

*Rescued Widows,
Spinsters, and Brides*



Oliveria

ELAINE MANDERS

Contents

[Olivia](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Excerpt: Mail Order Kaitlyn](#)

[Author's Note](#)

[Books by Elaine Manders](#)

[About the Author](#)

Olivia

Rescued Widows, Spinsters, and Brides

Book 4

Elaine Manders

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Scripture references are taken from the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible.

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May every reader be blessed and the Lord be magnified.

Chapter 1



Near the Colorado Rockies, 1889

Well, Lord, which way do I go now?

Jonah Dykes sat back in the saddle on his roan gelding and scanned the unforgiving terrain before him. Jagged peaks rose like spears ready to pierce anyone foolish enough to scale the towering mountains. The trees and vegetation thinned around the base, revealing a ribbon of trail climbing in a swirl around and around like the roping on a Christmas tree, until it disappeared through the gap between the mountains.

As far as Jonah could see, this narrow trail was the only way to get to the other side, and he'd have to reach the other side if he expected to find his brother in the mining camp.

Just to be on the safe side, Jonah consulted the crumbled map Bill Sikes had drawn for him. "Better get yourself an Indian guide," the old trapper had advised. But Jonah didn't have the money to pay a guide. He'd roamed these mountains since boyhood, so he'd convinced himself he could find the Tinsley Mining Company where his younger brother, Timothy, had gone to work.

A guide might have saved some time, though. Jonah had been on the trail over a week now, and he didn't have time to waste. The woman back in Greenwood, Lucille Lake, couldn't wait. Jonah wasn't sure how far along she was, but he had to get Timothy back in time to marry her before the baby came.

He leaned forward to rub the horse's neck. "I reckon this is the only way to our pass, Sampson. Let's go."

The gelding clip-clopped through the pines and aspens at a steady pace. The forest wasn't dense, but the horse had to pick his way through. Jonah noticed Sampson's ears twitch, a sure sign something had disturbed the silence. To the left, a wagon pulled by two horses came around the bend of the mountain trail at breakneck speed.

Jonah hadn't expected anyone else to be traveling on this road, so he pulled in the reins and watched. The driver held a whip, working to get his team up the slope. A woman sat beside him, a child held in her left arm, while she gripped the wagon's side as it bounced and swayed.

He couldn't blame her. She sat on the outside and the sheer drop must have terrified her. "I guess if the road is wide enough for a wagon and team, it'll be wide enough for us."

Sampson twitched his ears like he understood, and after the travelers were far enough ahead so Jonah wouldn't have to eat their dust, he pulled in behind them.

That wagon still worried him. The driver was hugging the inside, maybe too close. If the vehicle hit the wall, it could send the whole thing careening down the mountainside. Jonah wasn't all that afraid of heights, but just looking over the edge had him queasy.

Maybe it was his imagination, but the trail seemed to be getting narrower. He decided to pull up and try to get the wagon driver's attention. The fellow should stop now. He must be drunk to be endangering the lives of the innocent woman and child.

It would be impossible for the man to turn the wagon around—or the horses for that matter—but maybe Jonah could rig up Sampson to the back of the wagon and pull it back to where the trail was wide enough to turn. These people would have to travel the twenty miles to the wider pass.

A loud crack sounded and Jonah's heart stopped then surged as the disaster unfolded before him. He reined in Sampson and halted. As he'd feared the driver of the wagon had hit the stone wall. The horses reared, going wide, and the wagon's back wheels tipped over.

It all happened within seconds. Screams from both horses and humans rent the air. One of the horses broke away and kept racing along the trail. The other horse fell, along with the wagon, over the precipice. The crashing sound of broken wood, tumbling rocks, and snapping saplings cried out the fate of the wagon and its occupants, then faded, leaving nothing but deadly silence.

Jonah swallowed hard and, removing his hat, put it over his chest and prayed. *I won't ask why Lord. As a student of the Bible, I know this is an evil world and where evil exists, bad things happen. It will be that way until the wheat is separated from the tares. Just be with these poor people's relatives. Prepare them for the heartache to come, that I'll have to bring to them.*

He'd have to think of what effect this would have on his own mission. Delay it surely, but at the moment, that didn't matter.

It wouldn't be possible for any of the occupants of that wagon—not even the horse—to have survived. So, there wasn't a need to hurry. Jonah rode back to a place he deemed safe to descend. Satisfied he could scramble down by holding onto the branches of the well-rooted trees, he stepped down from Sampson and hooked his hat on the saddle horn, then unbuckled his gun belt and laid it over the horse's neck. He patted the animal's flank, and made his way to the edge of the trail.

This wasn't going to be easy. The wagon pieces had tumbled almost to the very bottom of the mountain, pieces strewn along the way. As he descended, he caught the flash of blue out of the corner of his eye. That was a color that didn't belong.

And wasn't the woman wearing a blue dress?

He threaded his way around the thick underbrush, over the boulders, slipping on smaller rocks. There were few trees on this part of the mountainside, but the woman was nestled in a grouping of immature cedar trees.

Jonah scanned the terrain. Of all the places the woman could have come to rest, this was the best to cushion her fall. It was as if God, Himself, had directed her fall so she would survive.

She must have been thrown out of the wagon as it pitched over the ledge, so her fall stopped about half way up the steep incline. It wasn't easy for Jonah to scramble up to her. He faced danger of tumbling down the rest of the way. Exactly how he was to get the woman down, he wasn't sure.

He couldn't take her straight down, that was for sure. Thankfully, he'd had the sense to bring a rope with him and might be able to fashion a travois with the cedar branches. But first he had to put her on the ground.

She rested at a forty-five degree angle with her head higher than her feet. As Jonah got his first close-up glance, he was struck by how peaceful she looked, as if she was just asleep. *Sleeping Beauty*. She was beautiful. Her caramel colored hair had fallen all about her shoulders and framed a face of porcelain complexion and perfectly sculpted features from her gently sloping forehead to her long, graceful neck. Her eyes were closed with long lashes fanning over her cheeks.

One would think she was only asleep, but Jonah suspected she'd died from her injuries. A sizable lump had formed on her head and, by the way her left arm was twisted, it had to be broken.

From her position, her face was level with his. He reached up to press his finger on her neck and jerked back when he detected a strong heartbeat. She was alive and, hopefully, only knocked unconscious. The urgency to get her down from the trees made him decide to check her injuries later. Getting her down presented other problems. He'd have to handle her with care.

He dug his boots into the ground for better traction, then reached up to slip one arm under her knees and the other under her shoulders. She wasn't a big woman, probably didn't even

reach his chin in height and her tiny waist told him she couldn't weigh much.

Nevertheless, he prayed as he lifted her. One false move and they'd both go plunging down the slope. Sweat ran from his forehead into his eyes more from tension than heat, and his heart galloped under his ribs.

He lost his balance and had to grab the tree branch, letting the woman's lower body fall. Keeping a grip on the tree, he lowered her to the six-inch strip of level ground. He slipped the rope around her chest and tied it to the tree's base, then looped the rope around his waist to free his hands.

Satisfied she wouldn't fall, he watched the steady rise and fall of her chest, and prayed she wouldn't regain consciousness until they were on level ground. From the look of her dress, she wasn't a well-to-do lady, but not poor, either. Her voluminous petticoat was hiked at an outrageous height, exposing her legs. She'd be scandalized if she were aware of her appearance.

He started to pull her skirt down over her boot-shod feet when the notion hit him to use her petticoat for cordage instead of his rope—that he'd use for a halter. His knife sliced through the cotton material easily, and he ripped off the ruffle. Soon he had several long strips of fabric.

Now to hack off the branches for the travois. Sweat rolled down his back as he worked. Fast, but carefully. He swiped the moisture on his brow with his shirt sleeve and lifted the woman onto the nest he'd fashioned. He thanked the Lord that the cedar branches were limber. But would they be sturdy enough to protect her as he dragged her along the slanted ground?

He kept her anchored around her chest and, with the other end of the rope tied around his waist, he held onto the saplings and rock handholds along the way. Every step was treacherous, and every time a dislodged rock plunged down the mountain his heart stopped. Even before he reached the place he'd descended, he realized he couldn't take her that

way. He'd have to drag the poor woman all the way to the more level ground and that would take twice as long.

Lord, please give me strength and don't let this lady get hurt more than she already is. He didn't dare look up as he normally did while praying. A careful watch for loose rocks and other dangers kept him focused on the ground. His muscles screamed for relief and his lungs burned. Every few minutes he was forced to stop for breath. The air up here wasn't good, anyway.

Finally, the tree line met the incline and he recognized this as the forest bordering the mountain trail. He untied the rope connecting the travois to him. Settling the woman under the cover of pines on a spongy bed of needles, he allowed himself the reward of sitting down. With his back propped against a tree trunk, he filled his lungs with the pine-scented air, knowing the worst chore was before him.

Already, buzzards were circling, dispelling any hope he had that he'd find another survivor of the wagon crash. But before he attended to the dead, he'd take care of the living. He searched the ground until he found two straight sticks with no sign of rot, but well-seasoned. After cutting them to the right length, he dropped to his knees beside the unconscious woman.

Jonah didn't have much medical knowledge. He'd helped Dr. Bower set the broken bones of two men—both leg bones—and he'd set one young boy's broken arm. No, he didn't feel capable, but it wasn't like he could wait to take the woman to a doctor or find any one better qualified out here in the middle of nowhere.

Her shirtwaist was made of fine linen. Noah couldn't bring himself to cut the sleeve to expose her injury, but expose it, he must. If they were in any other place in the world and if she were conscious, he wouldn't consider removing her shirtwaist.

There was no time to think over the decision. He fumbled with the covered buttons, and when his knuckles touched her skin, he felt the connection all the way up his arm. It wasn't as

if she weren't well clothed underneath her shirtwaist. Her chemise—he thought that was what the undergarment was called—was made of fine silk and edged with delicate lace. Again, he had to wonder what had brought a woman of means to this desolate mountain trail.

He was glad she hadn't awakened because this was going to be painful. As he stretched the broken arm out, he noted her hand. It was a hand that knew hard work—maybe man's work—the palm and thumb callused. Surprisingly, her nails were trimmed and rounded, telling him she took care of her appearance.

The soft flesh of her arm enabled him to feel for the bone and get it back into the proper position. Holding both sticks on either side of the break, he bound them with strips of her petticoat. She never regained consciousness, so that was good, but he hoped by the time he returned from burying the others, she'd be awake. The poor lady had sad news awaiting her.

He found an easy way down to the rest of the wreckage. All he had to do was follow the buzzards. The man's body had been torn apart, and what was left could hardly be recognized as a man. The baby had landed not far away in a gooseberry patch.

Jonah could tell by the angle of the baby's head that it was broken. What a tragedy. He found a large blanket among the wreckage and looked around for an indentation in the ground where a boulder had bounced over, leaving a dent in the soil. There were many, and he laid the blanket in the deepest one.

He carried the man's broken body to the grave site first. It wasn't far away, but Jonah was huffing by the time he got the body settled. He searched the pockets for any valuables that would now belong to the woman. Eighty dollars in bills and coin rested in the man's money belt. A good amount, enough for a long journey by wagon. Jonah also removed the gun belt with a fully loaded forty-five pistol. He tucked the gun into his waistband.

He gently lifted the tiny body of the child and laid him on his father's chest, at least he assumed the man was the baby's father. Just as he assumed the woman was the wife and mother of these two.

Fetching another of several blankets strewn around, he spread it out to hold the belongings to take to the woman. After picking through the wreckage for everything of value, he got to gathering the stones to cover the bodies. He set enough rocks over the grave to keep vultures away, but not so many that the woman couldn't have the bodies moved to a proper grave later.

He didn't have his Bible with him, but he didn't need it. He'd presided over enough gravesites during the short time he'd served as pastor at the Greenwood Christian Church that he'd memorized the words. Words meant to give comfort to the grieving people gathered around the gravesite. Words the woman should be hearing.

On his last amen, Jonah lifted his gaze to the trail where he'd left her. He'd been away too long. She might have awakened, or worse, some animal might have discovered her. Those thoughts didn't cause alarm, however. He was fairly sure God had intervened to break that woman's fall, placing her in his path, because He had a purpose for her. That being so, God wouldn't allow a wild animal to harm her now.

He gathered the four corners of the blanket holding all the goods he'd collected from the wreckage, including a carpet bag he hoped held the woman's clothing and personal items. On his way back up the hill, he caught the flash of sunshine hitting metal. Laying his burden down for a moment, he plucked a woman's reticule out of the underbrush.

Curiosity had him opening the bag, something he'd never have done under normal circumstances. Even so, he didn't feel right, rummaging through this lady's personal things. Maybe he should wait until he'd returned to see if she'd recovered consciousness, but he didn't have time for such niceties. The sun was ready to drop below the mountains. He'd have to make camp right there on the trail.

He slipped his hand into the bag and his fingers felt metal—a small derringer weighed down the bag. The only other items were a small mirror, a brush, a handkerchief, and a folded page of stationery. It had the look of a personal letter.

Praying the letter revealed who these people were, Jonah opened the paper and read.

Dear Olivia,

Please come home immediately, even if you have to come alone. Toby is getting frantic and Big John is coming after you if you don't return before the end of the month.

Sorry I can't make this a long letter and tell you all, but I see Miles is already here for the mail, and as you know, Miles waits for no one.

Love,

Aunt Hattie

Not nearly as much information as Jonah would have liked, no envelope, not even a return address, unless he assumed the word Carson, April 5th, referred to the town, a reasonable assumption since it was connected to the date. He folded the paper and stuffed it back inside the reticule. It would mean something to the woman when she regained consciousness.

He dropped the bag onto the pile of items he'd collected from the wreck and gathered the four corners of the blanket. Slung the bundle over his back, he trudged back to the clearing where he'd left the woman. She now had a name.

Olivia.

Chapter 2



Olivia was still in the same position he'd left her, and a quick examination revealed no change in her pulse or breathing. He laid the bundle behind her and shifted her to get her head and shoulders propped up. Her head lolled to the side.

Getting down on his knees, he straightened her head and patted her cheeks. "Olivia, wake up."

Still, she gave no sign of awareness.

He had to get her to a doctor, hopefully, tomorrow. Tonight, he'd make camp right here. It was as good a place as any with plenty of deadwood lying around for a fire and a stream nearby for water.

The sun had already crested the western mountains, and any other time, he would have enjoyed watching the golds, orange and lavenders proclaim God's artwork. Now, the urgency to make camp for the night kept him from focusing on the natural beauty around him.

It took him at least half an hour to trudge up the trail to get Sampson. The last conifers of the forest hid the horse from view until Jonah took the northern bend in the road.

Sampson answered with a whinny before his master came into view. And then an unfamiliar whinny. Sure enough, Sampson had found a friend.

Jonah's hand went to the forty-five inside his waistband. Yes, he was a preacher, but God had instilled enough common sense in him that he would confront a dangerous man and disable him before trying to save his soul.

He scanned the narrow trail but saw no one. The strange sorrel gelding's ears twitched as he stepped back, revealing the broken leathers of a harness.

Jonah slipped his pistol back inside his waistband. This was the horse that had broken away from the wagon just in time to save himself from falling off the edge like his mate. The horse belonged to Olivia and she would need him. Jonah had retrieved a saddle from the wreckage, so Olivia would have her own mount when she regained consciousness.

He tied the sorrel onto Sampson and swung into the saddle. As he rode back down the trail, he felt compelled to pray for Olivia. His thoughts went over the whole episode. The erratic driving of the man spoke of someone who didn't know this trail and who sped as if in pursuit. The items at the wreckage also spoke of someone who'd packed in a hurry. Nothing but a small carpetbag.

Was someone pursuing Olivia and her husband—if the dead man was her husband? Was she still in danger? He'd make camp well inside the forest just in case, and he'd probably sleep light tonight.

After taking the horses down to the stream for a drink, he found a nice patch of grass to hobble them for the night, giving each one a handful of oats to add to their meal.

His stomach growled with hunger, but he'd have to try to get some water into Olivia before building the fire and cooking. He didn't have any meat, but if he had time, he'd snare a rabbit to make a stew. She might be able to take broth. He just prayed she'd be able to get some water down.

Surprisingly, Olivia easily swallowed the water he offered her from his tin cup. In fact, she drank almost a whole cup full, although she still showed no signs of opening her eyes, or giving any sign of conscious thought.

She needed a doctor. Jonah's knowledge of medicine was sorely lacking. He wasn't even sure her arm was set right, but the head wound worried him most. He had to get her to a doctor.

His map had shown a town on the other side of this mountain pass. He'd taken the time to write in the businesses to be found in the more sizable towns. That was a lesson he'd learned a long time ago when he'd gotten lost trying to locate a friend of his father's. At the time, he hadn't realized how much territory extended between these small mountain towns. Since then, he'd never left home without a well-documented map.

After he'd eaten, he'd check the map by the light of the campfire.

It wasn't hard to find firewood here. He gathered enough for the campfire. With the flames dancing and the wood popping, he scraped some of the coals to the side and set his coffeepot on them. No point in cooking. He could manage with hardtack and beef jerky tonight. He couldn't trust that Olivia could manage solid food, but he did hold her head up so she could sip the lukewarm coffee.

She took only a couple of swallows and he surmised she didn't like his coffee, for which he couldn't blame her. He held her longer than was necessary. The firelight on her lovely features made him yearn for something he couldn't put a name to.

After getting Olivia settled in his bedroll, he gathered some pine branches to make himself a bed. Covering it with a blanket, he placed a buffalo hide he'd found in the wreckage on top. With his gun belt to his left and his rifle to his right, he scooted between the blanket and buffalo hide and took out his map. From the looks of it the nearest town with a doctor was Redstone Ridge. Counting up the miles, it would be a day and a half ride to reach the town after they left this mountain. How long it would take to get through this pass was hard to tell.

