

THIS RESTLESS SEA is a 90,000-word, dual POV, upmarket historical romance set in the Oklahoma Territory in the late 1890s. It is similar in theme and tone to Nancy Campbell Allen's 'Proper Romance,' TO CAPTURE HIS HEART. Fans of Rachel Fordham's A LIFE ONCE DREAMED and Deeanne Gist's TIFFANY GIRL will also enjoy my book. Themes regarding women's equality and the unfairness endemic in the striation of the social classes are woven in throughout the story.

This Restless Sea

by Sharon Kayne

Chapter 1 • The Train

Kate looked up as the train pulled into a Missouri station. There was nothing particularly poetic about the small station, but Kate knew that writers could get their inspiration anywhere, so she shifted her gaze to the faces of the people who were boarding the train. Besides exhibiting character and emotion, every face had a story to tell and Kate, who knew that it was story – and the drama of the human experience – that was at the heart of all poetry, soaked up as much from their expressions as the moment allowed.

As the train car began to fill up, an older woman approached Kate and asked if she could take a seat in the same row. Kate smiled, nodded her head, and set her book down. It had been some time since she'd had someone else to talk to and she realized this might give her a chance to find out more about the people who carved out an existence in the rolling hills of the Great Plains.

"Thank you so much," the woman said as she settled into her seat. "I never like to travel alone. A woman alone is always so vulnerable." While the woman's clothing was clean and well mended, it was of a considerably lower quality than what Kate was wearing – her plainest traveling ensemble. While Kate's skirt and matching jacket were made of a fairly simple fabric, and their colors – primarily greys and blues – were considerably duller than most of the clothes she had left behind at home, they were still tailored of brocade. Under the jacket she wore a simple shirtwaist with little lace. She also wore a close-brimmed bonnet, and carried a small, black handbag. It was, she believed, the most somber traveling outfit she could manage given

her wardrobe at home, and she had hoped it would allow her to blend in with other working people. But, for the first time on her trip, Kate felt as though she stood out. While her sisters and friends all hoped to stand out wherever they went by being the prettiest and best-dressed female in sight, Kate began to worry that she might not be able to fit in with the residents of her new home as well as she had hoped.

“Miss Katherine Palmer,” Kate said, extending her hand. The woman paused for just a moment before accepting Kate’s hand and returning the greeting. “Mrs. Howard. Pleasure to meet you.”

Kate nodded. “And you. Where are you headed, if I may ask?”

“Oklahoma. My oldest daughter just had her first baby, so I was in Missouri to see the little mite. And help out a bit,” she said with grandmotherly pride.

“Congratulations,” replied Kate. “I’m heading to Oklahoma as well.”

“You got family there?”

“No. I’m going to teach school in Anderville.”

“Well, bless your heart,” Mrs. Howard nearly beamed. “That’s where I live as well. I imagine you’ll have my two older granddaughters in your class.”

“I imagine I will,” smiled Kate, happy to have met her first Anderville neighbor.

“They are my eldest son’s children,” said Mrs. Howard. “Faith’s ten, so I expect she won’t be in school much longer. But Joy is just eight, so you should have her for several years.” Mrs. Howard smiled as she thought of her grandchildren. Then she frowned as she was taken with an unhappy thought. “That is, if you stay several years.”

“I hope to,” said Kate, both curious and a bit concerned by the woman’s comment.

“Well, it’s just that our last teacher up and married before her first year was over. Hitched herself to a ranch hand and followed him to California.”

“I see,” said Kate. Perhaps that is why her employment contract explicitly stated that schoolmarms could not be married. The men could, of course, and while marriage would end a

woman's job, it would lead to a small raise for a man. Though Kate did not imagine she would ever marry herself, she found this a rather unfair employment stipulation.

"I reckon," said Mrs. Howard, lowering her voice, "that she had to leave before her," she paused, unsure how to divulge this next piece of information. "Before, uh ... before her *condition* became apparent," she said touching her stomach.

"Oh," said Kate, at a loss for any other response. Her predecessor had apparently not only broken her contract, but she had also given the town gossips much to discuss.

"Left us in the middle of the spring term," Mrs. Howard continued. "Too late to hire someone else, so you're likely to find the children are a bit behind where they should be."

"I'm sure the children will be able to catch up quickly," said Kate, eager to leave this particular subject behind.

"Oh my, but you're a looker," Mrs. Howard said with a nod and a conspiratorial smile. "You won't have any trouble finding a husband if that's why you've come," she added with a motherly wink. "Although I can't imagine you had any trouble catching a beau – or two or three – wherever you're from."

