

THE COVERT BUCCANEER

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One Sentence Pitch

In a dual-timeline family saga inspired by true events, a modern-day climate migrant attorney and special needs mother uncovers her great-great-grandmother's secret life as a pioneering miner and suffragist, revealing hidden truths and alliances, a legacy of rebellion, unexpected romance, and the key to solving her client's case.

Brief Summary

THE COVERT BUCCANEER (115,000 words), is a dual-timeline women's historical fiction family saga that intertwines the lives of two extraordinary women: Theodora "Teddy" Ellis, a pioneering miner and suffragist, and her great-great-granddaughter Georgina "Ellie" Benvenuto, a modern-day attorney and special needs mother in San Francisco (an under-explored historical fiction setting). The story blends real events and characters with contemporary resonance, exploring themes of climate justice, gender non-conformity, the immigrant experience, caregiver economy, and unsung Indigenous voices. It combines the historical intrigue of "The Women of Chateau Lafayette" with the character-driven narrative of "The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo."

Divorced and facing job insecurity due to her special needs child, Ellie Benvenuto now represents climate migrants and women fleeing dangerous conditions. Upon discovering her great-great-grandmother Teddy's diary, Ellie uncovers a legacy of hidden alliances, covert actions for immigrants' and women's rights, and disguised exploits, including Teddy's flight from the 1871 Great Chicago Fire, gold prospecting in the Klondike, and rebuilding neighborhoods after the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake. As Ellie delves into Teddy's past—marked by tragedy, complex friendships, and an unconventional romance—she finds striking parallels to her own life, questions about her heritage, and even the key to solving her client's legal case. THE COVERT BUCCANEER is a gripping tale of resilience, adventure, friendship, and love, layered with humor and historical depth. Delicious AND nutritious, you'll feel all the feels.

As the great-great-granddaughter of the source material (and passionate literature and history buff) I bring a special authenticity to this novel. My connection is enriched by my background as a VP for UN Women, special needs mother in San Francisco, respected author, and attorney who has represented dozens of climate migrants, and has specifically advanced public policy for women in the areas of caregiver economy and discrimination.

Synopsis

Based on actual characters and events, THE COVERT BUCCANEER tells the story of a modern-day woman, mother, and professional in San Francisco who discovers a 100+-year-old family diary. This suspenseful, intricately woven generational tapestry spans political, social, and global threads through the lives of two women protagonists, bookending the Anthropocene and its long-term impact on the intersection of immigration, climate justice, women's rights, and Indigenous communities. Complex, funny, steamy, relatable, and true, THE COVERT BUCCANEER is a family saga of resilience, friendship, adventure, and discovery.

Ellie Benvenuto, a current-day divorced mother of two toddlers (one with severe special needs requiring a team of 14 interventionists), was raised in a small town outside Chicago. Now living in San Francisco, Ellie is a polyglot and attorney. Due to the extraordinary demands of her children, she takes on flexible work, representing climate migrants, undocumented laborers, and asylum cases for women fleeing dangerous situations in their home countries.

While helping her father clear out her grandparents' home in Berkeley, CA, after her grandfather's death, Ellie stumbles upon an aged leather diary written by her great-great-grandmother, Theodora "Teddy" Ellis (1854-1919). The diary ends in 1919, the year the U.S. Congress passed the 19th Amendment, granting women the right to vote.

Ellie is stunned to learn that her great-great-grandmother, though invisible to history and her own family, was a trailblazer on the American Frontier. Teddy was the first woman bookkeeper in Chicago, a miner, suffragist, real estate mogul, and ally of Native Americans. For years, she disguised herself as a man, accompanying Ellie's great-great-grandfather on his adventures from Chicago to San Francisco.

Theodora's life story is a whirlwind of the Industrial Revolution, cattle drives, bull train treks across the Plains, the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, saloon shoot-outs, vigilantes, sea voyages, and negotiations with Native Americans. Her adventures include encounters with Buffalo Bill Cody, General Custer, gold and quartz mining, whiskey smuggling, the grand opening of the Palace Hotel in 1875, a San Francisco fortune-teller, discovering a mammoth tooth while prospecting in the Klondike, the "Hat Pin Panic," and rebuilding San Francisco after the earthquake and fire of 1906.

In short, Ellie's great-great-grandmother, Teddy, was a covert buccaneer—a spirited, restless soul born in what might have seemed the wrong time and place, or perhaps exactly the right one. Although Teddy eventually settled in San Francisco to raise her children while her husband, George, continued prospecting in Mexico and the Klondike (facing, as he put it, "much trouble with the Indians"), she found meaningful pursuits alongside her Miwok best friend. She also utilized her previous life of disguise to infiltrate male-dominated spaces and strategize for the women's rights movement.

As Ellie walks the same streets her ancestor did over a century earlier, she bonds with Teddy through shared life parallels of their struggles, their friendships, and their romances—including a key clue among her great-great-grandmother's artifacts that solves the mystery of one of Ellie's legal cases.

What's more, Ellie is awed by Teddy's contributions to advancing the rights Ellie has enjoyed her entire life. Ellie, who once felt her promising legal career had been thwarted, now gains a new understanding of the work that remains to be done at the intersection of climate justice and women's rights.

Even more, she realizes she has already begun doing it.

This is the true story of countless women and non-Whites who went unnoticed during their time and why their stories matter to us now.

