

## JON KERSEY

*Boots and Blanket, 2006*  
silver gelatin print, 9 x 9 in



courtesy: the artist

## MARY DORIA RUSSELL

### from *Epitaph*

*Over 130 years ago, Doc Holliday and Wyatt Earp were involved in a thirty-second street fight in a vacant lot behind a photography studio in Tombstone, Arizona. To this day—because of movies and television—people around the world know their names.*

*In her critically acclaimed 2011 novel Doc, Mary Doria Russell stripped away more than a century of mythology to reintroduce the real men to readers—by telling the story of their meeting in Dodge City, Kansas, three years before the famous gunfight at the o.k. Corral. At that time, Doc Holliday was nothing more frightening than a quiet, sickly dentist, and Wyatt Earp was just a part-time policeman who couldn't seem to hold a job. Russell's next book follows them to their fate in Tombstone. This excerpt from Epitaph (coming in 2014 from Ecco) introduces Josephine Sarah Marcus, the teenager who would become the love of Wyatt Earp's life.*

“You’re Russian.”  
She looked over her shoulder.  
He was thin-faced and bent a little to his left, but tall enough to spy on her over the ornate swinging doors that separated the Cosmopolitan Hotel’s busy lobby from its rarely used music room.

She swiveled on the piano stool and fixed him with a bleary, red-rimmed, adolescent glare. “I’m as American as you are!”

A moment passed. A slow smile began in his eyes, and he stepped inside, leaning on a silver-topped walking stick. “Not ‘Russian.’ You’re *rushing*,” he told her, enunciating more clearly.

Everything about the man seemed slightly askew—his smile, his posture, his demeanor. With an unhurried staidness, he came closer and handed her a pressed white cotton handkerchief. “Blow your nose, Sugar.”

Resentfully, she did as she was told. Annoyed to be treated like a child. Aware that wiping snot on her sleeve was not a sophisticated alternative.

When he bent to place his hat and walking stick on a small walnut table, she could see the bones in his crooked back, right through the fabric of a silver-gray frock coat. Without introducing himself, he sat in the wingback chair, casually crossing one knobby knee over the other. “Right hand only. And slow down,” he said, taking a slim dark cigar from a flat silver case.

“Are you a piano teacher?”

“Never mind what I am.” He struck a match and lit the cigarillo with a few short, shallow puffs, choking slightly as he did so. “First eight measures. Right hand. Slowly.”

“It’s useless! I used to know this one, but I’ve forgotten everything! The music just looks like dots again—”

“Just play.”

Cigarillo at a jaunty angle, he leaned on his left elbow and settled into the upholstery. A tension that she had not noticed before left his face. He lifted his chin toward the keyboard.

She got a note wrong in the second measure and banged on the keys.

“You see?” she cried. “I told you!”

“Start over,” he said patiently. *Staht ovah*, it sounded like. “Give your hands a chance to remember.”

Six more attempts, and she got through eight mea-