Kate gave her a polite smile. She knew she was exceedingly pretty – many men had told her so. She was also slender and slightly taller than the average woman. She had an oval face with high cheek bones, green eyes, and thick auburn hair. Being of the class of women who could avoid spending time in the sun, her skin was an unblemished ivory color. Still, Kate sighed and looked out the train window. She had been excited about settling in the West because it was known for its spirit of independence. Apparently, that spirit only applied to the men. Women were still expected to marry and have children, both of which would keep Kate from pursuing her deepest desire – that of becoming a poet.

"I still have one more daughter at home – Sarah – who needs to find herself a husband," Mrs. Howard continued. "I expect she's about your age, so I hope you don't compete with her for all the eligible bachelors in town," she added with a light laugh.

“I’m sure I won’t,” Kate replied.

“And where do you hail from?”

“Philadelphia.”

“Oh my, you’re a big-city girl,” Mrs. Howard said, her eyes widening. “I imagine you’ll find life very different in Anderville. Much quieter and slower.”

“It will be an adjustment, I’ve no doubt, but I’m looking forward to my duties as a schoolteacher.”

What Kate was looking forward to the most was the time she’d have outside of the classroom when she could throw herself into writing poetry. But she wasn’t certain she wanted to share the details of her ultimate objective with anyone just yet. Kate also looked forward to not being drawn away from her writing by having to attend the high-society events – the dinners and dances – that were as ubiquitous as they were pointless for a young woman who was not making a career out of finding a husband. But she was also uncertain that she wanted to share the details of the life she’d just given up either. Instead, Kate listened while Mrs. Howard talked about the town and the people in it. The matron named all of the families with school-age children Kate was likely to be teaching soon, as well as the eligible young men and women, whom Mrs. Howard hoped would be getting married soon and having children of their own. She gave a rundown of who canned the best fruit and vegetables, who failed to attend church regularly, and whose marriages seemed to be unhappy. Kate listened politely, nodding her head every now and then, until Mrs. Howard either finally reached the end of her repertoire or simply got too bored to continue. After a respectable space of silence, Kate opened her book and began to read.

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Thomas Newhall looked at the clock in his office. The train would not arrive for another three hours. It had a large order on it for the lumber mill, but that was not what kept drawing his attention to the clock. This train would also have the new schoolmarm on board. He was not thrilled that the duty of hiring the schoolteacher had fallen to him, but it had. He’d offered to

do it once and then it had become expected. He didn't mind the work. What he disliked was not knowing whether he'd made the right decision until the new candidate appeared. By then, if he'd chosen wrong, it was too late to look for a replacement. Beyond wanting a teacher who was qualified for the job, the most important quality he sought was a woman who would not come to Anderville in order to find a husband. But, for the last several years running, that quality had eluded him, and he'd watched as schoolmarm after schoolmarm had left the position in order to marry. The last one had not even stayed for her entire contract. He would have hired a man if he could find one, but he hadn't come across a male candidate who'd showed the least bit of promise. He would have happily hired a woman who was too old or unappealing to marry, but that was hardly information one could request over correspondence. The newest schoolmarm, he surmised, was young, as this was her first assignment after completing normal school. It was quite wrong, he knew, to hope that she was terribly unattractive, but that did not stop him.

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Since the start of her journey, Kate had seen extraordinary changes in the landscape. Gone were the forests and mountains of the Appalachian Valley and the green, hilly terrain of the Ohio River Basin. Now the train was running through the mostly flat, completely open Great Plains. As she gazed out over the prairie, she realized the change in landscape was an apt metaphor for her flight from the Philadelphia society, which felt as stultifying to her as a forest too dense to admit sunlight.

Though largely empty, the new landscape had almost a poetic sense to it. Kate had made copious notes of the words and feelings that came to mind. As she had made this life change so she could write poetry, she was going to capture whatever inspiration came her way.

Kate found the Great Plains breathtaking – particularly now in the early autumn. The grass, thick and golden, created a mantle of sorts for the land. Trees were considerably scarcer here and those that stood did so with stubborn pride, despite their often-lackluster appearance. The landscape – whether flat or in gentle hills – gave one a sense of spaciousness that Kate found rather intoxicating. Where Philadelphia society had felt close and suffocating, the prairie gave

her the feeling of unlimited possibility. It had a sense of endlessness about it, much like the ocean. The near-constant wind made the grasses look like a restless sea. And the sky. The sky! With no buildings, hills or forests to block one's view, the sky took on a whole new dimension. At once much larger than it had appeared at home, the sky also felt much closer, as if the inviting spread of the open plains brought it down to the land, connecting it at every horizon. And the sun, which was constant and much brighter than at home, felt more like an active participant in the landscape rather than the remote, capricious arbiter of weather patterns it had been in Philadelphia.