If Olivia didn't regain consciousness, he'd have to hold her on his horse. He'd rig up a sling with the blanket to hold her on the horse. Hooking it around his neck would keep his hands free, and he'd need free hands to maneuver Sampson on the narrow ridge.

He tucked the map back into his pocket and got up to lay another log on the fire, then hunkered back down into his make-shift bed. It wasn't the worst place he'd ever slept.

Olivia was lying only a few feet away. He'd thought it better to keep her close in case she awoke in the night. He turned on his side and let his gaze rest on her face. She'd turned her head toward him. It wasn't the first time she'd moved. She'd jerked both her arms when he was setting the broken bone, and he'd seen her move her leg.

All that was good. He knew enough about head injuries to know they could result in paralysis. That must mean she wouldn't suffer a permanent disability. He sent up his thanks to God for that mercy.

The firelight flickering over her porcelain features gave his chest an unfamiliar squeeze. Longing formed a knot in the pit of him. He was close to the Lord and the Holy Spirit was always with him, but sometimes, he was so lonely he could hardly stand himself. He couldn't help feeling sorry for himself when he saw his friends happily married with children.

Before they'd turned him out of the church at Greenwood, his congregants had included him in their families. Inviting him to meals and family celebrations. But that wasn't the same as having his own family.

Trouble was, there were no marriageable women in the town, and he just couldn't bring himself to send off for a mail-order bride. Olivia was a widow, but he knew nothing about her. He would take her to the doctor and help her get back to her family, but he had no hope that she'd develop feelings for him. They wouldn't be together long enough for either of them to develop the deep love a couple should have in order to marry.

Still, his mind built a future of a little cottage in these mountains, a small church for him to pastor, and a woman like Olivia waiting for him when he came home.

Chapter 3



Olivia struggled to stay awake. By degrees, she took out each sensation and examined it, trying to make sense of the binding that held her, the rocking motion, the sound of a heartbeat.

Maybe she was being held by her mother and rocked by the fire. No, that couldn't be true. She was a grown woman and she didn't remember a mother—or anyone. Someone held her, though, someone who rocked her like a mother and held her close to his heart. Did he mean her good or harm?

He was the one she'd heard last night. She'd wanted to see him, but her eyelids were too heavy to lift. The man's actions and the feel of the place had told her they were in the woods. But now, they were out in the open, riding on a horse. She didn't know whether she wanted to wake up or not. Every time the edge of consciousness drifted near, it brought pain. Searing pain in her arm and dull, pounding pain in her head.

The horse hit a bump and Olivia couldn't stifle a groan. They stopped. She felt the man's hands on her, moving her and the pain soared. She cried out.

He shifted her, cradling her to hold her against his left shoulder and arm. His fingers touched her face. Lightly. Gently. "Olivia, can you hear me?"

She worked her mouth, trying to get the word out, but nothing rose above her throat. Her dry lips stuck together and she worked them to gather enough moisture to speak.

"It's all right, Olivia. We'll stop here so I can get you more comfortable."

No! That would hurt. She wanted to root back into her safe cocoon, being rocked, listening to his heartbeat. Her attempt to shake her head sent off an explosion of new pain.

The man didn't notice her feeble protests. He slipped from the saddle taking her with him. Only then did she realize she was sitting in a blanket tied around the man's neck. He held her with one arm while he untied the blanket. How kind. He must think she was too weak to stand, and maybe she was.

Her eyesight was clear now and she took the man's measure. His face was very close to hers, and she stared at his handsome features, appreciating how his curly dark brown hair tumbled over his forehead.

"I'm sorry we're in the sun, but it'll be gone over the mountain peaks soon and we'll be in shadow."

She was hot. Her hand went to her forehead, her fingers slipping down to her parched lips. The man lowered her to the ground with her back against a boulder or maybe the sheer face of the mountain. Yes, that's what it was. Her gaze traveled to the valley below. She'd never liked heights and the sight made her dizzy.

"Ma'am, my name is Jonah Dykes. I happened upon the wagon wreckage."

Wreckage? Her mind went blank. Jonah held the canteen to her lips and she drank greedily, hoping she wasn't taking water he'd need. She had no idea how long it would take to get off this mountain, but there was no sign of water as far as she could see.

Jonah sat back on his heels. "Do you remember the accident?"

"No." Her voice sounded strange, like the short word was dragged over gravel. "Where?"

He thumbed over his shoulder. "A little ways back there." His brown eyes softened and his mouth worked like he didn't want to tell her more. "I'm sorry your husband and child d... they didn't survive."

Her brows tightened as she searched his face for an explanation. “I don’t remember a husband. A child.” Her voice held a note of hysteria and Jonah touched her shoulder lightly, those soft brown eyes exuding sympathy.

“I only assumed they were your family since they were with you. And don’t worry about your memory. I’ve heard of folks temporarily losing their memory from a knock on the head and you got a bad one from the fall. But your memory will come back.” The corners of his mouth quirked into a friendly smile.

She pressed her palms onto the ground to pull herself up. “You called me Olivia. How do you know my name?” She shook her head, even though it intensified the pain. “I don’t remember my name.”

Instead of answering, he reached for the bundle tied to one of the horses and pulled out a small bag. He plucked a piece of paper from the bag and held it out to her. “Do you remember an Aunt Hattie?”

She stared at the paper for long moments, the words swimming before her eyes.

“Can you read it?” Concern edged Jonah’s voice.

Yes, she could read the letter, but it didn’t bring up any memories of the people mentioned. Strange that she could remember how these letters formed words, yet couldn’t remember the people who should mean something to her.

“I can read it, but I don’t remember Aunt Hattie or Big John or Toby. Maybe I’m not Olivia at all. Maybe I had her letter for some other reason.” Panic sank its claws in her again. Her heart raced and she panted for breath.

Jonah moved beside her and wrapped his arm around her shoulders. “Breathe slowly. God has you in His keeping. All will be well with you.”

She couldn’t breathe slowly. “How do you know?” Her voice shrilled. “I remember how to read...how to ride a horse, but I don’t even know my name. I don’t remember any personal memories.”

He pulled her closer until her head rested against his neck. “Shhh. God knows your name, but until we know different, you’re Olivia. After you’re checked by the doctor, we’ll find Aunt Hattie. She’ll know if you’re Olivia or not, and she can fill in the details for you. I expect when she talks to you, it’ll all come back.”

She drank in his scent of pine and horse and something else that was uniquely male. But he was a stranger. She shouldn’t feel attracted to him in so short a time. Right? After all, she might be married. How could she recognize this attraction unless she’d experienced it before? Even if newly widowed, she shouldn’t allow her feelings for this good Samaritan to take root.

For all she knew, he might be married himself, although she didn’t think so. She wasn’t a naïve maiden, otherwise, how could she instinctively take a man’s measure as she did? Unless she’d been held closely by a man, perhaps kissed?

“How long will it take to get off this mountain?”

Jonah stood up straight. He removed his hat, slapped it against his thigh, and finger combed his hair. The brown mass of waves stuck up in places. He slammed his hat back on too soon. She’d have liked to run her fingers through those spongy locks, even as impossible as that would be.

He took his time to answer—a man who thought before he spoke. She liked that because something in her stirred a memory of a man who never thought before doing anything.

“I had hoped to reach the bottom before nightfall, but that won’t happen. We’ll have to spend the night on this trail. I just pray we find a wider place before we have to camp.”

Spend the night up here? Clinging to the side of this mountain. She groaned.

An urgency took hold of Jonah as he strode to the pack horse and pulled out a handful of kindling and a pot. “We aren’t setting up camp now, are we?” Her throat tightened, putting that note of panic back in her voice.

Jonah set the sticks of wood into a teepee shape. “No, but I want to brew you some willow bark tea for your pain, especially the headache. It’s going to be rough going, so it’ll help you.” He lit the fire and poured water into the pot. After fishing a pouch from his pocket, he sifted some of the bark into the water and held the pot over the flames.

She’d almost forgotten the pain in her head during her panic over having lost her memory. Now, it came back in a dull ache. “I could have waited. We need to cover as much ground as possible before dark.” The shadows were already deepening and she knew they wouldn’t be able to trust moving an inch on this precarious trail in the dark.

“It won’t take but a minute.”

After the minute had passed, he went back to the pack and retrieved a sieve that fit the little pot perfectly and poured the dark brew in a tin cup. “It’s better hot, kind of like coffee is better hot.”

She wrapped her hand around the cup, and it felt good to her cold hand. Now that the sun had dropped below the mountain the cold began to seep into her bones. She took a tentative sip and almost gagged. “This is like coffee?” She thought she remembered how coffee tasted, but maybe not.

Her grimace was enough to coax a smile from Jonah and that was worth the nasty tasting stuff. “I think I know coffee, but I’m sure I’ve never drunk this stuff.”

“Probably not, but it will make your headache better.” He gnawed his lower lip, pulling her attention to his well-shaped mouth. “I hate to rush you,” he added, “but we have to get moving as soon as we can. Those clouds rolling in look bad.”

She forced herself to drink the stuff, her gaze traveling over his head to take in the ominous sky. He was right. It was going to rain and they had no shelter here. They had passed a shallow cave not long ago. *Please God, let there be a deeper cave up ahead.* The thought shocked her. She couldn’t remember her name, but she remembered God. Maybe Jonah was right and her memory was returning.

The wind kicked up fierce and both horses' heads went up, ears twitching. Olivia took the hand Jonah offered her. The space between his eyebrows held a deep V, prompting her to offer to help. "I can ride my horse, if that will help us go faster."

He pulled her into a standing position and began gathering the supplies. "I don't think we have time to search. I noticed a hole a little ways back on the trail. We'll ride out the storm there."

"I noticed that, too, but it's not big enough for us, much less the horses, and a boulder takes up a third of the space."

"We'll make do," he said. "Can you walk? It's not safe riding in this weather. I'll have to hobble the horses when we get there."

That seemed sensible. They couldn't risk the horses spooking and breaking away. She had worked with horses in the past, but the details refused to surface. "Yes, I can walk. You lead the way with the horses."

With a nod, Jonah tied the sorrel gelding with the white stockings to his darker roan horse and took hold of his leathers. She remembered the sorrel, that he belonged to her. Yes, she was regaining her memory.

They had to walk single file, close to the inside wall. Olivia watched the sorrel horse, the one from the wagon. She knew this horse's name.

Cedric. She recognized him as an old friend. That realization brought a smile to her lips. She was mighty glad she owned something of value. To test her memory, she called softly, "Cedric." The horse turned his head at the sound as if waiting for a command. She remained silent, not wanting to slow Jonah, but she would tell him as soon as they were settled.

This breakthrough in her memory excited her and even the thunder and the wind pushing them along the trail couldn't tap down her hope she'd recover fully.

But why couldn't she remember Aunt Hattie and the others? Or the man and child who died in the wagon accident when she'd survived?

A fear she couldn't name wormed its way into her mind. Maybe she didn't want to remember.

Chapter 4



The little indentation in the rock wall looked even more shallow than Jonah remembered. The boulder took up a lot of the room, leaving scant room for Olivia. A ledge of sorts hung above, however, and they'd be protected somewhat from the wind and rain. He looked around the boulder and was satisfied Olivia would fit in the space. That would keep her dry.

After the storm, he'd build a fire and cook some cornmeal cakes and perk a pot of coffee. Olivia needed some substance. She hadn't eaten anything all day and was still a little wobbly on her feet.

Fat, cold drops had begun to fall. He'd have to get the horses hobbled soon. These mountain storms could crash down in a moment's notice. He grabbed a blanket and stuffed it in the crevice between the boulder and rock wall.

Olivia was holding the sorrel's head, waiting. A clash of lightning almost knocked Jonah off his feet. He caught hold of the reins just in time. Holding them with one hand, he pulled Olivia by the arm into the shallow cave. "Get in this hole and fish this rope through there." He had to shout to be heard above the howling wind.

Fortunately, Olivia understood and took the rope. Jonah hoped it was long enough to wrap under both horses' chests. The leathers wouldn't hold up and he might well strangle them to loop the rope around their necks.

Using a sailor's knot he fastened the rope to the boulder, glad that summer he'd spent on his uncle's ship hadn't been a waste. He turned to the frightened horses. One well-placed

strike to the head from those hooves, and he would be dead. *Lord, help me. Hold off the storm, please.*

It didn't seem that even the Lord could hear him above the wind and rain. Hailstones began to fall, mostly small but some the size of goose eggs. Finally, he had both horses tethered, though they still strained against their restraints, their eyes wide with fright. He couldn't blame them.

Still, he had to get the saddles off if possible. Bad decision. The full fury of the storm unleashed one lightning strike after another. Hail stung his back and he fell to his knees, trying to shield his head. The rain was a solid sheet of gray and if he didn't have the boulder to guide him, he wouldn't have found the cave.

He thought he heard Olivia scream over the tumult. Could there have been a snake hiding in that crevice? Had he inadvertently sent her to her death? *Lord, no, please.*

He still held onto the rope tethering the horses and a good thing he did. Just as he stood to enter the cave the wind's fierceness grabbed him, lifting him into the air and twirling him over and over. Holding onto the rope, he felt it twisting around his body, which made it easier to hold onto, but squeezed the air from his lungs.

How long he was suspended with hail and rain pelting his body, he couldn't guess. Probably not long, though it seemed hours. He hardly had time to lift a prayer. When the storm had its fill of him, it slammed him onto the ground, further knocking the breath out of him.

Dazed, he crawled to his feet and unwound himself from the rope. His ribs still ached and he had to shake his arm to get the blood flowing in his previously bound arm. Then it came to him. If he hadn't been holding that rope and it hadn't gotten tangled up around his body, he'd have been swept up by the mighty winds. Somewhere at some point up as high as the eagle soared, he'd be released to fall into the canyon and certain death.

Olivia. She needed help. Darkness filled the small space, but he didn't have far to go. She stood just outside the gap

between the back wall and the boulder. When he touched her, she slammed herself into him, sobbing hysterically.

His arms folded around her as if of their own accord. “It’s all right.” He spoke close to her ear because the noise of the storm prevented normal hearing.

She pulled back enough to stare him in the eyes. “I saw that. You were holding on by a thread, it seemed. I was so scared that rope would snap.”

“If I hadn’t been so busy praying, I might have been afraid, too.”

Her lips moved in a small smile. “I was too afraid to pray. I’m just so glad you’re all right.”

He felt her breath as she moved back into a tight hug. The rightness of the moment forestalled any thoughts of impropriety. They could take that question out later and look at it from all angles. Yes, they’d think about that during the long trip ahead. Right now, just savor the moment of being alive and not alone.

Jonah didn’t know how long they stood like that waiting for the rain and wind to lessen, but it finally did. “I’ll have to see to the horses.”

“I’ll help you,” she said.

He wanted to say no. The weather was still precarious, but something had just happened. They were no longer strangers but rather, vagabonds on the same journey—one that had nothing to do with the distance or dangers of the road. It was a journey they’d both been on for a long time and they understood each other without any explanation.

“Be careful.” He took her arm and they stepped outside together.

The horses had settled down and were drinking from the puddles left by the storm. The rain had leveled off to a raw, cold drizzle. “I’ll put the feed bag on Sampson first, then we’ll feed your horse.”

“Cedric.” The horse turned his head in Olivia’s direction.

He gave her a look over his shoulder. “Cedric?”

“Yes, he’s my horse.”

“You remember him?” This was another step toward her recovering her memory. Somehow, that didn’t please him as much as it should. “Do you remember any of the people in your family?”

“No, just Cedric. I don’t remember when I got him or how he came to be named that, but I know him. I may not recognize my family until I see them.”

After fastening the feedbag on Sampson, Jonah turned to peer out into the valley. His breath caught in his throat at the sight. He laid his arm around Olivia. “Look. Have you ever seen anything so amazing?”

“It’s beautiful and terrifying at the same time,” she whispered. “Is that the top of a tornado?”

It might have been. The huge cloud was a dark, rotating mass. “I don’t think so. Looks too big, almost like a hurricane.”

“You’ve seen a hurricane?” Her tone held skepticism.

“Actually, yes. My family lived in Louisiana for a couple of years when I was a boy. It didn’t come on land, but my pa showed it to me from the wharf.” He hadn’t thought of that for years. Hadn’t even thought of Pa. He’d have liked to introduce Olivia to his folks as they were back then.

“Do they still live there?”

“No, they both died of a fever almost ten years ago.”

Her hand came up to cover his. “I’m sorry.”

He almost asked her if her parents were still alive, but he’d nagged her enough to remember. He could tell from the deep pucker to her brow that trying to remember pained her. She’d experienced enough pain for tonight.

“I think Sampson has eaten enough. While you tie the feed bag on Cedric, I’ll see if there is enough dry wood in the

pack to build a fire. I'll warm the bacon and beans and fry enough cornbread cakes for our breakfast."

"I can help." Her eyes appeared tired and red-rimmed. In fact, she looked like she was about to drop.

"I appreciate it, but you need to rest. Besides, I don't want you to put much stress on that arm."

The clouds had pushed off to the east, leaving a clear sky with a half moon in its wake. The moonlight touched Olivia's face as she smiled. He'd never seen such a beautiful sight and wished he could tell her so, but she didn't need any more emotional stress, either.

She stood beside Cedric until he'd eaten his fill, then scratched behind his ears while whispering words Jonah couldn't hear. He understood her love for her horse. Sampson meant as much to him.

He managed to nurse a flame into a small fire. The two good-sized logs were dry enough to burn and keep the fire burning until their meal was warm. If it were only him, he wouldn't bother with heating the food, but Olivia hadn't had anything to eat and she deserved a hot meal.

Before he put on the coffee pot, he brewed some more willow bark tea for Olivia. Pain showed in her eyes and slumped shoulders. After their silent meal, it didn't take much prodding to convince her to lie down in her niche.

