness no! This is the dawn of the twentieth century, ma’am, we are entering a time of peace and prosperity...’

‘Sure we are,’ she said dryly. ‘Come on in, I expect I know why you’re here.’

Jones followed her into the sparsely furnished farmhouse and looked around. The house was neat and tidy, a grandfather clock stood in the hallway softly ticking and the walls were covered with photographs of children and families.

‘Come into the kitchen.’

The kitchen was warm and smelled of fresh cooking. An aura of warmth and friendliness, the sense of a home, struck Jones as he looked around.

A gun belt and holster hung from an old bureau and the woman shocked Jones by removing a pistol from her pocket and slipping it back into the holster.

Seeing his shocked expression, she winked and said softly, ‘you never know when some varmint is going come along to steal your peace and prosperity!’

She laughed softly and nodded at the old coffee pot on the fuel stove.

‘Coffee, mister? What was your name again?’

‘Hamilton Jones. Well, yes, coffee would be...nice.’

As she poured the coffee, Hamilton studied the woman. Her hair was completely grey and extended to the middle of her back. Two small plaited threads hung on either side of her face as was the Indian custom but

the rest of that thick grey mane was simply brushed back and covered her shoulders and down her back.

She would have been, Jones thought, a handsome woman once, probably beautiful. It was, he concluded, the eyes that entranced you, so dark and magnetic.

There were no records of the birth of Annie Parker so Jones had no way of calculating her age but he guessed she was maybe as old as fifty. Jones was only twenty two so anyone over forty seemed old to him and Baldwin had appeared positively ancient.

The coffee was thick and black and Jones sipped it as the woman cut him a piece of pie and slid it over the table. She had thin gold wedding ring on her finger and a beaded Indian bracelets around each of her wrists.

‘You look a little scrawny,’ she said with a hint of kindness. ‘Have some pie.’

‘Thank you, ma’am.’

He munched the pie and sipped the coffee while she watched him carefully.

‘What you after, son,’ she said after a moment.

‘Are you, Mrs Caldwell?’

‘And if I am?’

‘I was told that you perhaps had another name,’ Jones said slowly, ‘that you were Annie Parker.’

She sighed softly, moved away and stoked the fire.

‘Gets chilly when the sun starts to go. Maybe I feel it more in my bones now.’

She carefully hung the poker next to the fuel stove and sat at the table across from Jones.

‘Who told you that I was Annie Parker?’

‘Horace Baldwin. He was known as...’

‘Bullets,’ she finished quietly, staring at the rough tabletop. ‘Horace,’ she said with a smile, ‘he hated that. How is he?’

‘I’m afraid he’s dying, ma’am. He’s got something wrong with his lungs...’

‘He used to smoke that foul tobacco, probably caused it,’ she said with a wistful smile.

‘Still smokes it, ma’am,’ Jones volunteered and the woman chuckled for a moment until her face grew serious with a tinge of sadness.

‘Old Bullets dying. Then, there’s nobody left.’

‘Except you,’ Jones said quietly.

She stared at the holstered gun and Jones was surprised to see her pull a thin handkerchief from her skirt pocket and dab at her eyes.

‘Bullets was a fine man, a great man,’ she whispered and they sat in a long silence as she stared at the wall.

It was plain to Jones that she was somewhere else; perhaps lost in memories of another time, another place and he kept quiet so he wouldn’t break the spell.

After a time, she gathered herself and smiled at Jones.

‘*I am Mrs Ann Caldwell, son.*’

‘And were you also known as...’ Jones jumped in eagerly.

‘Yes,’ she sighed softly, ‘I was known as Annie Parker – *Avenging Annie*. Darn, I hated that nickname! I expect you want me to tell you a story?’

Jones rapidly pulled his notebook from his pocket.

‘Yes,’ he stuttered.

*Was this really Avenging Annie Parker?*

‘I’ll tell you, son,’ she whispered, ‘I’ll tell you the story of Avenging Annie but you won’t believe it, no one will.’

Annie stood, walked over to the bureau and removed an old shawl and wrapped around her shoulders.

Sitting again, she stared at the gun belt looped over the mirror stand on the bureau.

‘You won’t believe it,’ Annie whispered again, to herself, ‘no one will and no newspaper will print it.’

‘I’m sure Mister Greeley will print it...’

‘Who?’ Annie asked swiftly.

‘My editor, Thomas Greeley. You were a folk hero...*are* a folk hero...’

‘Tommy Greeley? Well, well,’ she said with a small smile. ‘He’d be old now, wouldn’t he?’

*Not as old as you*, Jones felt like saying but realised it wouldn’t exactly be polite. Besides, he’d come all this way for a story, and he was going to get it!