Although it was just a little more than two years since Kate had told her parents that she wanted to attend the normal school to earn a teaching certificate, it seemed ages ago now. Her mother had demanded to know why any daughter of hers felt the need – or even desire – to stoop to earning a living when she was provided a comfortable, even enviable life. At first Kate had tried to explain her dream of being a published poet, and why the social class to which she belonged was too rigid to allow such expression. Not to mention duller than dirt and bereft of any poetic underpinnings. The young women she was expected to associate with talked of nothing beyond fashion and marriage. The only news she was allowed to consume was between the society pages. She'd had to sneak into her father's study to steal the sections of the paper with any real news, and then had to read them in secret. The few times at social gatherings when she had tried to express her opinion on the news of the day she had been immediately engaged to dance.

"Your father and I have provided everything a young woman requires, and you have had scores of suiters, any one of whom would have made a proper match. I don't understand why you cannot simply select one of them and get married and settle down," her mother had said. "If you continue to dally this way, you'll find yourself too old to attract a husband. Good heavens, you're out of your teens as it is. You will end up living your days as an old maid. Is that what you want?"

"What I want is to pursue my own interests. I have no desire to marry and produce babies. If that makes me into an old maid, so be it. I'd rather be an old maid who has followed her own

path than a woman who has settled for a life she does not desire. The life you want for me will tie me to everyone else's expectations and lock me into an existence so prescribed that I might as well be stepping into my grave," Kate had answered back.

As appalled as her mother had clearly been by that answer, it did not deter her from continuing the battle, albeit with an assault from a new position. "And what kind of example does this set for your sisters?"

"A good one, I hope, in the event that they want to follow their own dreams," Kate replied, even though she knew it was unlikely. "If Issy and Beth want for themselves what you clearly want for me, then what I do will not sway them." She knew her two sisters, both younger than she, would not follow her example. They were delighted to live in the world of openly chasing the latest fashions and discretely chasing the most eligible men. She had no doubt Isadora and Elizabeth would both marry men who could provide for them as they were accustomed. Then they would run households of servants, bear children, and do the obligatory charity work. And if it made them happy, Kate would be happy for them. But it was not what she wanted for herself.

Only her brother – who, by virtue of being male and therefore free to pursue his own interests – seemed to have any empathy, albeit limited, for her situation. Byron had not only been allowed to attend university, he had been encouraged to do so. And only now – since he had joined a promising law firm – had his status as a still-unmarried man become an area of concern for their mother. Even so, Mother's prodding of Byron to find a wife was gentle – far gentler than her work to push Kate into marriage.

Still, since Kate had come of age and had a small inheritance from her grandmother, she had been able to attend a normal school without her parents' explicit consent. Her mother came to accept that course of action with little comment as long as Kate continued to attend the most important social events. Kate's current path, however – traveling to the Oklahoma territory where she had accepted a job as a schoolteacher – was something her mother found far more difficult to accept.

“Oklahoma! Why that’s Indian territory!” she had cried in absolute terror. “You’ll be scalped or taken captive by bands of savages!”

“Oh mother, don’t be ridiculous. Oklahoma hasn’t been considered Indian territory since the 1850s.”

“That cannot be correct,” her mother had persisted. Then turning to her husband said, “That is not correct is it?”

Mr. Palmer, who was never particularly keen to be drawn into what he considered his wife’s domain, simply nodded his head. “That sounds correct to me.”

Mrs. Palmer did not let her husband’s inability to back her up stop her. “And how will you get there? By covered wagon?”

“I’ll get there the same way we got to Chicago to see the World’s Fair last year. By train.”

“But Chicago is a big city. Surely the tracks don’t go beyond it.”

“Really, mother. Do you know nothing of what goes on outside of Philadelphia? The railroad has been expanding westward for nearly four decades.”

Mrs. Palmer showed immense dislike that somehow her eldest daughter had managed to find some facts that conveniently rebutted her own arguments. Kate half expected to hear once again the lecture on the evils of girls who read too much. It had been reading, Mrs. Palmer undoubtedly believed, that had put these wild ideas of traveling to the frontier to become a schoolmarm into Kate’s head.