Jonah banked the fire and pulled out his small New Testament to read by the light of the coals. He thought Olivia had already fallen asleep given how tired she was, but he'd only opened the Book when she said, "Read out loud so I can hear."

"Certainly." He found the passage he'd marked—the account in Matthew 17 when Jesus cast a demon out of a child.

Then came the disciples of Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief, for verily I say unto you. If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain,

Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove, and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

“Jonah,” Olivia interrupted, “do you have faith as a mustard seed?”

He considered her question, one everyone should be able to answer, and certainly a minister of the Gospel. “I’ve never moved a physical mountain, nor had a reason to.” He chuckled. “Well, until today, but I wouldn’t do so even today. In answer to your question, I don’t know if my faith is as large as a mustard seed. I can only say it’s enough for me to believe on my Savior, Jesus Christ. That is, I believe everything He said to be true, and I trust that He forgives my sin and saves my soul. I wish my faith was greater, but it is enough.”

“Thank you for stopping and saving me from certain death. Thank you for taking care of my wounds and helping me. Good-night, Jonah.”

There was a lot he could have said, but not tonight. “You’re welcome. Good-night, Olivia. Sleep well.”

He hadn’t finished the chapter before Olivia’s even breathing told him she’d fallen asleep. Morning would come soon enough, so Jonah hunkered down into his bedroll and counted his blessings until sleep claimed him



Shrill screams jolted him awake. The coals no longer gave any light, but a shaft of moonlight filtered into the shallow cave, revealing Olivia’s thrashing figure. Her shrieks filled the walls with terror, and Jonah almost sprang to his feet before remembering he was taller than this overhang by at least a foot.

He crawled to Olivia and gripped her flailing hand. “Olivia, wake up. You’re having a nightmare.”

She pulled her hand free, using more strength than he'd have expected. The hole where she'd made her bed was so tight, and she couldn't move much, but he feared she'd harm her broken arm strapped to her chest.

"I didn't knooow. Didn't knooooow." She clawed at her throat, apparently trying to free herself of the demon attacking her.

Jonah managed to slip his hand under her back and lift her to a sitting position. He shook her gently. "Olivia, this is Jonah. You're having a bad dream."

Her eyes popped open and she stared at him, fear still clouding the blue orbs. "It's all right. You're safe—just a nightmare. When I had bad dreams as a lad my mother would say if I told her about it, it would lose its fright."

She released a long breath. "Not much to tell, just hands reaching out to strangle me."

"Describe the hands."

"Long fingers, gnarly, much stronger than they looked."

"A witch's hands?"

She smiled and sat up straight, letting him know he could remove his hand, which he did. "Silly of me. I'm sorry I woke you," she said.

He pulled out his pocket watch. "By the time we have breakfast and pack up, it'll be light enough to travel." He stood up as much as he could and offered her a hand.

She took his hand and warmth spread up his arm. "You get the fire started and I'll fix the coffee. I can even heat up the hoecakes."

Hoecakes. That indicated she may have grown up in the South. Little hints were coming out to fill in her missing memory. And although she called the nightmare silly, he suspected some old woman had threatened her sometime in her past.

Chapter 5



Olivia held onto Cedric's saddle horn as she swayed from side to side. Would they never get off this mountain? Her head pounded and pain radiated all the way up her broken arm into her neck. Jonah would stop and brew her some more willow bark tea, but she refused to burn up a moment that would take them to the end of this never-ending trail.

At least the trail had widened. She could ride beside Jonah, but she'd fallen back, or rather Cedric had fallen back. He was carrying the pack, as well as her, so she knew he longed to stop for a rest—and water. The poor horses hadn't had a drink since that rain last evening.

Occasionally, Jonah would glance behind to check on her. She read the question in his eyes. Did she want to stop and rest awhile? She shook her head in answer. Bad move. Any movement of her head had that anvil striking harder inside her skull.

Maybe she was injured worse than she realized. Shouldn't her headache be getting better by now? Shouldn't she start remembering what had happened? Foremost, had she been married to the man who died? She didn't think so, nor could she imagine that the child was hers.

But she might be married to someone. She might have children. A family anxious to know what happened to her. To the man and child. She bit her trembling lower lip. She couldn't even remember Aunt Hattie or Toby or Big John.

Without warning, thoughts of the nightmare surfaced. *That* she could remember vividly. Jonah didn't think it meant

anything, but she wasn't so sure. Those long, gnarled fingers closing around her throat, cutting off her breath. What did it mean?

She shuddered, unable to shake the feeling she'd experienced that nightmare in reality, and not so long ago.

"Ho," Jonah shouted, forcing her head up.

They'd just rounded a bend—the last one, please God, before coming to level ground. She blinked against the brightness of the waterfall just ahead on their path. They'd have to go behind the waterfall.

Suddenly, it was an experience Olivia wanted to enjoy. She pushed her pain away and stepped down, or rather slid out of the saddle. Jonah was at her side in moments, giving her strength. She had to admit she needed him, or she'd have fallen flat on her face.

The waterfall was both surprising and breath-takingly beautiful. Multiple rainbows danced in the spray. It gave her renewed energy and she walked with Jonah, his arm still around her shoulders. He held onto the horses' reins with his other hand.

"We'll let the horses drink their fill," he said.

Water ran down the wall and formed a stream about six inches deep across their path. The horses lowered their heads in unison into the flowing water

"I'll fill our canteens." Jonah stepped away to take the canteen from the saddles. For once she hardly paid him any attention. "I'll brew some tea for you," he added. "You look all done in."

"You don't have any wood, do you?"

"Just a bit. Not enough to cook with, even if we had anything to cook. When we get to the forest, I'll hunt something. I thought I'd packed enough to get to Redstone Ridge, but we'll make do."

"You didn't know you'd have me to feed," she said. "How many days until we get to Redstone Ridge?" What a

nice name for a town. She prayed it would live up to its name because she had a feeling Jonah intended to leave her there.

“Hard to tell.” He was already shaving kindling from what was left of the log. “It’ll probably take at least two days, maybe three.”

Three days without food would be hard, but she’d been hungry before. Hadn’t she? Yes, though she couldn’t remember when. She should tell Jonah not to bother with the tea, but truth to tell, she longed for some relief from the constant throbbing. The willow bark only dulled the pain, but it helped. Some fuzzy memory came to mind of using a ground powder of the willow bark to treat fever.

Jonah got a tiny blaze going and set the pot in the middle. She watched his every move, feeling as though she should be helping in some way. It wasn’t her nature to stand around and be waited on. She couldn’t remember the life she’d lived, but she was sure she’d been a helper.

He rummaged through the pack and came toward her with a fur and a blanket. After arranging them into a bed against the mountain wall, he held out his hand. Their gazes met and he gave her that half smile that made her stomach flutter. If she didn’t watch herself, she’d come to care too much for this man.

And their time together would be short. She had to remind herself of that. She wouldn’t be able to sort out the fragments of her past if she were losing her heart in the present.

It didn’t take long for the tea to brew. “Just drink it straight out of the pot, if you will.” Jonah offered her the pot handle covered with his handkerchief to keep from burning her fingers.

He squatted beside her as she drank the bitter stuff. She was getting used to it by now, though it was only lukewarm. They both stared at the waterfall, and it seemed like the horses were enjoying it, too. All was silent except for the rushing water.

It would be wonderful to fall asleep to the soothing sound, but she didn't want to hold them up. After a few long swallows, she handed the empty pot to Jonah. "I'm ready. If you'll help me up and into the saddle, we'll be on our way. How much longer do you think it'll take to get off the mountain?" She'd asked him that at least twenty times already.

"Not long, if my map is correct." He took her outstretched hand and his strength radiated up her good arm. "You could ride in front of me. It would give you a chance to sleep."

"No, I'd rather ride Cedric. I know it might sound silly, but he's the only connection with my past."

"Not silly at all," he said, sweeping her in his arms. He lifted her into the saddle as easily as if she were a sack of potatoes, but much more gently. Jonah was always gentle and careful of her injuries. She took the reins he offered her, then he sprang into his saddle, and they took off.

Jonah's map was right. Within two hours they entered another world of conifers and aspens and oaks. Birds sang and life teemed on both sides of the narrow trail that no longer circled in one direction, but rather, wound through the forest like a snake's path. The pine scented air made breathing easier and Olivia drew in a deep breath, grateful the pain had dulled. In fact, she felt invigorated, like one who'd accomplished a great feat.

Cedric hardly needed her guidance. He followed Sampson with Jonah sitting tall in the saddle. He made no move to slow down, but continued on the path for another two hours, before halting. The sound of bubbling water filtered through the forest.

"We'll stop here for a rest and let the horses graze while I scout this game trail. See if I can find us some food." He had dismounted and at her side to help her before she had a chance to step down, although she thought she'd be able to dismount with one hand.

"I'll throw a blanket down over there by those trees so you can rest," he said.

“You fuss over me too much. I can build a fire while you’re gone.”

He let his head fall forward and rubbed his neck. “Let’s not build a fire until we have something to cook. If I can’t bring down something within half an hour, we’ll be on our way.”

It made sense, so she nodded and held onto his hand as she lowered herself to the blanket.

“Do you know how to shoot?” he asked.

She gazed up at him. He looked so handsome standing there, the sun behind him. Did he want her to hunt, too? “I think I can.” It was one of those things she felt in her bones she’d done before, something she couldn’t forget, like reading.

He handed her his pistol. “If anything threatens you, fire the pistol. I’ll hear and come running.”

She took the weapon and it felt comfortable in her hand. “I know you will,” she said, smiling. He took his job of protector seriously, as every man worth his salt did. Nodding, he turned and snagged his rifle before disappearing into the woods.

With her back against the thick trunk of a tall redwood, she watched the horses munch on the plentiful grass. What was Jonah’s story? This was the third day since he’d plucked her off the side of that mountain and she knew little to nothing about him.

Except that he affected her like a man affected a woman. And that could be dangerous if he had obligations elsewhere. He gave her no indication the feeling was mutual, so she was probably worried for nothing. He’d leave her at Redstone Ridge and be on his way to whatever his original destination was.

A gunshot rent the air, and the birds took flight. Olivia waited for another shot but it didn’t come. That meant Jonah had either brought down his kill in one shot or the animal had gotten away. Her stomach rumbled. She hoped his hunt was

successful. That hoecake she'd had for breakfast was long gone, and she knew they only had a few strips of jerky left.

Minutes dragged by and still Jonah hadn't returned. What was keeping him? Surely he hadn't shot himself. Should she go look for him? Then she'd probably get lost. Had he gotten lost?

She wished she had a watch. Waiting always made time seemed longer than it was.

The horses' heads came up and their ears twitched. Something had caught their attention. She gripped the pistol, ready to fire if need be. She handled the weapon easily and knew exactly how to take aim, convinced she'd hit her target.

"Don't shoot me."

She relaxed her hand, relieved to hear Jonah's voice. He came into view holding a bloody mess of meat.

"I shot a young buck. I cut out the backstrap and left the rest to the predators. This is enough to feed us for a couple of days, but it won't keep raw in this weather." He laid the meat on a pine bough and started gathering firewood.

She should be helping. Getting up wasn't easy with one hand strapped to her chest and every shift in position brought on pain in her head as well as in her arm.

Jonah noticed her struggle and dropped the wood. He reached her before she'd gained her feet. "You should have remained lying down while the meat cooks."

She flashed him a grin. "I need to find a bush, then I'll help you with the fire."

He smiled. "Don't go too far. That bunch of brambles will provide you with privacy." He pointed in the direction he spoke of.

"Thank you. I won't." She wasn't at all embarrassed to speak so casually to this strange man. She had had to address personal things to strangers before as no ordinary young woman would. Why was that? Maybe she was the type who

just didn't embarrass easily? She didn't even know what type of person she was.

She might have known Jonah would have the fire going by the time she got back. It was hard managing her clothing with one good hand. She knew by instinct that a broken arm would take a long time to heal, so she'd have to get used to the inconvenience.

Jonah had the meat on a spit over the fire. She returned to the blanket and her mouth started watering as the smell of roasting venison's juices hit the hot coals. She licked her lips.

"Hungry?" Jonah sent her a knowing grin.

She hadn't realized he was staring at her, and for some reason she felt heat rush to her cheeks. That figured. She wasn't embarrassed by going to relieve herself, but having this man watch as she licked her lips did. "That smells good. Don't tell me you're not hungry."

He turned the spit to cook the meat evenly. "I am. So glad I spotted that buck. It's going to taste a lot better than jerky."

"I wish we had the makings for biscuits. Wouldn't that be good?"

He turned the spit again. "Can you cook?"

"Some. I think I could make biscuits."

"Then you must have done some cooking in your past. My mama used to say it took practice to make good biscuits."

She wanted to ask him about his mother, but another question fell from her lips. "Are you married, Jonah?" That was something she'd been wondering since she regained consciousness and found this handsome man taking care of her.

Instead of answering right away, he fiddled with the fire. The birds had stopped singing like they held their breath, waiting for Jonah's delayed answer. Olivia realized she was holding her breath as well.

Finally, after what seemed like hours, he tossed the stick into the blaze. "I'm not married—haven't even come close.

There weren't many unmarried ladies in my congregation.”

“Congregation?”

“I'm a minister of the Gospel and until recently pastored a church in Greenwood, Colorado.” He turned those soft brown eyes on her. “I'd like to get married one day. The loneliness gets bone aching sometimes. In fact, I've enjoyed your company on this journey.”

She didn't know why it surprised her that he was a preacher. He'd been reading his Bible before lying down at night and praying at every meal. “Why did you leave your church?”

He turned the spit and got to his feet. “They turned me out.” He walked away and disappeared behind the trees.

She shouldn't have asked anything so personal, but how was she to know? Her next question died in her throat when a twig snapped. The horses' heads came up, and Jonah returned with a piece of firewood.

Something or someone was coming this way. Jonah snagged his rifle and held it across his middle. Olivia found her pistol in the folds of her skirt. Feeling trapped and helpless, her heart raced. They hadn't encountered a single person so far, making her forget how vulnerable they were.

She wished Jonah hadn't told her he was a preacher. He could handle a gun, but he'd have trouble shooting a man, even if that was called for.

Two men riding mules appeared from the dense tree line. From the animal pelts hanging from the mules, they must be trappers—trappers who hadn't seen civilization in a while from the looks of them.

“Howdy,” the first one said. It was hard to tell what he looked like behind that long, thick, graying beard. “We were down-wind of your cooking and wondered if you have any grub to spare.”

“Howdy,” Jonah replied. “I'm Jonah Dykes.” He didn't offer to introduce Olivia. “And you are?”

“I’m Zed Hook and this here’s my boy, Tadpole.”

Olivia almost laughed. The boy named Tadpole was a hulking giant of a man. She felt sorry for the poor mule carrying him.

“I took down a buck not thirty minutes ago and the rest of the carcass is back yonder on the game trail. You’re welcome to it—the hide, too.”

“Hope it’s still there,” Hook said, eyeing the meat on the spit.

Tadpole had his gaze fastened on Olivia, sending a chill down her spine. Jonah’s eyes followed the man’s line of sight and lifted his rifle a notch. “I’m sure it will be.”

Hook barked a laugh. “Come on, Tad. If we’s lucky, there’ll be a bear at the kill. I like bear meat better than deer.”

As soon as the men got out of sight, Jonah took the meat off the spit and wrapped it in a napkin. Packing up, he said over his shoulder, “Let’s get going. I have a bad feeling about those two and I want to put some distance between us before we eat.”

Olivia knew exactly what he meant. While the big fellow was leering at her, the other one was taking stock of their horses.

Chapter 6



Jonah spread his map out on the top of the boulder. Maybe he was missing something. They'd been traveling two days since high-tailing it from those trappers and their meat was almost gone. The last landmark before Redstone Ridge was a stand of aspens beside a shallow stream.

This had to be it. The little brook babbled its way around the rocks strewn about. Probably from some ancient landslide. They were too far away from the mountain to be in danger of a landslide now. Didn't mean there weren't dangers aplenty, both physical and emotional.

With one final look to burn the landmark in his brain, he turned, taking long strides in Olivia's direction. He'd left her alone too long. All the way back, he prayed, or rather carried on a conversation with the Lord.

What am I going to do about Olivia, Father?

He'd planned to take her to the doctor's office, and from there, get her a hotel room before he left to continue on his search for Tim. Had he told Olivia about Tim, his brother, yet? He thought he'd told her he was searching for Tim, but he certainly wouldn't have told her the reason. They'd discussed a little about his background, though. He was three years older than Tim and when their parents had died, he'd taken on the responsibility for his brother while he studied to be a minister, using his inheritance, since their parents had left him their small farm.

Olivia sat with her back propped against an aspen trunk, reading his Bible, whether because she wanted to read the

Scripture or because it was the only thing to read, he couldn't tell. She didn't talk much about her faith, but he knew she was a believer. He also knew she was smart, resourceful, helpful, kind, and educated.

Lines of pain etched her brow, but she'd refused to drink the willow bark except at nighttime. It made her too sleepy to ride was her reason. He wished she'd ride in front of him, but she insisted on riding her own horse. *Cedric*. He smiled just thinking of the name. Where had she gotten that? Just another mystery about her.

She didn't want to be a bother she'd told him at least a dozen times a day. She was no bother to him. He liked for her to ride with him. If he were honest with himself, he enjoyed holding her. His feelings for her were deepening, and that wasn't a good thing. It could only lead to disappointment.

The way of God was the greatest mystery, but to Jonah, the way of women was also mighty mysterious. None of the women in his past had attracted him like Olivia, maybe because he'd never spent every moment with them for days. For whatever reason, he cared for this woman, and he knew enough about the ways of women to know she was attracted to him.

She caught him staring at her again. Lifting her gaze from the book, she sent him an impish grin. "You didn't stop before dark because of me, I hope. We could have put in another two hours in the saddle."