‘He’s getting on,’ Jones said diplomatically, ‘but he admires you, so he’d want to print all your story.’

‘Admiration can be a dangerous emotion,’ Annie said quietly, ‘and I doubt he’d print it.’

Annie shook her head slowly and pointed at his notepad.

‘But I’ll give you the chance. Might as well tell the true story before I shuffle off. You just write down everything I tell you, no questions until the end, agreed?’

Jones nodded.

They sat in silence for a long moment and then Annie took a deep breath and began.

## ***One***

### **I spend my whole life tellin' lies**

I was born Andrew Parker in New York and spent my early years in the harsh world of a Brooklyn orphanage. At first, I had a natural curiosity and wondered what happened to my parents but nobody seemed to know or even care what the truth was.

It was a plain fact that who ever they were, they decided I wasn't good enough for them and deserted me. That's how I saw it, anyways. When pressed, the nuns reluctantly gave me the theories that my mother was a lady of the night who just left me or, perhaps, died having me and my father was some drifter.

Either way, it really didn't matter to me and I learned very quickly that only the tough and the ruthless survive in this world. And you have to be quick-witted.

The world I was born into, kicking and screaming, and tried to make my way in, didn't appear to be so darn good. Maybe it was a fine place long ago before folk started meddling and taking what they wanted. People fiddled with everything and the greedy started plundering while the strong destroyed the weak and the powerless.

Sometimes I wonder what we've done with this gift the universe gave us, what we've done with this here world. Politicians full of greed and lies have twisted everything for their own short-term glory - delusional

grandeur, one of the drunks who slept against the orphanage wall said it was, they think that because they're Governor or President, they're immortal, that they'll live on in history.

That same drunk told me of explorers finding this huge statue of a man in some desert somewhere that had been half buried by sand. When the explorers dug it out, they saw something written on it and they must have known the language because it said something like this.

*My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings.\**

I'd never heard of any king by that name but that doesn't mean much, as I'm not educated. Hell, that drunk was better educated than me.

Anyway, I think the story meant that people might think they're important today but in the grand scheme of things, they're no more important than an ant, a tree or a river. In fact, the tree and river is probably more important than us!

Whatever it was, those politicians strut around in their fine clothes, spouting all kind of fairytales while this world of ours just goes down the drain! I guess there ain't no point worrying about things I can't fix but it seems we just keep repeating mistakes, that we never learn.

Humans are supposed to be smart, the smartest on the planet but, in my eyes, humans fool themselves about that and, in fact, we're pretty dumb!

We humans think we can control everything, but I've come to realise that things are not what they seem,

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\* Poem by Percy Bysshe Shelley (See Appendix)

that there are things around us that we're just too blind to see.

And too dumb to believe in.

Anyway, back to my tale.

The orphanage was hell! A desperate hole with bullies and sex fools preying on the weak! I wasn't strong enough to fight back, so after my first three or four beatings, I figured I had to outsmart my enemies as I sure wasn't going to be able to outfight them!

You see, I was small for my age and thin with a young face. Either I had boys wanting to beat me or do things to me that, I thought, at the time, were unnatural.

Don't get me wrong, I knew a little about the birds and the bees, I wasn't a completely naïve fool, but I didn't want to play unnatural games with some of those hulks that controlled the upper dormitories.

At fourteen, I broke out of the orphanage and took off as fast as my feet could take me. It was easy to get out – I think the nuns hoped that some of us *would* vanish – so I just slipped through a window and over the wall.

It wasn't easy to survive outside, but as I was small, I didn't attract much attention and managed to scrounge food and pick a few pockets for cash. I even tried a little begging but the police didn't take kindly to that and used to beat up any beggars they found. Luckily, I could run pretty fast!

I survived on the cold streets of New York for a time but I thought there had to be something better. One

night, while I was fixing to pick pockets, I overheard some gentlemen talking about the opportunities that were out west. It appeared that fortunes were being made everyday and some of the streets were paved with gold. After hearing that, I decided, I should go west where, it was said, everybody got a fresh start and everybody could own their own piece of land.

Folk were all talking of a better world out west and I was all for a better world! The one I was in was closer to Hell and nothing no Indian or wild animal could throw at me would even come close to that!

So, I thought I'd try this fresh start everyone was talking about, see if it would work for me. I didn't know then just how *fresh* my new start was going to be!

For the next year and a bit I drifted out of the cities and began heading west in earnest. One day, on the banks of the Mississippi River, I tried to pick the wrong pocket.

Or, as it turned out later, the *right* pocket as it led me onto a strange but true path.