That this job would require Kate to leave Philadelphia and head into the western frontier was one of the reasons she had accepted it. The West had an aura of independence about it that Kate found extremely appealing. Only those with a dream and great determination headed into the western territories. It took spirit, gumption, and sheer will to carve a life out of nothing and Kate was certain she had those qualities in spades. She loved the idea of being a pioneer, of sorts, but what truly drew her was the thought that pioneering would both free her to write and give her endless inspiration. While the job itself had some drawbacks – chiefly that the pay

for a woman was considerably lower than for a man, despite both sexes being expected to do the same work – it had one bonus. Most teaching jobs in the West required the schoolmarm to find shelter with some kind or generous family. Here, she was to live in a small home near the schoolhouse. It was furnished with just the basics, and Kate did not expect to spend her savings on making it more comfortable, but it would be hers and hers alone! A bed for sleeping and a small table for writing, along with time and solitude, were all she really needed to become the poet she knew herself to be.

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The rest of their journey was spent quietly. Mrs. Howard didn't speak again until the train was slowing to make its stop in Anderville. "Well, here we are," Mrs. Howard said with a companionable smile, as if they had become the best of friends. "And there is Mr. Howard to greet me," she said, with a wave toward the window. "Oh! And he's brought Faith and Joy, so you can meet two of your brand-new students," she said standing up and grabbing Kate's hand. "Follow me."

With barely enough time to grab her things, Kate followed Mrs. Howard off of the train and stood on the platform as Mrs. Howard pulled each of her grandchildren into a hug, before acknowledging her husband. "You'll never believe who I met on the train," she exclaimed to the two girls as if Kate was an oddity. "Faith, Joy, this is Miss Palmer, your new teacher." The two children gave her a polite but lukewarm hello before turning back to their grandmother.

"Did you bring us anything?" Faith asked her grandmother as though she was about to burst.

"Of course. They're in my trunk, so behave. Miss Palmer, this is my husband, Mr. Howard."

Kate and Mr. Howard exchanged the necessary niceties while Mrs. Howard took each grandchild by the hand and walked off toward the station, Kate having been forgotten. "I have so much to tell you about your newest cousin," she began as they walked away. Mr. Howard gave Kate a look of apology before turning and trailing after them.

Kate stood on the train platform, which was quickly emptying of people, and looked out past the small station waiting room. As she glanced down the length of the train she saw men using

oxen to unload tree trunks from one of the flatbed cars. One man stood out from the rest. Aside from being quite tall, he was not dressed for manual labor and was standing a ways from the train where he was able to watch the entire operation. So, not everything was as different here as Kate had hoped; the hard work was still done by paid hands while the owners and managers looked on like nannies watching their nursery brood. She had hoped to put this sort of social order behind her, but even this tiny frontier town followed the unspoken rules against which she chafed.

She was still musing on this thought when she was approached by an older man, dressed in a wide-brimmed hat, work shirt, and quite dingy dungarees.

“Uh ... Miss Palmer?” he asked, having taken his hat in hand.

“Yes. You must be Mr. Newhall.”

“Oh, no ma’am,” he said with a nearly imperceptible bit of embarrassment. “I’m Samuel Grover. I work for Mr. Newhall. He sent me to fetch you to the school.”

“Of course, Mr. Grover. Katherine Palmer,” she said holding out her hand. “I’m pleased to meet you.”

Samuel looked at her outstretched hand and his embarrassment turned from almost imperceptible to quite apparent. He looked down, put his hat back on, and clasped his hands behind his back.

“Those are your trunks, then?” he asked, indicating the two that had been set on the platform just behind her.

“Yes,” she said, lowering her unaccepted hand.

“I’ll just get a boy to help,” Samuel said before turning and walking toward the station.

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Once the trees for the mill had been unloaded, Thomas noticed that all of his workers were watching the train platform behind him. He turned around and what he saw made his throat

close. A lone woman stood by the edge of the platform. That, in and of itself, was not an especially provocative sight. But there was something about her that made his body react with disconcerting arousal, even though he could not see her terribly well from this distance. She appeared to be well dressed and proportioned, and she stood tall, her posture signaling that although she was new here she was not the least bit afraid or unsure of herself. He tried to convince himself that this fine woman could not possibly be the new schoolmarm, but then he noticed that the buckboard from his farm was parked near her just beyond the platform. Then Samuel and a boy loaded two travel trunks onto the buckboard. Once Samuel offered his hand to help the woman alight the buckboard, all hope that this was not the new schoolmarm fled him. One of his workers gave a soft whistle of appreciation for the sight she presented. When Thomas turned back to give the man a censorious look, he noted that all of the men had expressions of awe; almost as if she was the first woman any of them had ever seen. He cursed silently.

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