"I stopped here because it's a good camping area. It's close to the water, but far enough away not to attract predators."

She sighed audibly, prompting him to add, "We'll leave in the morning at first light and be in Redstone before noon. Think of the breakfast we'll have before seeing the doc."

He was teasing her, but she took him seriously. "I do hope so. I've never been as hungry in my life." She lifted sad eyes to him. "It's my fault. If you didn't happen upon me, you'd have had enough food and would probably have found your brother by now. I'm sorry to be so much trouble."

He pulled the last of their food from the pack. “You keep talking about the trouble you’ve been to me.” He sat on his haunches on the other side of the fire. “Once and for all—you have not been any trouble.” He finished stirring the coals and sent her a pointed gaze. “You’ve been a blessing to me by being company on this lonely trip.”

“I just don’t want to be a burden.”

“You’re not a burden to me. We are called to carry our cross, true, but also to cast our burdens on the Lord.”

She scrambled to get up, and he rushed to offer her a hand. She held onto him after getting to her feet. “Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee,” she quoted the Psalmist. Obviously, she knew her Bible better than he’d thought. He was glad he hadn’t tried to preach to her. “What is the difference between our cross and our burden?”

He squeezed her hand before dropping it. “That’s something I’ll have to study on. I’m a new preacher and have a lot to learn yet.” He saw a question in her eyes and added, “I may be a preacher, Olivia, but I’m just a man, and I have to find my way like every other man.”

“But you will learn, and you’ll find another church where the people will appreciate you.”

He turned back to the fire. The idea of finding another church hadn’t occurred to him. He expected to go back—with his brother—and when the congregation learned the truth, they’d welcome both of them back with forgiveness and grace.

“What made you become a preacher?”

She was full of questions tonight. He just hoped she didn’t ask anything he couldn’t reveal. She had a good opinion of him so far, and he valued her good opinion. “It was a calling. I felt the Spirit urging me to preach the Word.” He laid another log on the fire and sparks flew up. Maybe it would be better to divert her questions with one of his own.

“What do you think your calling is?”

Her reaction surprised him. Instead of shrugging as he’d expected, she leaned forward, her eyes lit as she looked into

space, maybe trying to make out the image of a memory. Without a memory, how was she to know what her calling was?

“What is it? Do you remember something?”

She looked at him as if she just realized he was there. “It’s just that when you asked me what my calling was, I was sure someone had asked me that before.”

“Who?”

He shouldn’t have asked that. She closed her eyes as her brow puckered in pain. “It’s all right. These things will come back in sputters. Don’t stress yourself.”

She shook her head. “An image of a soldier flashed in my mind, then an Indian. I don’t know why, though. There’s no connection.”

“It might be some dream you’ve had—even an image from a book you’ve read.”

“I’m sure you’re right. Do we have any more venison roast left?”

“Only a small hunk is left. You eat it. I’ll be all right until tomorrow.” He held out the napkin-wrapped meat to her.

She examined the venison. It was the worst end of the roast, being mostly tendon and fat. “This is enough to make a stew. When I went to find a necessary, I discovered a patch of dandelions and wild onions growing near the stream. Oh, and yellow mushrooms—not many, but enough to make a nice stew and plenty for both of us.”

Jonah lifted his gaze to the darkening forest. “I don’t know. It’s getting that time when the game comes out. I would go with you and try to take down another deer or rabbit, but we’ll enter the town in the morning, so it would be a waste.” One thing his father had taught him was to never kill an animal unless it was for food or to protect himself.

Olivia busied herself finding one of her cloth sacks out of the supply pack. “It won’t take long and you can almost see me through the trees from here.”

Knowing she was determined, he said, “Be sure to take your pistol.”

“I have it tucked inside my waistband. Be right back.” She flashed him a sweet smile and off she rushed into the trees.

She’d done too much today. He would be glad to get her to the doctor’s and obtain an expert’s opinion about her head wound. The swelling had gone down a lot, but she still couldn’t remember her past. Not much, anyway, just a few deep-seated things, though it was promising she retained her knowledge and wisdom.

The arm didn’t seem to bother her as much, so he hoped that meant it was set correctly.

Although he truly wanted to get her into Redstone Ridge as soon as possible, a part of him wanted to delay the end of their time together. For that reason alone, he’d dragged out today’s journey. That was selfish of him. Something he should apologize for, except it would reveal too much of his feelings.

Once he delivered her to the doctor’s office and set her up in her hotel room, he should be on his way to find his brother. He’d lost a week already, and he didn’t have the time to spare. Surely the doctor and the town’s sheriff would be able to advise her on how to find her family, and she could stay put until they came for her. She had enough money to pay for two weeks hotel lodging and food.

Maybe he should contact the local church and see if someone would take her in until her memory returned.

It still worried him, though. She was all alone. So vulnerable. He got busy chopping up the pitifully small hunk of meat and dropping it into the pot of boiling water. He didn’t know about those mushrooms. So many were poisonous, and they looked similar to the edible ones. Olivia acted like she had foraged before, and maybe she had, but...

The sound of a shot jerked his head toward the woods. Then a woman’s scream had him grabbing his rifle and bounding toward the sound. *Please, God, take care of Olivia.*

He spied the wildcat before he saw Olivia. Lifting his rifle, he barely had time to get the beast in his sights before it sprang right at Olivia. The blast rang in his ears, but it was a good shot. The big cat fell to the ground, not six feet away from Olivia. He sped to her.

Tears streaming down her face, she held out her good arm. That was invitation enough for him to take her in his arms. She trembled like a captured fawn and great sobs racked her body. "It's all right. You're safe now," he soothed, rubbing circles on her back as he held her to his chest, resting his chin on the top of her head. He shouldn't be so intimate with this woman; after all, they were strangers.

No—by now they were much more than strangers. As much as they'd both been through, they were friends, at least. More than friends on his part.

After a while, her sobs changed to shudders and sniffs. She pulled away. "I'm sorry. I've never been so scared in my life. I couldn't hold the pistol steady. If you hadn't got here in time..."

"But I did and everything is all right." He wrapped his arm around her shoulders and they began the trek back to camp.

Remarkably, by the time they got back, she'd recovered. She was such a strong, resilient woman. "Do you want to sit while I go back for my rifle." He'd dropped it after killing the wildcat.

"No, no. I'm all right. Get my sack, too, please. It's at the water's edge. I was washing the plants when I looked over my shoulder and the cat was almost on me." She shuddered. "I'll stir the stew while you're gone."

When he got back, she'd gotten down by the fire with the pot before her. Her smile lit up her tear-stained face. "You'll have to cut up the vegetables, but I can stir them in. The stew already smells wonderful."

He laughed, glad to let his tense muscles relax. "Probably because you're so hungry. Are you sure these mushrooms

aren't poisonous?"

"Positive. They're delicious. I ate one earlier and, as you can see, I'm still alive."

"Praise God for that." He got to work chopping up the greens and mushrooms and dropping them in the pot.

She lifted her face to him, a wobbly smile still on her swollen lips. "Thank you. You're my hero, you know that." Emotion laced her strained voice.

"I'm just glad I got there in time and my shot was good. You weren't the only one who was scared. I appreciate you saying it, but I'm no hero."

"You are to me. You've rescued me twice from certain death. I might have forgotten my past, but I'll never forget you."

Her words were darts to his heart. She indicated that they were to part soon, probably never to see each other again. That she would no longer need him, and that just reminded him of how much he wanted to be needed.

Chapter 7



After less than an hour in the saddle the next day, they turned from the trail onto a well-traveled road, the first sign they were close to a town. Olivia should have been relieved, but she wasn't. Apprehension had her palms sweaty although the morning still held its chill. 'What-ifs' buzzed around her like angry bees.

What if the town didn't have a doctor? What if she never regained her memory? What if the sheriff couldn't help her find her family? And most of all, what if Jonah left her?

He'd promised he wouldn't leave until she had some answers, but what if those answers left her in a worse predicament than she was in now?

They rode side-by-side. She glanced often at Jonah's strong, handsome profile. God had been gracious to her when He put Jonah in her path. She couldn't remember the men in her past, but she knew many would not have been as gentle and patient as he was. Maybe the thing that scared her most was the possibility that the men in her past were the opposite of Jonah.

"I see chimneys," Jonah said. "It looks to be a sizeable town as western towns go." He didn't pick up his pace, so maybe he, too, was reluctant to find out what lay ahead.

He halted at the first street. "If you're agreeable, we'll eat breakfast before the doctor. According to my map, the town has two cafes and one restaurant."

"I'm more than agreeable. That stew last night was delicious, but not nearly enough." They didn't have anything,

not even a piece of jerky, this morning, and according to the position of the sun, it was probably about ten o'clock. "The only thing is, if I look as dirty as I feel, they might not let me in."

"You look a sight cleaner than I do—smell better, too, but if they're like most businesses, they take any paying customer. Besides, most folks have probably already had breakfast. My guess, the place will be nearly empty."

They rode at a clip-clop pace down the street, looking for the eatery. "Look, they have a bathhouse," Jonah said, nodding his head in that direction. "While you're at the doc's I think I'll clean up."

"A bath would be heavenly, but I don't know how I'd be able to manage with this broken arm."

"I'm sure the doctor has a lady assistant who can help you with a bath. We'll ask. Most doctors believe in cleanliness."

"I do hope so." She turned her head and spied a sign for Polly's Place. "Here's one of the cafes, and it says it's open."

"Polly's Place it is." Jonah stepped down and helped Olivia to the ground.

A bell tinkled as they entered the quaint place. The smell of bacon and other good foods had Olivia drooling as she waited for her eyes to adjust to the dim light. With only one small window at the front, it had a cave-like atmosphere. And very small, though only one of the five tables was occupied.

"Let's sit over here," Jonah said, taking her by the elbow and easing her to the table nearest to the door on the side.

The tables had benches made of half logs, and as soon as they were seated, a short, brown-haired woman dressed in a black dress and white apron appeared with a pad and pencil.

"What will you have, folks?"

Olivia didn't see a menu. "What do you have?" Jonah asked.

“Breakfast is either bacon, eggs, hash brown potatoes, biscuits with butter and jam or you can substitute the biscuits with pancakes. Lunch isn’t served until eleven and it’s just ten-fifteen.”

“I’ll have the breakfast with biscuits and coffee,” Olivia said.

“Make that two. A whole pot of coffee, if you please.” Jonah shared a grin with Olivia, probably reminding her of his coffee-making abilities.

“Coming up,” the waitress said, giving a hard look at Olivia’s bound arm.

They watched the waitress disappear into the curtained-off back of the café. “After you’ve been seen by the doctor, we need to visit the sheriff,” Jonah said.

A pebble of anxiety dropped into her stomach. “Why?”

“To ask him to help us find your folks, of course. I’m hoping he’ll have a map of the whole territory. We have little to go on except your aunt’s mention of Carson in her note. Now, that might be a town or a person, but when she put the date beside it, I think it’s a town.”

Olivia chewed her lip. “That makes sense.”

“The only city I know of that it might be is Carson City, but that’s in Nevada, not in the direction you were headed. There must be a dozen little towns named Carson scattered throughout the West, most named after Kit Carson. You don’t remember a town named Carson, do you?”

She should remember her hometown, shouldn’t she? “I actually recall Kit Carson,” she said, pleased to tell him about another memory. “He was a trapper, wasn’t he?”

Jonah nodded. “Trapper, wilderness guide, Indian agent, general in the army. He helped map out the Oregon Trail. He became so famous he was written about in dozens of dime novels, which, of course, exaggerated his exploits. But it’s reasonable to believe towns he traveled through might take his name. I hope the sheriff can shed some light on it.”

“How are we going to explain our relationship?” They didn’t have to explain themselves to the waitress, but they would at the doctor’s office, and certainly to the sheriff.

“What about our relationship? We met on the mountain trail and traveled together to help each other.”

Olivia laughed, without any mirth. “You helped me. You saved my life, but you wouldn’t let me do hardly anything.”

“That’s not true. You kept the fires going and foraged for food.”

She leaned forward, fingers laced together as she laid her hands on the table. “Oh, Jonah, you know what I mean. We’re an unwed couple who’ve spent nearly a week together out in the wilds. You and I know it was perfectly respectable, but people are...well, they think the worst, and these people don’t know us.” She drew in a breath that became a shudder. “I don’t even know me. We could tell the doctor we’re brother and sister...or cousins.”

Jonah’s lips drew into a grimace, etching deep lines around his mouth. “I see no reason to lie. We’ll tell the doctor, and anyone else who has to know, the truth.” His features softened as he reached across the table to lay his hand over hers. “Besides, you should always tell your doctor the truth, and don’t hold anything back. Agreed?”

“That’s fine with me, but don’t be surprised if we’re not met with a mob, pointing shotguns at us, expecting us to marry.” She meant it as a joke, but it missed its mark on Jonah.

“There won’t be any weddings. Neither one of us knows if we’re free to marry, even if we wanted to.” He smiled. “Don’t worry. These people don’t know us and we won’t be in town long enough for them to get to know us.” He laid both hands on the table. “Let’s bless the food before it gets here, so we can eat right away. I know you’re hungry.”

She slipped her hands in his and that warm, mellow feeling settled in the pit of her, making it hard to concentrate on his prayer.

Neither of us is free to marry. What did he mean by that?

Yes, there was an outside change she was still married, though she doubted it, but Jonah had said he wasn't married. Did he mean he was promised to someone else? What else could it mean? She shouldn't have allowed herself to feel so deeply for this man. At that moment, she realized she loved him.

Too bad for her. He didn't feel the same way about her.

The waitress appeared with enough food for four hungry lumberjacks, but her appetite was gone.

Chapter 8



Jonah sat in the reception room of Dr. Norwood's clinic. He shook his leg nervously. What could be keeping them? The nurse had taken Olivia back over two hours ago. In that time, he'd traced the number of tiles covering the floor a dozen times, each rotation, stopping to look out the window. He probably knew the town's traffic better than the residents.

A door closed and footsteps approached. Jonah stood, preparing himself. Those weren't Olivia's soft footfalls.

A tall, silver-haired man materialized from the hallway. "Are you the young man who brought Miss...Olivia in?"

The man held out his hand and Jonah took it in a firm shake. "I'm Jonah Dykes. I'm with Olivia. How is she?"

"Physically, she's doing fine. You did a good job of splinting that arm. The bone is already fusing correctly. My nurse is giving her a bath and after that, I'll put a cast on the arm so she has more movement, although it will remain in a sling for six weeks."

The doctor's words relaxed some of Jonah's tension. He'd been worried about Olivia's condition. He knew she'd hid her pain a lot and kept pushing herself beyond endurance. He sent his silent thanks heavenward.

"What about mentally? When will she regain her memory?"

The doctor's shoulders slumped. "I wish I could tell you. The brain is such a mysterious thing. We don't know how trauma such as Olivia experienced affects the brain. As I told her, she'll just have to wait and see."

“She can remember some things.”

“Yes, deep seated memories it seems. I will tell you, Mr. Dykes, that woman has worked with doctors before.”

“How do you know?”

“She knows the instruments of surgery and can name medicines the average person wouldn’t know.” He paused, looking off into space as if seeking answers. “She says she can’t remember working for doctors or in a clinic or hospital. I suggested she send out inquiries to the area educational facilities, because she’d have had to study medicine at some time, probably not too long ago, judging by her age.”

“How old do you think she is?”

“Not above twenty-five.” The doctor rubbed his hands together. “I wish I could be of more help, but that’s about all I can suggest. I also gave her the names of specialists in brain injury, but I have to warn you, as well as Miss Olivia, some of them may cause more harm than help. In other words, you may wish to trust your own judgment.”

Jonah shook the doctor’s hand again. “Thank you, doctor. We won’t be seeking further medical help.” Since when did he start speaking for Olivia? Since he started caring for her, probably that first day. The idea of leaving her here on her own sounded ridiculous now. He couldn’t, in good conscience, abandon her. “How long until she can go?” he asked the doctor.

“About an hour, I should say.”

That would give him time to cross the street to the bathhouse and clean up. He returned within half an hour feeling human again. Back in the waiting room, he resumed his pacing and counting tiles, but now he had a different problem. Love had sneaked up on him. Maybe he’d failed to recognize it because he always extended care and human love to his neighbor—including those he found along the way. To love one’s neighbor as one’s self was a commandment he didn’t take lightly.

His love for Olivia was different. He didn't want their relationship to end. Honestly, he wanted it to lead to marriage. But if he couldn't convince Tim to go back to Greenwood and marry Lucille, he'd promised to marry her before her child was born. And time was running out. He was going to have to explain it all to Olivia.

Explain what? That he wanted to marry her if he wasn't obligated to marry another? That he'd foolishly promised to marry the woman carrying his brother's child?

He was peering out the window at a couple of cowboys riding down the street on beautiful paint ponies when he felt her presence.

"Jonah."

He swung around and was gut-punched at the sight. Her glossy brown hair hung down her back, tied with a blue ribbon. She wore the same blue calico dress she'd worn out on the trail, but even as dirty as it was, it enhanced her eyes. And those amazing, long lashes made her eyes appear even larger than he remembered.

She smiled. "Well, say something. Do I look decent now?"

"You look beautiful, Olivia. I'm sure you've had plenty of people who've told you that if only you could remember." Out on the trail, he'd often wondered if she could remember what she looked like.

"I can't remember, but the doctor says I should regain my full memory before my arm knits."

"I believe you will, too." He offered his arm. "Shall we see if the marshal is in? Turns out the town's law is a U. S. marshal."

They found Marshal Booker in the front office of the jail. He looked to be about the same age as the doctor, and he affirmed he'd been Redstone Ridge's lawman for the last ten years. He should know the territory well. After they told Olivia's story, the marshal looked from one to the other, as if he'd never heard such a tale before. He probably hadn't.

“I know that mountain pass you’re talking about. It’s treacherous anytime, but impossible in winter. A wagon couldn’t get through there, summer or winter. You don’t know why your man was traveling that way?” He posed the question to Olivia.

She glanced at Jonah. “I don’t remember even leaving for the trip. Jonah says we were going too fast, like we were being pursued.”

The marshal swiveled toward Jonah. “But you didn’t see anybody behind them?”

“No, if anyone was chasing them, it looked like they had a good head start. Assuming I’m correct that they were running away from someone. Might be, the fellow was just reckless.”

Marshal Booker inclined his head. “Or had to get somewhere fast.”

“The only clue to Olivia’s identity was a note from her Aunt Hattie.” As Jonah spoke, Olivia pulled the crumpled paper from her reticule and handed it to the lawman.

He perused the short missive and scratched his head. “Since there’s a date beside Carson, it might be the name of the town.”

“That’s what we thought. Do you have any maps of the territory north of Greenwood, Colorado? That’s where I’m from and we were both traveling north.”

The marshal threw his shoulders back. “That’s a town on the other side of the Rockies, isn’t it? My grandparents used to live near there.”

Any other time, Jonah would have liked to hear the man reminisce, but Greenwood meant nothing to Olivia. “Then you’re familiar with the area and the states that run north along the Rockies. There might be a lot of little towns by the name of Carson, but if we could find some on the map, I’d like to send a telegram to the sheriffs of those towns and ask if they know a woman by the name of Hattie.”

Marshal Booker rubbed the side of his nose. "Hattie is a common name for a woman, too, but there's a chance to run Miss Olivia's aunt down that way. It's somewhere to start on." He turned away from them. "The maps are in this cabinet back here. I'll bring you the one for Colorado and Wyoming. You want Utah, too?"

"Yes, and Montana."

Marshal Booker raised his hand to indicate his understanding as he left the front room.

Olivia slipped her hand into Jonah's. "That was mighty clever of you to think of looking at the maps. I have a good feeling about this."

"It might be a waste of time, but we're going to find your folks, I promise."

"I don't know what I'd have done without you." She pressed his hand, sending a jolt up his arm. "Yes, I do. I'd be dead."

"Here they are," the marshal said. "Let me get some tacks and we'll put them all up on the wall. If we find a town with Carson in it, I'll circle it with my pencil."

Starting with Colorado, they studied the maps. "You understand some of the towns may be so small or new they won't be on here."

Jonah nodded. "Here's a Carson Lake. It's north of here."

The marshal circled the place on the map. "Not very far, either, but it might just be a lake and no town at all, and no sheriff's office. If it doesn't have a lawman, there won't be anyone to send a telegram to."

"Yeah, no one said this would be easy with so little information to go on," Jonah said. "But we'll put it down."

"I found two in Wyoming." Excitement edged Olivia's voice. "Carson's Rest and just Carson."

"That's good," Jonah said. "There's two in Montana, too. Carson Gap to the north and Carson Valley in the south. It looks like a fair-sized town by the way it's drawn on the map."

“Yep.” The marshal nodded. “Looks to be about the same size as Redstone. I’ll surely find the sheriff in charge.”

They went over the maps again, but no other towns with the name of Carson could be found. “That’s five. I’ll get you the names of the lawmen in charge of those towns, if I have them. If not, just send your telegram to Sheriff’s Office. I’ve had telegrams come in addressed to Post Office and Jenkins, our telegraph operator, gets it to me.”

As Marshal Booker got to work, Jonah and Olivia waited at the door. They didn’t have long to wait. Within a minute, the marshal came back with a slip of paper. “That’s the names of the lawmen for those towns from the last notice I got. Even if they have new men, the telegraph operator will get it to the right man.”

They thanked the helpful marshal and stepped back onto the boardwalk.

“While you send the telegrams, I’ll book our rooms at the hotel,” Olivia said. The happiness on her face told him she held out a lot of hope they’d be able to find her aunt.

“Maybe we should keep together.” He didn’t know anything about this town or its people. All his protectiveness of this woman rose to the top. “Besides, we’ll have to stop by the livery to get our carpet bags.”

“I’ll be all right. You can collect the luggage after you send out the telegrams. Do you need me to pay for them? I know you paid the livery for both our horses. I thought I’d pay for our rooms.”

She’d read him wrong. He wasn’t about to take her money. She had little from what he’d found in the wagon wreckage. “Don’t worry about the money. I’m not rich, but I can take care of the telegrams and the hotel.”

She crossed her good arm across the one in the sling in that stubborn stance he’d become familiar with. “No, I insist. I can see the hotel from here. I’ll meet you there in the lobby with our room keys.” She hightailed it down the street before he could get out a word.

It occurred to him that maybe she wanted to get away from him for a while. After all, except for the doctor's visit, they'd been together every minute for almost a week. No wonder when she left his side, he felt bereft of her presence.

He loved her and if things were different, he'd ask her to marry him. That's what he really wanted. But things were different, and tonight he'd have to reveal his heart to Olivia and tell her how different things were.

Chapter 9



As soon as she had the keys in hand, Olivia sprinted to her room. She wanted to look at herself in the mirror. Jonah had said she was beautiful, but she wanted to know. The doctor's nurse had helped her bathe, but she wanted to get out of this dress, which was so stiff with dirt, it would be able to stand without her in it. She had a light blue sprigged muslin dress in her bag and as soon as Jonah brought their luggage from the livery, she wanted to change. She hoped the room had some sweet-smelling soap on the washstand.

Instead of booking two separate rooms, she'd asked for a suite of two bedrooms. It wasn't any more than two separate rooms, although the second bedroom was small, suitable for a couple's children, the clerk had told her. She hadn't told him they were not a couple, nor without children.

The truth of it was she wanted Jonah nearby. The idea of being alone through the night terrified her. She didn't know why, but even now, being separated from him made her uncomfortable.

Or maybe she wanted Jonah nearby because she'd foolishly fallen in love with him. She really didn't know him as he'd only spoken of his growing up years, nothing about his current life. Still, she flattered herself that he found her attractive. After all, he said she was beautiful.

His behavior had been nothing but gentlemanly, but she just knew he would like to call on her if circumstances were normal. It was just a feeling that any woman would notice in a man.

What would it be like for him to kiss her? No, she shouldn't be thinking things like that. He'd surely pick up on such mannerisms.

She barely had time to inspect the place and give her image a critical inspection in the mirror when a knock sounded on the door, making her jump. "Who is it?" she asked through the closed door.

"The maid with your linens, ma'am."

Of course, it was only the maid. There were no devils hiding behind every bush waiting to ambush her. She opened the door and the maid entered with an armload of blankets and towels.

She left the linens on the bed and stopped at the door. "Do you need anything else, ma'am?"

"No, thank you, not at the moment." After the maid left, Olivia brushed her hair, being careful not to apply any pressure to the lump on her scalp. Her hair was still wet from her bath and she had trouble brushing it with one hand. Did she dare ask Jonah to brush her hair? Just the thought sent tingles down her spine.

No, that was too personal. Oh, but how she wished for it.

Fatigue weighted her down and she gave up brushing her hair dry. Disappointed, she laid the brush down. She wanted to look good for Jonah. She wanted to smell good for Jonah. She yearned for him to admire her.

A knock pulled her away from the mirror. It had to be Jonah.

"Jonah?"

"It's me, Olivia." Her memory might be faulty but she'd never forget his voice. It was a perfect blend of bass and baritone, a mellow voice that soothed the soul. No wonder he was a preacher.

"Look at you," he said on the threshold. "You're beautiful."

She moved out of the way to let him in. “I feel better after my bath. You look rather spiffy yourself.” She allowed a flirtatious note in her voice.

His gaze traveled around the room. “Thank you. I got the telegrams off and decided to get a shave and haircut before taking you to supper. Do you have the key to my room?”

She bit her lower lip. “This is your room, Jonah. This suite has two bedrooms, but I’ll take the smaller one.”

A crease pinched his brow, indicating his annoyance. “You got a suite for the both of us? The clerk didn’t question that?”

“He got the impression we were married. I didn’t tell him we weren’t, and I got the suite in your name. I think the clerk believes we have children. I probably should have set him straight, but...the truth is—”

“Yes...the truth is?”

She tilted her head back. He’d understand. Right? “The truth is I’m afraid, Jonah. I have to have you near. I’m still having nightmares and...I have this feeling someone is coming after me.”

“You might well have someone coming after you. Surely your family will be wondering where you are and will be coming after you.”

“It might not be a family member. It might be an enemy.” She reached out to him with her good hand. “Please, Jonah, as you said yourself, no one knows us here. There won’t be any shotgun weddings if we stay in a suite designed for a married couple.”

His reluctant smile sent flutters to her stomach. “All right. How would you like an early supper? I’d like to take you for a walk afterward.”

Those butterflies in her stomach took flight, rising into her chest. A man didn’t ask to take a walk with a lady unless he had something important to talk about. Usually, a walk was the only way to ensure privacy, although there was little need to get away from people here. Besides, they had already had

all the privacy in the world out on the trail. But now, here in town, it seemed different.

She slipped her hand into the crook of his elbow. “A walk would be most welcome. I need some fresh air.”

He patted her hand as it rested on his arm. “Then let us be off.”

The restaurant was small but well-appointed with red-checked tablecloths and a flickering candle on each table. The waitress showed them to an out-of-the-way corner table.

Instead of discussing their plans for the next day as Olivia had expected, they talked about the beauty of this land, the places they wanted to visit, the places where they’d like to live. The world’s condition and how they’d like to do their part to help their fellow men and women.

Olivia hung on his every word, which to her came as a note in the sweetest song—one she had to remember since, deep inside, she feared all she’d be left with was memories. How ironic that was.

The food was delicious, though she wouldn’t have been able to tell anyone what she’d eaten.

When the room got crowded as the normal dinnertime arrived, they left the hotel. The twilight carried a cool breath with a hint of lavender on the air, and Jonah draped her shawl over her shoulders, before hooking her arm.

“Where are we going?” she asked.

“I don’t know. Away from the saloon district. A quiet street where we can hear mothers calling their children in and fathers greeting their families after coming in from work. If we listen carefully, we might hear the cricket’s song or the call of the nightingale.”

She clutched his arm. “That’s what I love about you. You are so poetic.”

His chuckle fell softly on her ear. “Oh, I don’t know about that, dear Olivia, the truth is I’m stalling.”

“Stalling? For what?”

“I don’t know whether you’ve noticed or not, but I’ve come to care for you very much. I didn’t realize how much until our time together was growing short. We will find your family, possibly tomorrow, and they will come for you and take you away.”

Her heart stopped and tears rose in her eyes. He cared for her. She swallowed the lump in her throat and stopped walking. “No one can take me away from you, Jonah. I...I love you.”

He brushed her cheek with the back of his fingers, flicking the tear away. “I shouldn’t have let it come this far, Olivia. I’ve wanted to love you from the first and now I do and always will, but there are complications.”

She tried to focus through her tears. “There may not be as many complications as you suppose.” She drew in a deep lungful of air and plowed on, “I’m not married. I asked the doctor to...well...to examine me to see if I’d ever had a child, and he got his nurse to do it. She said I had never borne a child and was still a virgin.”

He pulled her to him, cupping both elbows. “How do you feel about that?”

“I don’t know. I already knew deep down inside. I wanted to tell you as soon as we were alone.”

He tilted her chin and lowered his head. His lips met hers in the lightest of kisses, like a testing of the waters and savoring the touch. She wrapped her good arm around his waist and pressed into him. The earth fell away as he tightened his hold. She heard him groan or maybe that was her.

She didn’t know how long the kiss lasted, but he was the one to break it. “Olivia, my sweet, brave Olivia. I’ve been waiting for the right time, too. The complications aren’t only on your side.” He stared over her head. “There’s a bench. Let’s sit and I’ll explain.”

She didn’t want him to explain. She wanted him to kiss her again. That tone in his voice held despair, and fear rose in her, making it hard to breathe.

He kept his gaze on the street like he couldn't stand to face her with his story. "I told you I was looking for my brother. I should've told you why at the same time."

With a quick glance at her reaction, he leaned back onto the back of the bench. "Back in Greenwood, Tim, my brother, grew up with a girl named Lucille. She's the daughter of a big rancher and the most important man, at least to himself, in our church.

"Although Lucille was only sixteen, and too young for courting, Tim and she sneaked around. Mr. Lake found out about them and forbid Tim to ever see his daughter. A little while after that big fight, Tim found a job with the Tinsley Mining Company. That's a mine about twenty miles north of here."

"So that's where you're going?"

"Yes. About a month after Tim left, Lucille came to me, asking for counseling. She admitted she was with child and would have to tell her parents soon. She said Tim was the father and wanted me to help her join him." He dropped forward, propping his elbows on his knees. "I couldn't do that without her parents' permission, and she promised to tell her parents."

Silence fell over them until Olivia had to prompt him. "What happened?"

"She told her parents I was the father."

The impact of that shot through her, making her gasp. "Oh, Jonah. I'm so sorry."

"I told Mr. Lake it was Tim and tried to convince him that he was in love with Lucille, but Mr. Lake took it before the church and they turned me out. Besides that, he insisted I marry Lucille. I spoke to Lucille, asking her to confess the truth, and she said she'd told her parents I was her child's father because she was scared of what her father would do to Tim, and she loved him.

"She begged—literally begged—me to find Tim and let him know. I told her and her father, I was going to get Tim and

bring him back. And that if I couldn't get him to agree to marry Lucille, I would."

Olivia grabbed his arm. "You can't do that. It's Tim Lucille loves. You don't love her."

"No, but if I have to marry her, I'll also have to love her and her child, who's my nephew or niece." He took Olivia's hand. "If I'd known you, I'd never have promised to marry her. It was just a heated time with the Lakes and, well, I didn't know what else to do. I truly believe Tim will agree to come back and marry Lucille, but I can't be sure. He hates Mr. Lake as much as he loves Lucille."

"I'm sure your brother will come back to marry Lucille." She wasn't at all sure of that but the desire to comfort Jonah made her blurt out, "It's the honorable thing to do. Surely your brother will realize that."

"I hope so. I pray so." But his tone gave her no comfort.

They stared into each other's eyes until darkness blanketed them, and the crickets began their song.

Olivia shivered. The temperature had dropped. This town was still high enough on the mountain range that the nights remained cold way into the summer. Jonah noticed her shiver and peeled off his coat to drape it over her shoulders. He leaned into her and kissed her forehead.

As she lifted her head, he pressed his lips to hers. It wasn't a passionate kiss, but oh, so tender her heart rose in her throat.

"We'd best be getting back. Everything will turn out for good, my sweet Olivia, for both of us." He kissed her forehead again and stood, then helped her stand. She was grateful for his support since her legs had turned to rubber.



After a delicious breakfast the next morning, they walked to the telegraph office. Jonah expected to have received replies

by now. His had been a simple inquiry. *Missing person. Looking for matronly lady named Hattie.* Marshal Booker had explained that every lawman responded to help with finding a missing person. And besides, Jonah couldn't afford a telegram that explained Olivia's complicated situation.

That was another reason he didn't feel free to ask her to marry him. He didn't have a job and little money. How could he support a wife?

The bald-headed man behind the counter looked up as they entered the office. A broad smile revealed one missing tooth. "Got all five replies for you folks. I'll get them." He disappeared behind a faded yellow and red calico curtain.

"I'm afraid," she said, her gaze scanning the small room.

Jonah laid his hand on her shoulder. "All will be well, sweetheart."

How could he keep saying that? Because he was a man of faith and always believed that God would work things out for the good. She didn't have that kind of faith yet.

The bald man returned with a fistful of telegraph forms in his hand outstretched to Jonah.

Olivia turned away to look out the small window that needed cleaning desperately, but then, she supposed with all the dust, it was impossible to be kept clean. The town street looked familiar, though she was sure she'd never been here before.

Now that she might learn the truth in the next few moments, she didn't know that she wanted to know the truth.

She felt Jonah at her back. "Olivia, only one town has a woman named Hattie. The sheriff of Carson Valley, Montana didn't give any details. See if you recognize this lady's name."

Something in her spirit knew before she even looked that her relationship with Jonah was about to change, and it was with trembling hands she took the paper.

Hattie Carlyle. Not a common surname, but she recognized it. Suddenly she was shaking all over. She drew in

a breath so deep it filled her lungs to the brim, but still felt it hard to breathe. Bending from the waist, she sobbed. Great soul-shaking sobs.

Jonah pulled her into his arms. “Olivia, are you all right?”

Memories gathered in her mind, and she lifted her head to peer into his eyes. She held the paper between them, stabbing it with her finger. “This...this...is my name. Olivia Carlyle, daughter of James and Mary Carlyle. Both of them died when I was seven years and I went to live with Aunt Hattie and Uncle John. He was my father’s brother. Carson Valley is a quaint, growing town, much like this one.”

He leaned in and kissed her cheek. “That’s wonderful, sweetheart. Why do you cry?”

She held onto him for support. “I know you can’t understand how amazing it is to realize you’re,” she threw up her hand, “you’re a real person again.” She forced a smile. Of course he wouldn’t understand. He might have troubles, but at least he knew who he was.

“Come on. Let’s get out of here before I embarrass you and myself,” she said.

He opened the door. “You don’t embarrass me. I’m just happy for you. Let’s go back to the hotel and lay our plans. I saw a territorial map in the desk drawer that’ll help us find the best route to Carson Valley. Hopefully, most of the trip can be made by train. With your arm, you shouldn’t be traveling on horseback all the way to Montana.”

Out on the boardwalk, they turned in the direction of their hotel. “What about our horses?” she asked. She wasn’t about to leave Cedric behind.

“We’ll ride them to the nearest train depot and freight Cedric to Carson Valley with you. I’ll just ride to the mining camp. It’s not far.”

Her smile died. They’d be parting ways. She might never see him again, and that killed all the joy that had exploded in her upon learning her name.

Chapter 10



Where did Olivia's elation go? Her emotions seemed to be on a see-saw, and Jonah decided to pretend all was normal. Now that her memory had returned, she would naturally have a lot to process in that pretty head of hers.

Maybe they should wait until after lunch to discuss the next move for both of them, but on the other hand, they had to get out of the hotel before they incurred another day's cost. "Let me get us a cup of coffee and we'll look at the map."

On his way to the door she called out, her voice breathless. "You'll come right back?"

"I will be back within five minutes. Why don't you rummage through the desk and spread the map out?" He glanced back once more before slipping through the door. Her eyes were clouded with fear. But why, he couldn't fathom.

He returned with two coffee cups. The restaurant wouldn't give him a tray, so he had to set one cup down to enable him to knock. Olivia immediately opened the door and took her cup. He closed the door and followed her to the desk, noting that she had the map spread out across the top.

"Did you find Carson Valley?"

"Yes, but I already knew where it was on the map. When I went to help Uncle Jeremiah on the Blackfoot reservation, I had to study the maps carefully."

"I thought your uncle was named John?"

"I grew up on Uncle John's ranch. Uncle Jeremiah is my mother's brother and he's a doctor and missionary. I went to

serve as his nurse.”

Jonah blew on his coffee. So that’s where she got her knowledge of medicine that Dr. Norwood had mentioned.

“There’s a train depot in Carson Valley, but as far as I can tell the nearest train depot from here is on the Transcontinental. The way I went to—”

He sipped his coffee, as she looked off into space, obviously trying to remember her trip south—that place she’d never named.

“The way I went to Colorado was to take the train from Carson Valley and crossed the Transcontinental in Laramie. I didn’t take the western route like we’ll have to.”

Jonah set his cup down and studied the map. “Looks like we’re only about twenty miles to the Transcontinental, so we could take the stage there.”

“What about our horses?”

“We’ll have to take them with us. They can be tied onto the back of the stage and we’ll have to freight Cedric on to Carson Valley. I’ll have to ride to the mining camp.”

Olivia sprang to her feet so fast she almost dropped her coffee. “No. I want to go with you to find your brother. Now that I know where I’m going, there’s no hurry.”

He got up to turned her to face him. Nothing would please him more than that she go with him, but they’d have to camp overnight and now that they’d declared their love for each other, the temptation would make that impossible.

She stared at the floor and he lifted her chin with his fingers, coaxing her to look at him. “I don’t know what we’d find at the mining camp, sweetheart. I’ve heard there are unsavory types in such places. It wouldn’t be safe.”

Tears rolled down both cheeks as she grabbed the lapel of his coat. “Please don’t leave me.”

Her tears were his undoing. He hugged her to his chest, resting her head on his shoulder. “I want more than anything to

take you with me. There's nothing I want more than to marry you, Olivia."

For several moments nothing but her sniffs broke the heavy silence.

"Let's pray about it," Jonah said. They sat on the side of the bed, holding hands, heads bowed.

"Heavenly Father, guide us in the way You would have us go. You know our hearts better than we do, but we are human, Lord, and it's hard to understand our own ways. We ask You humbly to forgive our shortcomings and every stumble. But Lord, we come to You boldly, asking that You continue to heal Olivia, her arm and her memory. That You prepare Tim's heart to receive the news I have for him. Lead him to the right decision. Help me, Lord, to find the next step in my calling. All of this we ask, but not for our will, but Yours, be done. Amen."



Olivia went with him, although he still wasn't easy with the decision. There might be danger in the mining camp. There might be danger on the trail. Mostly he feared his desire for her would break him.

He had to keep his distance, and that hurt her, he knew. Should they talk about this attraction between them? They sat on opposite sides of the campfire. Her silence drew words from him. "Olivia, I'm not in a position to take a wife. I have no job, no home. I can't ask you to marry me, but I'm praying our circumstances will change and you'll wait for me."

"I've never been known for my patience, Jonah. But, if I have no choice." Her voice was thick, filled with emotion as she lifted her head stoically. "I don't think it will be hard for you to get a job, and as far as the home, we have a tent. Many a pioneer woman lived in tents and soddies and worked side-by-side with her husband to build a better home."

He smiled. "You're right, sweetheart. We have a tent, but for tonight, only you will be sleeping in it."

Later that night, Jonah was awakened by a woman's scream. His heart hammering his ribs, he sprang to his feet, reaching for his rifle. A check of the tent revealed what he already knew. It was empty. Olivia was out there in the woods in the direction of the scream.

Had she got up in the night, needing to relieve herself, and come up on an animal? She screamed again and he was off in that direction. Already, morning light filtered through the trees. He didn't see an animal, unless it was a snake.

She saw him before he got to her and held out her arm.

"What happened, sweetheart?" He held her tight, rubbing her back in wide circles. "Did you come up on something?"

He felt her shaking her head in the negative. "It was the dream."

"The shadowy figure?"

"Yes." She pulled back a step. "I'm sorry. It was so silly of me, but it seemed so real and I ran."

"No reason for you to be sorry." He laid his hand on her shoulder and eased her toward camp. "Besides, light's breaking. By the time we build a fire and have breakfast, it'll be time to go."

Olivia didn't offer to help with the fire and cooking; in fact, she was unusually quiet. Instead of sitting opposite her, Jonah settled beside her as the coffee heated. They had the biscuits and ham the cook in Redstone packed for them, so the coffeepot was all that sat on the fire. He enjoyed taking a place opposite her for one reason alone. She looked so beautiful with the firelight showing her features.

She didn't even turn her head as he sat beside her, and that worried him. "Do you want to talk about it?" he asked.

"No, I want to forget about it." Her soft laughter held a note of fear. "Trouble is, I can't. It's funny that I remember

everything up until I left to go wherever it was I was leaving from when the accident happened.”

“I’m sure your Aunt Hattie will fill in the blanks and everything will return to you.” He’d told her that before, but he had an idea she didn’t want to remember that part of her past, and maybe feared what Aunt Hattie would tell her.

He’d been doing a lot of thinking and praying. Whichever way he looked at his dilemma, he couldn’t imagine leaving Olivia and marrying another woman. Deep inside, he hoped Tim would do the right thing, but he didn’t know how Tim’s situation might have changed. Or why he’d left Lucille in such a hurry.

He threw a stick into the fire and watched the sparks spring into the air. “Olivia, I’ve been praying about our situation. You know I love you and I’ve compromised your virtue. I don’t want to take you to your family without the best intentions. I was thinking—” He coughed into his hand. This was harder than he thought it would be. This was certainly not the place he’d thought he’d propose to the woman of his dreams.

“I believe there’s a missionary at the mining camp.”

Her head came up. “A missionary? To minister to the men, you mean?”

“Yes, the miners and the men and the women who work in the saloons.”

“That’s good. Are you thinking of helping this missionary?”

Her question disrupted his thoughts. “No, I don’t know the man, but Tim wrote that he was a good preacher.” He took her hand, an action that put a question in her eyes. “If you’re agreeable, we could get this missionary to marry us. That way, we’d be...well, it would keep your reputation intact...that is, for when we met your aunt and uncle.”

That had to be the dumbest marriage proposal he could have uttered. He drew in a deep breath. At least it got his intention across.

Olivia lifted his hand to her lips and kissed his knuckles. "I love you, Jonah. I want to spend the rest of my life with you. I believe God put us together on that mountain, but..."

"But?"

"We should wait until the time is right. Last night's dream reminded me that there are still pieces of my past that are missing. We should wait until we know everything about each other. You should know me as well as I know you."

She pressed his hand and set it back down beside them. "I know you, Jonah. I know you all the way through to your soul. I know that may seem like boasting because we met little over a week ago, but we've been together every moment of every day since. I know you well enough to know you can't go back on your promise. If Tim refuses to do the honorable thing, you'll have to go back to Greenwood and persuade Lucille and her father that you love another and they must release you from your promise."

He started to shake his head. This wasn't going like he'd wanted it to. Going back to Greenwood would take time, more time than he wanted to wait to take Olivia as his bride.

She held up her hand to forestall his protest. "I'm praying as you are that once Tim knows he's to be a father, he'll do the right thing. I also know that if he refuses, you will make provisions to care for your nephew or niece and his or her mother."

"How could I do that when I don't even have a job?" He had to smile. Just being with Olivia had him senseless. He couldn't support a wife any more than he could an unwed mother and her child. "You said Carson Valley is a sizeable town, so I know I'd be able to get a job there, if not to pastor a church, I can work at the livery, for the blacksmith, as a store clerk, all jobs I've done before. If I have to take care of Lucille and the child as well as you, I'll simply take on two or three jobs. I'll do what's necessary."

Silence fell between them. The woodland creatures sounded so loud without her sweet voice to shut everything

else out. He pulled her closer and she turned her tear streaked face to him, mouthing “I love you.”

She moved in to kiss his cheek. He felt her breath and shifted so their lips met. The kiss wasn't as passionate as the other one, but it went on longer. Deeper. More desperate.

Chapter 11



Are you sure this is the mining camp? Olivia asked. “It says Tinsley.” For a mining town, this turned out to be much larger than Olivia had imagined. It even had a welcome sign. She’d heard the camps were nothing more than tents spread out over muddy streets.

“Harold Tinsley is the mining tycoon who runs the place,” Jonah said. “Tim says he’s a conscientious man who pays above what most miners make, and the men are housed in boardinghouses. That long building on the left must be a boardinghouse.”

They were riding their horses side-by-side now at a slow walk. “Is that where Tim lives?”

“Probably, but he’s probably already gone to the mines by this time of morning. We’ll stop here and ask the owner.”

Jonah stepped down and helped Olivia dismount.

Someone had attempted to make the entrance beautiful by planting a red rose bush on either side of the wooden walk. The sign on the overhang proclaimed this to be Tinsley’s Boardinghouse. Olivia wondered if there were any vacant rooms available. It would be wonderful to have a place to bathe and change clothes before she met her prospective future brother-in-law.

A tall, thin woman with gray-streaked curls poking out of a day cap came forward. She wore a dull brown dress and a welcoming smile. “Good morning. I’m Mrs. Brinks. Mr. Brinks and I run this boardinghouse. How may I help you?”

Olivia returned Mrs. Brinks's smile as Jonah removed his hat. "Pleased to meet you, ma'am. I'm looking for my brother, Timothy Dykes. He works here in the mines. My name is Jonah Dykes and this is my fiancée, Olivia Carlyle."

When he introduced her as his fiancée, Olivia slipped her hand into his. Her heart flipped with gladness that he'd taken her bumbling answer to his marriage proposal as an eventual *yes*.

Mrs. Brinks nodded to Olivia. "Heavens, child, what happened to you?"

At first Olivia thought the woman was speaking about her disheveled appearance, then she realized it was her arm that had Mrs. Brinks's attention. "I was in a wagon accident and broke my arm. It's healing well."

"That's good," Mrs. Brinks said. "If it gets to hurting, you might let Doc Linder look at it while you're here." She shifted her glance to Jonah. "I know your brother well. He has room twenty-four, but he won't be back until suppertime."

"We expected that. This Doc Linder you mentioned. Is he related to Preacher Linder who runs a mission for the town?"

"The same. He's an ordained minister, but he also studied medicine, I understand. He holds Sunday preaching at the little clapboard church as you're going out of town. It's up on the hillside. You can probably see the steeple through the trees. His infirmary is located on the same road."

"Quite the little town Mr. Tinsley has founded," Jonah said.

"Indeed. We're proud of our town. Mr. Tinsley might be rich but he's a good man. Probably gives away as much as he takes in here." The woman's head dropped like a charging bull's, as her eyes speared them, daring anyone to challenge her. "If any rich man can enter Heaven, Harold Tinsley will."

"Do you have any rooms available, Mrs. Brinks?" Olivia asked. "I would love to change from my trail clothes." She hoped the woman would offer a bath, as well. She thought

she'd seen a bath house sign as she and Jonah rode into town, but she hated public bath houses.

Oh, to have a home of her own. It seemed forever since she'd had a real bed to lay her head on.

"No, dear, we don't rent our rooms to women." Mrs. Brinks pursed her lips, leaving a circle of tiny wrinkles around her mouth. "But you're welcome to use mine and Mr. Brinks's suite. It has a bathtub and a water closet." A note of pride edged her voice. "Mr. Brinks is away on an errand, but I'll leave a 'Back Later' sign on the desk and take you up there and help you with your bath. It's obvious you can't manage with your arm in a sling."

"Thank you, ma'am," Jonah said. "That's very kind of you." He dropped a kiss on Olivia's forehead. "I'll visit the bathhouse and come back for you so we can call on Dr. Linder."

"Doc Henry is the nicest man and he can doctor the soul as well as the body." Mrs. Brinks set a folded card on her desktop to alert any patrons of her absence.

Olivia followed Jonah to the door and waited there for him to fetch her carpetbag. When he handed it to her, she said, "You want to talk to Dr. Linder about a job, don't you?"

"You can already read my mind, sweetheart." He winked. "Enjoy your bath."

She watched him swing into the saddle and tip his hat to her. He was so handsome it was hard for her to turn away and shut the door. But Mrs. Brinks was waiting at the stairs.

Forty minutes later Olivia descended those same stairs, wearing her best dress, made of lavender-colored fine linen and trimmed with purple ribbon and delicate, white lace. The fabric was made for summer and felt good against her skin, but she'd brought a cobweb shawl with her to ward off the chill that would roll in later in the afternoon.

Mrs. Brinks hadn't washed her hair since it had been washed by Dr. Norwood's nurse a couple of days ago. The kind boardinghouse owner had tried to fashion an up-do of

coils swirling at the crown, but Olivia didn't have enough pins to hold it, so she'd let it fall in waves down her back. That's the way Jonah liked it.

Jonah waited by the clerk's desk, looking up at her, a tantalizing smile on his freshly shaved face. He met her at the landing and she took his outstretched hand. His gaze swept over her, heating her cheeks.

"You are so beautiful, my love." He drew her hand through the crook of his elbow.

A ridiculous wave of shyness swept over her as she held his gaze. "And you are the most handsome escort I've ever had." They had reached the boardwalk where Jonah's horse was hitched to a buggy. "What's this?" When she'd dressed, she hadn't even thought about how she'd ride Cedric wearing this dress. Leave it to Jonah to take care of everything.

"I rented it for the day and left Cedric munching on a bag of oats at the livery."

She wanted to scold him for spending the money. They could make do, of course they would, but she knew neither of them had much money left. She'd have plenty of money when she arrived at Carson Valley. Her father had left her with more than enough to take care of her, and Uncle John had managed her account so well that the amount had doubled by the time she came of age and gained control.

She started to remind Jonah that she could help with the expenses, but decided against mentioning it. She'd offered before and he'd refused to take her money. She didn't want to bruise his male ego by reminding him how little he had. In truth, she admired him for assuming the responsibility of paying their way. Though it didn't seem fair. He'd have to find a job in Carson Valley. She didn't doubt for a minute that he could. It was a growing town, and he was a hard worker. Uncle John would help him find a job.

"Is Dr. Linder's place so far you had to rent a buggy? We could have walked."

“We could’ve walked and it would’ve been a pleasant stroll except that we pass by the saloons and cribs.”

“What are cribs?”

“They are a group of shacks for street walkers. The lowest level of prostitutes stay there. Basically, they have nothing more than room for a bed and a wash stand. The higher-priced prostitutes live above the saloons and have some measure of protection provided by the saloon owner.”

This was something no respectable woman would know about, but she had no doubt most mining towns out here had cribs. That Jonah wanted to protect her from seeing such depravity was admirable, but she wasn’t a child. “I thought madams had rather...comfortable establishments for such women.”

“Most of the city brothels do, but not here—not now, anyway.”

He circled her waist to lift her onto the buggy’s seat, and she enjoyed the feel of him. His strength made her feel protected. He walked around the back and swung up beside her. Taking the reins, he released the brake. “They have a small church, and Dr. Linder does his best, but from what I’ve heard from the locals, the whole town could use a pastor.”

“And you will fill that position perfectly.”

“I’ll know more about that after I speak to the doctor.” He flicked the reins to get Sampson underway. “I feel the Lord is leading me to something here, not sure what. What about you? Would you be willing to live in this place? I mean if a proper house was built.”

She gave him a side hug. “I told you I lived in a teepee once. I think I could manage a small country house.”

The doctor’s house and clinic turned out to be a surprisingly large whitewashed, milled-wood building. The man, himself, opened the door to them. After introductions, Dr. Linder led them into a cozy parlor. “Alice is visiting a patient and left me in charge.” He laughed, his manner giving

one the impression of an affable man, and a doctor with a pleasant bedside manner.

“Have a seat. I have an accident patient coming in, but I have some time.” After they’d seated, the doctor lowered himself onto a worn leather armchair. “So, you’re Tim’s brother? He’s spoken of you many times.”

“We haven’t seen him yet. We just got here and he’s at work, but we stopped at his boardinghouse and Mrs. Brinks, the proprietor, told us you hold Sunday services as well as run your medical practice.”

“That’s right. I was ordained a minister when I was a young man, mainly to please my mother. Not that I don’t want to serve God, but my calling was medicine, so after a couple of years assisting our pastor, he offered to send me to medical school. I practiced in Pennsylvania until—” The doctor twisted his lips for a moment. “Until about five years ago when Mr. Tinsley ask me to take the job of doctor to his miners out here. The salary was generous and Mrs. Linder, Alice, had relatives out here.” He threw his arms apart. “So here we are.”

Olivia saw the question in Jonah’s eyes as he sought her approval. “Go on and ask him.”

Jonah cleared his throat. “I’m a preacher myself, and I was wondering if Mr. Tinsley would like someone to take that position full-time. Mrs. Brinks said she thought he might, and it must be hard for you to work all the hours in the week as a doctor and preach on Sundays.”

Dr. Linder grinned and slapped his knee. “You are an answer to my prayers, young man, an answer to my prayers. I don’t feel like I have time to give our growing congregation the attention they deserve. I told Mr. Tinsley that and he said he’d be on the lookout for a minister. As you can see our town is growing, but there are a lot of folks here who need ministering to. I can assure you Mr. Tinsley is a very generous man and will pay a good salary, so you won’t have to rely solely on donations, although most of the church’s attendees are generous, too.”

“Then you’d be willing to write to Mr. Tinsley and recommend me?”

“I would. We’ll sit down and discuss that tonight at dinner, how’s that?”

Before Jonah could decline the invitation to dinner, they were interrupted by an attractive gray-haired lady who entered the parlor from the back. “Henry...oh, I see we have company.”

Dr. Linder rose to his feet and introduced Olivia and Jonah to his wife. “Of course, we’d be pleased to have you for dinner.” She turned to her husband. “Henry, Nat Felton fell on a pick and has an awful gash in his leg. They brought him in the back.”

“I’ll see you all at dinner,” Dr. Linder said, beating a hasty exit.

Mrs. Linder gestured for them to sit back down. “Let’s get to know each other better.” The lady’s smile grew wider as they explained the situation. “If you’re going to be serving as the church’s pastor, Jonah, Olivia and I will be involved in all the town’s activities. I hope, at least.”

Olivia smiled. Mrs. Linder seemed to think Olivia and Jonah would be marrying soon. “I’d like that, but Jonah and I will be leaving for Montana tomorrow. That’s where I live.”

“Yes,” Jonah said, “and we’ll have to decline your kind invitation to dinner tonight, Mrs. Linder. We’re going to be meeting my brother for dinner at the café. But when we return to Tinsley, I hope the invitation stands.”

Olivia’s insides warmed at his words. He took it for granted that they would be married and would be returning together. Of course, a lot depended on how Tim reacted and what Aunt Hattie and Uncle John thought.

“Certainly, it will stand, but please call me Alice. We’re very informal here. Everyone calls my husband Doc Henry. He’d be insulted with any other name.”

Olivia glanced at Jonah before sending Alice a warm smile. “We prefer informality, too, don’t we, Jonah?”

Considering the way we met, there was never any formality.”

“Oh, how did you two meet?” Alice asked.

Jonah got to his feet. “It’s been a short time, but a long story, and Olivia can explain better than I can. If you ladies will excuse me, I want to introduce myself to the town’s proprietors, and while Doc Henry is busy, it seems to be a good time to do so.”

“How long will that take, Jonah? I’m sure Alice has better things to do than entertain me.” Olivia was well aware Jonah wanted to learn whether this town was respectable enough for them to make their home here. but he should take her with him. She didn’t want to impose on Alice.

“You’re no imposition to me, Olivia,” Alice said. “I’d love to hear your story. Go ahead, Jonah. Olivia and I will have a nice chat.”

As Jonah closed the front door on the way out, Alice asked, “Why don’t I make us some tea?”

“Can I help?”

“No, just stay where you are, dear. It won’t take me but a minute to get the tea brewing.” Alice was already disappearing into the kitchen when she added, “I want to hear your story from the beginning.”

By the time Olivia had related how Jonah had rescued her from the side of a mountain where her companions had died, then taken her to the doctor’s in Redstone, they had drained the teapot. Alice had let Olivia do all the talking, merely uttering a few words of compassion along the way.

Olivia wondered what the woman was thinking of her situation, given she’d just admitted she’d traveled alone with an unrelated man for nearly two weeks now. When the silence grew, she added, “Jonah suggested we get married before we go on to Carson Valley where my family live, but I thought it was...too soon.” She hadn’t mentioned anything about her dreams and that part of her memory still missing.

“I believe Jonah is right,” Alice said. “It’s obvious to me you two love each other, and when there is love, there is no

reason to delay marriage.” Her eyes twinkled like she spoke from experience. She reached over to pat Olivia on the knee. “Henry is qualified to conduct weddings. You could marry tonight. That way, as you continue your travels, you won’t be compromised in any way. And unless I’m wrong, Carson Valley is still a long way from here.”

“It is. It’s in western Montana, but there is a train depot at Carson Valley, so once we get to the main railway, it won’t take long to get to our destination.”

“Why do you hesitate to marry your young man? Your family may feel he’s not of the highest moral character if he’s compromised you on the trail.”

Olivia released a sharp laugh. “Jonah is of higher morals than I am.” She bit back her next thought. Alice had given her something else to consider. That her family might not think highly of Jonah soured her mood. “There are complications too private to relate, but that’s all that holds me back. I assure you I love him and will marry him...as soon as I can.”

“You would know best,” Alice said, although her tone sounded disappointed. “But love can cover any complication. Read First Corinthians, chapter thirteen tonight before you go to bed and reconsider your situation.”

Olivia didn’t have to read that chapter. She knew it by heart. “Love beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never fails.”

“Then you already know that love wins every time. Your unconventional courtship may have been short, but it ended in love. I can tell by the way you two cling to each other and the way you look at each other.” Alice laughed lightly. “Think of the adventure you can tell you children.”

Children. An image flashed in Olivia’s mind. She held a child close to her, trying to keep him from feeling the bumps and bouncing of a wagon over a narrow, rocky mountain trail. Sadness smothered her. She had loved the boy. She knew he was a boy.

The heir. Foreboding filled her stomach and she felt bile rise to her throat. No, she couldn't go any further. Not here. Not until she was with Jonah.

"What is it, dear?" Alice must have noticed her distraught expression.

"I just had a memory of a child—more like a feeling. That's the way it's been with my memory."

"Could it have been your child?"

"No, that's impossible. I've never been married or...been that close to a man." Was that the best way to say it? Now she knew why the Bible used the words "knew his wife" to describe a mating. A man could never truly know a woman nor could a woman truly know a man, until then, when they became one flesh.

Alice was staring at her like she didn't believe her. "I did love the child, but he couldn't have been mine."

The older woman opened her mouth to respond but was cut short by Doc Henry. "Alice, I need you."

"Oh, dear." Alice shot to her feet. "I must go, though I dread this part of being a doctor's wife. I can't stand the sight of blood."

Olivia rushed to follow Alice. "I have had nursing training. Perhaps I could assist the doctor."

Alice hooked her by the elbow and held on like she was a lifeline. "You have, oh, my dear, yes, please. You can help the poor injured man better than I can."

All worries about when or if she should marry Jonah left her as she fell into the familiar routine of helping a doctor save a man's limb.

Chapter 12



Miners Café was a hole-in-the-wall with a false-front second story. Jonah timed himself so that he and Olivia would arrive before the miners rode into town. Ollie Dune, the café owner and cook, assured him Tim was on the first shift that stopped by to eat before going on to the boardinghouse.

So many times before, Olivia had been the nervous one while he'd done his best to keep calm for her sake. Now she was the one helping him settle down. "As you've told me so many times, all will be well." She tugged him to a table by the window, as out of the way as any in this small space.

He did have the presence of mind to pull out her chair and let her sit first before taking the chair opposite. Tim could have the outside chair. He should have sent Tim a telegram announcing their arrival. It wasn't a good idea to surprise him like this.

This was going to shock his brother and the news would hit him hard. Maybe he should have taken Olivia back to Doc Henry's place so he and Tim could have a private conversation. It was going to be awkward enough as it was.

But he'd wanted his brother to meet Olivia as soon as possible. Let him be one of the first to know they were getting married tonight.

Was it possible he would be marrying Olivia tonight? She still hadn't said why she changed her mind, but he thought it had to do with the prospect of being separated from him. She was terrified and he was her only anchor in the storm still swirling inside her.

He almost toppled the water glass as he rearranged his place setting. He wasn't given to panic attacks, but he was close. Olivia reached across the table and laid her hand on his. She didn't speak but her deep blue eyes spoke for her.

His chair faced the café's entrance and he forced his gaze from Olivia and stared at the front. Not many minutes passed before Tim entered. He looked good. Despite the bad working conditions miners sometimes endured, the job seemed to agree with Tim. He'd become leaner, more muscular.

The perky, young waitress met him at the door with smiles and giggles. Jonah couldn't hear what they said, but it was obvious they were friends. Oh, no, please Lord, not another complication. Had Tim developed feelings for another woman? And Lucille carrying his child.

Both Tim and the waitress came toward them. He didn't look surprised to find them here. Jonah got to his feet and the brothers hugged. "You're looking good, Jonah," Tim said. "Preaching must agree with you." His glance slid to Olivia. "Or is it the beautiful young lady who's responsible?"

"Mining must agree with you, brother. How did you know we were here?"

"Mrs. Brinks over at the boardinghouse told me. You don't think I'd look this clean if I hadn't stopped by there before coming to dinner? Are you going to introduce me?"

Jonah smiled, wondering what else Mrs. Brinks had told him. "This is my intended, Olivia."

Tim leaned across the table and kissed Olivia on the cheek. "Welcome to the family, Olivia. Now we're a family of three."

Jonah and Olivia exchanged a smile. They would be a family of five if Tim did his duty. "Thank you, Tim," Olivia said. "I've been looking forward to meeting you. You and Jonah could pass for twins."

Tim chuckled. "In physical appearance only." He pulled out a chair and sat.

The smiling waitress had been hovering behind Tim the whole time, holding a tray. “Congratulations, Jonah and Olivia. We have beef stew and cornbread tonight.” She set the steaming bowls before them and the aroma of the stew had Jonah’s stomach rumbling. A couple of days on the trail had reminded him how to appreciate good food.

The waitress fetched a coffee pot and filled their cups. “If you folks need anything else, just holler.” She winked at Tim and swished away.

Jonah hoped the young lady hadn’t set her cap for his brother. He was already taken. “Let’s pray,” he said, taking his brother’s hand and Olivia’s. After the short blessing, he addressed Tim. “You probably think we met in Greenwood.”

Tim was chewing and Jonah gave him time to swallow. “Didn’t you?” Tim asked.

Jonah and Olivia took turns explaining how he’d found her in a nest of cedars after her wagon pitched off the trail. Since Olivia didn’t mention her memory loss, he didn’t either, only explaining how he’d splinted her arm and spent the next few days on the perilous trail before arriving at Redstone. By the time they’d related how they’d clung to the sheer mountain ledge during a tornado, how Olivia was almost attacked by a wildcat, and how they’d traveled from Redstone to the mining camp, everyone had finished the stew and was sipping the coffee.

“So you two decided to get married after all that,” Tim said.

“We believe God brought us together and protected us so we’d have a future together, hopefully here in Tinsley,” Jonah said.

Tim looked from one to the other, smiling broadly. “Is that right? Are you going to work in the mines?”

“No, I hope Mr. Tinsley will hire me as chaplain to the miners and pastor to the town.”

“It sure needs it. Don’t get me wrong. There are some fine people here, but those saloons—I think there are four—

and the cribs don't make it a place you'd want to raise a family." He leaned forward. "I've been saving my money and have my eye on a ranch about five miles from here, a nice place with a house and barn. All it needs is fencing and corrals. I hope to run two or three hundred head of cattle. Can't handle more than that without help."

He drained his cup and added, "How about you coming in with me? You could still preach and all. It's not that far away."

Jonah glanced at Olivia and she rested her hand over his. "I think it's a fine idea—for the future. We have to find out what Mr. Tinsley thinks first."

"That we do." She was right. So many unanswered questions yet, and the most important one loomed.

He and Olivia had decided that she'd leave the brothers to talk about the situation with Lucille. Tim wouldn't want to talk about something that private with a woman present, not even one who would soon be a sister-in-law.

"I have something else I'd like to discuss, Tim. Let's order another coffee and a slice of pie."

"Sounds good to me," Tim said.

Olivia picked up her cue. "I noticed the mercantile is just next door. If you gentlemen will excuse me, I'd like to look over the dresses. If possible, I'd like to find one suitable for a wedding dress. I know it's not a fancy wedding, but you know how women are."

She rose and both men rose with her. "The dress you're wearing is beautiful to me," Jonah said, "but if you want a new one, find the best one they have. I'll drop by to pick you up on the way back to Doc Henry's."

The waitress set the pie before him and he stared at the pastry a long time, trying to gather his thoughts. "Eat up," Tim said.

"Do you still think of Lucille?"

Tim stabbed his pie with his fork, using more force than needed. "Of course, I think of her all the time. Why do you

think I want to buy that ranch? I want to prove to her father I'm not the guttersnipe he thinks I am."

Jonah released a breath. Tim still loved the girl and he'd do the right thing. "Lucille is with child."

Tim's fork fell, clattering off the plate and hitting the floor. He made no attempt to retrieve it, the shock was dilating his gray eyes until Jonah couldn't distinguish the pupils from the irises. "How long?"

"Long enough. I'd say she was at least seven months along when I left and I've been on the road three weeks."

"Why didn't she write me? Why didn't she answer the letters I wrote?"

"You know why. Mr. Lake intercepted her letters."

Moments passed as Tim digested that. "Mr. Lake sent Lucille to me for counseling," Jonah added. "You know I hold counseling sessions out in the sanctuary with Mrs. Heller just out of earshot. On her third visit, Lucille asked if I had an extra Bible she could borrow. I went to get it, but it was just a ruse for her to follow and get inside my office."

"Why would she do that?" Tim's jaw clenched in anger. "No, don't tell me. I know. Her father put her up to it. He was trying to compromise you, so you'd marry her. He always thought you were more suitable than me."

"Mr. Lake was waiting to follow us in the office. There, he claimed to have caught us. It led to the scandal he was hoping for. The elders ask me to leave the church and Mr. Lake demanded that I marry Lucille."

"But you obviously didn't. You're going to marry Olivia."

"That's right. I am marrying Olivia. I told Lake I was going to find you because you were the father. He didn't like that answer, but he'd run out of leverage. I may have been rash because I told him if you didn't return to marry Lucille, I would."

“Well, you certainly can’t marry Lucille.” Tim studied his pie for a long while. “You know how much I hate the man. He’ll expect me to stay on and work for him, and I can’t abide Lake, much less working for him. I’ll go and find Lucille, ask her to elope and bring her back here. I’m able to take care of her now—her and the baby.”

Jonah reached across the table to give Tim an affectionate slap on the shoulder. “I know you’ll go get her, but do me a favor and try to let the hate go. Talk to Mr. Lake. It’s my guess he may have changed his mind by now. He’d rather accept you as a son-in-law than lose his daughter and grandchild.”

“I know it’s the right thing to do, but I don’t know if I have it in me to—” He stooped to get his fork.

“Forgive? Pray about it on your way down there. Do it for Lucille.”

Tim’s shoulders slumped. “I’ll try. I’ll talk to my boss tomorrow and ask for time off. I’ll leave next week, so you can be praying for me.”

“I’ve been praying for you all the time.”

Tim stared at his plate. “I’ve got to get back to the mines,” he said, obviously forgetting his coffee and pie. “I’ll meet all of you at Doc Henry’s at eight. Is that soon enough?”

“Yes, we won’t start the wedding without you. Having you there means a lot to me.”

Tim threw a couple of coins on the table. “Does Olivia know you’d been promised to marry Lucille?”

Jonah slid his chair back and slowly gained his feet. “She knows.” It occurred to him Olivia knew a lot more about him than he knew about her.

But it didn’t matter. Only the present mattered, and they were getting married tonight regardless of what the future held.

Chapter 13



Olivia's heart pounded as she paced in circles around Alice's dressing room. Each time she passed the floor length mirror her image startled her. Alice had insisted she wear her wedding gown. "It will be something old and borrowed," she said, laughing in that blithe tone that failed to calm Olivia's nerves.

She had grown fond of Alice. Alice was a friendly, motherly type that appealed to Olivia, who'd lost her mother when she was a child. But she felt like she'd betrayed Aunt Hattie. Both Aunt Hattie and Uncle John would be hurt to learn that Olivia had married without even sending them notice.

They would love Jonah, though. She had no doubt of that. Everything would turn out all right. So why was she so nervous? It wasn't the wedding night. She knew about intimacy, and she yearned to be held in Jonah's arms. No one but he could keep those nightmares from disturbing her sleep.

Were there relatives she couldn't remember? Other relatives she should have notified of her marriage?

Her mind drifted again to the baby. William. Little Willie, the heir. Only he was no longer an heir. He'd been killed in the wagon crash. Had she been related to him, even though she knew she wasn't his mother? Why did she have the baby with her? Where was his mother? Why couldn't she remember that, at least?

A sharp pain shot through her skull, cutting off any further probing.

“I found the veil.” Alice’s voice preceded her into the room.

Olivia turned from the window. “Oh, it’s lovely.”

Alice pinned the gossamer headdress to the top of Olivia’s head, then pulled it around to cover her injured arm. Alice had wrapped the sling in lace to make it a part of the costume. She paid attention to details.

Olivia could hardly believe she was the bride in the mirror. The dress of silk and lace was stunning, and Jonah would be so surprised. He’d expect to see her in the dress she bought at Hanson’s Mercantile. That pretty blue summer cotton with tiny white flowers would have suited Olivia. It was the best Sunday dress in the shop and boasted wide lace at the three-quarter length sleeves and the top skirt that swept across the front and ended in the semblance of a bustle in the back.

But she couldn’t refuse Alice anything. She’d become a dear friend in the few hours they’d known each other.

“I hope Aunt Hattie isn’t hurt that she wasn’t here to attend me,” Olivia said as Alice fussed over the wedding gown, probably reliving her own wedding as she picked and tugged.

“I hope not, too, but it couldn’t be helped. The time is right for you and Jonah. Believe me, I know.” Olivia didn’t ask how she knew. She believed this was right, too.

“Besides, Henry brought in our resident photographer who will take your photograph after the ceremony and he’ll give you two prints in the morning. It’s a wedding present from Henry and me.” She stopped to smile up at Olivia. “You can give the second print to your aunt.” With a sigh she stood back and scrutinized the dress.

Tears stung Olivia’s eyes. She pulled Alice into a side hug. Her friend tugged a handkerchief from her pocket and wiped Olivia’s face. “None of that until after the ceremony.”

“We’re ready when you ladies are.” Henry’s bass voice boomed up the stairs.

“Are we ready, dear?” Alice asked.

Olivia nodded. "More than ready."

Doc Henry waited at the landing. "Ah, you're a beautiful bride, my dear. Jonah is truly blessed." He offered her his arm.

"I am truly blessed as well." She would never forget the next few minutes. They were implanted, not just in her mind, but in her heart.

Her breath caught at the first sight of her handsome groom. He'd dressed in a black coat, trousers, and string tie. A smile creased the corners of his mouth with double laugh lines, and his eyes had darkened to a shade of smoldering chocolate.

The appeal in those eyes drew her to him and she floated to him as if on air.

Tim stood beside Jonah, also dressed in black coat and trousers. "You look lovely, Olivia," her soon-to-be brother-in-law said. She'd never had a brother, or at least, she didn't think so. She felt the love Jonah had for Tim and, because of that, she would love him, too.

"He's right," Jonah said. "The most beautiful sight I've ever seen." He took her hand and kissed it before they both faced Doc Henry, who held a book in his hand.

"Before you repeat your vows, I must ask if you know of any reason the two of you should not be wed, and if you do, speak up now."

"No," they replied in unison.

Guilt lay on her tongue even as she said the word. Had she spoken a lie? Was there a reason she shouldn't marry Jonah that she didn't know about? Just being a virgin didn't mean she wasn't already married or was promised to another. Who was the man driving that fateful wagon? Was she of sound mind since there were still pieces of her memory she'd yet to reclaim?

All those doubts flew out of her mind when Doc Henry asked her if she took Jonah as her lawfully wedded husband. Yes, a thousand times yes. She couldn't envision a future without him.

In less than five minutes, including the prayer, they were sealed as husband and wife until death. That was just the way she wanted it.

She lifted her face to receive Jonah's kiss.

Chapter 14



The train's whistle blasted, jarring sleeping passengers awake. Jonah flexed his muscles. Crammed into the narrow, hard seats as they were, he didn't have room to move his legs. It would take hours before the numbness wore off, he didn't doubt.

"Next stop, Carson Valley, folks," the conductor announced. He held a lantern in front of him to light the floor since it was barely five o'clock in the morning, and it wasn't uncommon for people to leave things to trip over in the aisle.

Olivia still slept, her head on Jonah's chest. He hated to wake her. Each morning since their marriage he woke first to find her snuggled up to him, and each morning he'd sent up a prayer of thanks for sending him this woman. He hadn't realized how empty, how incomplete he was, until he found her. She warmed him to the cockles of his spirit.

He knew she still worried that she couldn't remember why she was on that mountain trail or who was with her. Except the baby. She remembered the baby, but she didn't know why she had him.

Soon she would know. Not that it mattered to him.

Before they married, he'd wanted to wait until her arm healed to consummate the marriage. He didn't want to hurt her, nor to make the night more awkward than it had to be. She had agreed for a different reason. Since she didn't know all of her past, she felt it wouldn't be fair to Jonah to be tied to her in case he wanted to end the marriage.

That wouldn't happen, and in the end, their foolish expectations meant nothing. In the quiet of Doc Henry's guest room, they became one. Where desire and love met, there was no awkwardness. They had found that to be true during the two nights on the trail to Laramie.

There hadn't been any privacy on this train. Society frowned on any show of affection in public, and Jonah found it frustrating how seldom he could steal a kiss. It was still dark in the train, so he tilted her head with his two fingers under her chin, and kissed her.

A quick kiss, but it made her stir and wipe the sleep out of her eyes with her fingers. "I heard the whistle," she said, her voice husky with sleep.

"We're arriving in Carson Valley. How long do you think it will take to get to your aunt and uncle's?"

"If they have our horses ready, we should arrive in time for breakfast."

"That's good, because I only have a few coins left." The train fare had been barely edible and very expensive.

"Even if we're late for breakfast, I'll cook us some pancakes with bacon and fluffy scrambled eggs with cheese, like you like them."

He snuck another kiss on her forehead. "You already know all my secrets." He shouldn't have said that. Her smile died and he felt her shudder. Neither of them knew all her secrets.

They found the horses ready, and Jonah wished he had a bigger tip for the stable boy. The town was a fair-sized town, as Olivia had told him. He was sure he could find a job for a short time while they visited with her relatives. Now his relatives. He hoped they wouldn't blame him for the hasty marriage. It had been a long time since he'd been a part of a large family, and his chest swelled at the thought.

Please God, everything would work out for Tim and Lucille and the baby, the other additions for the family.

While he checked the leathers on Sampson, Olivia stood crooning to Cedric, rubbing his nose, scratching behind his ears. Jonah finished cinching his saddle to his satisfaction and came up behind her. “Ready? You’ll have to lead the way.”

She turned her face to him, and from the gleam in her eyes, all trepidation had left her. Glancing around to find the stable boy’s back turned, he sneaked a kiss on her upturned lips.

With a pat to his chest, she stood on her toes and kissed him in return. “Let’s go.”

Outside of town, Olivia gave Cedric his head. There was no chance for conversation, so Jonah took in this lush land, breathtaking in its splendor of deep green forests banked by tall mountains. The morning sun just topped the tree line and streaks of light flooded the valley.

Olivia had told him her uncle ran a horse ranch, and soon he could see a fenced area with horses—mustangs, quarter horses, pintos, along with work horses of all colors; blacks, sorrels, chestnuts, and grays.

Maybe Mr. Carlyle could give him a temporary job. A ranch of this size could always use help.

They crested a hill and the farmhouse came into view. Olivia reined in, probably to give him a chance to take in the view—a view that must have delighted her as she grew up. “What do you think?” she asked.

His first thought was Olivia had married beneath her when she wed a poor preacher, but he resolved she’d never regret it. He sat back in the saddle and studied the farmhouse made of logs and stone. “It makes me feel good that you grew up in such a beautiful place.”

They rode at a trot to the stables beside the house. A grizzled man who might be of any age between fifty and sixty rushed to the horses’ heads. Jonah stepped down and helped Olivia to the ground.

The old man smiled broadly, revealing two gold teeth. “Miss Olivia, wasn’t expecting you. Big John didn’t say a

word to me.”

“He didn’t know, Rob.” She swung around to take Jonah’s hand. “Rob, I want you to meet my husband, Jonah Dykes.”

Jonah held out his hand and Rob pumped it up and down. “You done got married? I’ll be. Pleased to meet you, Mr. Dykes. You done got a peach.”

“That I have. Please call me Jonah.”

“Aunt and Uncle don’t know yet. Do you think they’ll be shocked?”

Rob laughed. Removing his hat, he slapped it on his thigh. “They will be for a fact.”

“Will you take our bags up to my room, Rob? Is Uncle John still inside?”

“Haven’t seen him come out. I expect they’re still having breakfast.”

A nervous tone sounded in Olivia’s laugh as she slid a glance at Jonah. “I guess it’s time to shock them.”

Hand-in-hand, they made their way up a stone walk to the front porch that stretched all the way across the front. Roses bloomed in shades of red on either side of the porch steps. He could picture the porch of the much smaller parsonage in Tinsley being framed in roses. Would Olivia miss the benefits of her life here in Carson Valley? No, he didn’t think so. She knew what he offered her, and she’d still agreed to marry him. He was confident in her love.

He reached over her shoulder to lift the bronze knocker in the shape of a horseshoe, but she opened the door and barged in.

A silver-haired lady sat on a sofa, pulling out what looked like rags from a large basket. With a startled expression, she bounded from her seat and rushed forward, stopping to holler over her shoulder. “Big John, Olivia is home.”

Jonah gave the two women room as they hugged. A tall, husky man, with salt-and-pepper hair and beard came into the

room, stopping a few feet from Olivia and Hattie. His hard gaze took Jonah's measure.

Olivia left Hattie's embrace and hugged Big John. Then she stepped beside Jonah, her arm going around his waist. "Aunt Hattie, Uncle John, I'd like you to meet my husband, Jonah Dykes."

Obvious surprise held them in place for several beats. Big John extended his hand to Jonah and Hattie's hands flew to her face as she pressed her palms to her cheeks, pushing her mouth into a bow. "You're married?" she gasped.

"Why didn't you let us know, Livy?" Big John asked, censure evident in his voice. "How did your arm get hurt?"

"Hurt?" Hattie's gaze dropped to Olivia's sling.

"It's a complicated story," Olivia said. "We'll explain everything over breakfast if you still have some. Jonah and I haven't eaten anything substantial since lunch yesterday."

"Oh, my, yes. I think it's still on the table and the coffee is still hot." Hattie turned to lead them through the entryway into the kitchen. Big John tagged along behind Olivia and Jonah. "We have ham and biscuits and...what else do we have, John?"

"Fried potatoes and red-eye gravy," Big John said as he sat at the head of the kitchen table.

Jonah waited until Olivia and Hattie were seated before pulling out his chair. He could feel a chill in the air emulating from Olivia's aunt and uncle and it would take time before they accepted him as their nephew.

But he was so hungry, he forgot about winning over his new relatives and enjoyed the first home-cooked meal they'd had since leaving Doc Henry and Alice. Hattie and Big John shot questions so fast, he found it hard to keep from talking with his mouth full.

He couldn't blame them, and as the meal progressed, Olivia took over most of the explaining. She didn't mention that she still couldn't remember what sent her on that narrow mountain trail. Hattie and Big John were so shocked and

interested in how Olivia was rescued and traveled with Jonah, mostly how they'd fallen in love, that they didn't get around to questioning anything that happened before.

In spite of all the talk, they managed to finish the food and sat enjoying the rich coffee. Hattie and Big John were thawing to him, or Jonah hoped.

"You men are out of coffee. Let me get the pot," Hattie said.

Olivia waved her hand. "No, let me get it. You are not to wait on us while we're here, Aunt Hattie." Jonah pulled her chair out so she could rise.

"So, you two are going to be living in that mining town?" Big John asked.

Apparently, they thought Tinsley was one of those wild, dirty places Jonah himself had imagined before he and Olivia arrived in the mining town. "It's located four miles from the mines and growing into a nice town," he said.

Olivia turned from the stove. "It is, and Jonah has prospects of a position at a large church. I'll be helping Doc Henry at the clinic a few hours a week." Her gaze clashed with Jonah's and they shared a smile. It was a stretch calling it a large church, but he had hopes it would be someday.

"We hope you'll visit us when we get settled down," Jonah said.

"If that's where you and Livy live, I guess we will." Big John held out his cup for Olivia to fill.

She poured Jonah's cup full and stepped back. "Oh, I do hope so, and Jonah and I will come back here to visit, I promise. Don't know how often. It's almost a full week's journey, but the railroad is expanding every day. Maybe they'll soon have passenger cars coming to Tinsley. The tracks are already there."

"We'll find a way," Aunt Hattie said. "By the way, Olivia, you haven't mentioned your visit to Colorado. How was Elizabeth?"

Jonah put his cup down on the table just as Olivia whirled around, her mouth hanging open. Her eyes had glazed over with the look of one who suddenly realized she'd stepped into quicksand. "Elizabeth." Her voice was nothing but a raspy whisper, but he heard her.

As his wife's head wobbled and her eyes rolled back in her head, Jonah bounded from his chair so fast it fell backward. He caught her just before she hit the floor.

Hattie gasped. "She's fainted. I'll get the smelling salts."

"I'll take her to the sofa." Jonah said.

Big John followed him. "Wonder why she fainted."

Jonah didn't have to wonder. Olivia had just recalled the missing part of her memory.

Chapter 15



She felt the fog sucking her back to a place she'd hoped never to see again.

Olivia peeped into the nursery. Baby Sammy lay in his crib on his stomach, his thumb in his mouth and his rump in the air. She would miss the little cherub. Ducking back out, she turned and almost crashed into one of the ranch hands.

The man stood with his beaten-up hat in his hands, a worried look in his eyes. "What can I do for you...Tag, isn't it?" She didn't know if Tag was his first name or last. This was her third week visiting her sister and brother-in-law, and she still only knew a few of the ranch workers. She'd planned to stay only two weeks, but Riley, Elizabeth's husband, had been murdered last week. Shot by a rustler.

She'd tried to convince Elizabeth to return to Montana with her, but she'd refused. Had to wait until the ranch's affairs were in order, she'd said. Olivia didn't like leaving her sister so distraught, but she'd received a letter from Aunt Hattie. Her aunt didn't say much, but Olivia knew she was needed back home.

Marcella, Riley's step-mother, had taken everything in her hands. She'd told Olivia that she'd sent a wire to notify Uncle John and Aunt Hattie about the situation.

Tag looked over his shoulder. "Miz Lizzie wants you to meet her in the back woods. I'll show you where."

What a strange request, but Elizabeth hadn't been in her right mind, and that was to be expected, having lost her

husband in such a violent way. Olivia closed the nurse door and followed the cowboy.

They went out the kitchen door into the back yard. She had to run to keep up with Tag as he strode in long strides to the woods. Olivia saw no sign of Elizabeth. “Why did she want to meet me out here?” She spoke loudly to make sure he heard her.

“It’s about Riley’s murder,” Tag said over his shoulder.

When they reached the thick woods dominated by aspens, oaks, and pines, Elizabeth stepped from behind a large cottonwood tree. Tag stopped and turned back toward the stables.

Olivia laid her hand on Elizabeth’s shoulder. “What’s going on?”

Elizabeth sent a furtive glance to the house and spoke in clipped sentences. “We don’t have much time. Tag is hitching a team to the wagon. You have your bags packed?”

“Yes, all packed. I’m sorry to have to leave you like this, but Marcella assured me she’d looked after you.”

“She killed him.” There was no emotion in Elizabeth’s tone.

Startled, Olivia wondered again about the state of her sister’s mind. “Who? Marcella killed her own son? The sheriff investigated and said it was a rustler. He assured Marcella he’d call up a posse.”

“Marcella and the sheriff are lovers. When you first arrived, you heard how she and Riley were arguing about him making a will.”

“Yes, Marcella wanted to make sure Sammy inherited the ranch in case anything—” Was Elizabeth insinuating Marcella anticipated Riley would be killed?

Suddenly, Elizabeth grabbed Olivia by the elbows. “We don’t have time. She’s watching us, and I can’t trust anyone but Tag. You have to take Sammy with you.”

“What? If I take Sammy, you’ll have to come, too.”

“No, I have to make sure she’s brought to justice for killing my husband and ensure she hasn’t found a way to take the ranch from Sammy.” She released her grip on Olivia and rubbed her temple. “Sammy isn’t safe, either. He stands in the way. You have to take him now. Tag is waiting. He’ll get your luggage and the bag I’ve packed for Sammy. You take the baby.”

“I...I don’t know.”

“There isn’t time, Olivia. I’ll come as soon as I can. Go, please.” Elizabeth hugged Olivia and pushed her toward the house.

With one backward look, Olivia hitched her skirts and ran. She had just reached the back porch when she heard a shotgun blast behind her. At the same time, Tag appeared at the corner of the house.

Olivia heard Tag curse and glanced back toward the woods where the sound of the shot came from. Elizabeth lay on the ground only a dozen feet from the tree line. Pivoting, Olivia ran to her, Tag beside her.

Blood oozed from Elizabeth’s back. Stifling a scream, Olivia dropped to the ground and turned her sister over. The blood pouring from Elizabeth’s chest told her the wound was fatal. She hugged Elizabeth to her as shock knocked her senseless. How could this happen?

Elizabeth was moving her lips and Olivia bend down, putting her ear to her sister’s mouth. “Take Sammy.” She went limp in Olivia’s arms.

She hadn’t noticed Tag on his knees beside them. Her gaze met his. “She’s gone,” he said. “I’m sorry. Marcella did it or the sheriff himself.” He got to his feet, pulling Olivia with him back toward the house.

Weeping, Olivia reached her arm backward. “Elizabeth.”

“I’m sorry. I admired Miz Lizzie a lot, but we have to carry out her wishes. I’ve got the bags packed. You get the baby and we’ll go before Marcella gets back to the house.”

Numb, Olivia followed instructions. Within minutes, she found herself with a still sleeping Sammy in her arms, sitting on the wagon seat beside Tag, who drove the horses at a breakneck speed.

“Why are we going this way?” The easiest route would be to travel to the railroad in Boulder.

“That’s the way she’d expect us to go. This trail will carry us across the mountains and we’ll find a depot over there.”

Sammy had awakened and was crying, but it was impossible to feed him from the bottle Elizabeth had packed, because the swaying and bouncing of the wagon made it hard for Olivia to keep them in the seat, much less feed the baby. She prayed frantically they wouldn’t plunge over the narrow ledge.

Aside from the dangers of the road, Tag hadn’t rigged the horses soundly. Cedric was trying to hug the inside, while the other horse seemed determined to take them over the cliff.

Despite her prayers, it seemed inevitable they wouldn’t reach the mountain pass. Suddenly, the horses reared, the wagon cracked and they pitched forward into the air. Sammy wailed. She screamed. The horses screamed.

Olivia hugged Sammy tightly to her chest, but he was snatched from her grip by an unseen force. Then the fog rolled back in.

As from a far distance, she heard a woman’s voice, calling her name.



“Olivia! Olivia!” Aunt Hattie yelled like that would awake her niece.

Jonah had Olivia’s head cradled in his lap and he felt her stir. “I think she’s coming around.”

Big John fanned the air with his hand. “Put that stuff away, Hattie. It’s making me want to sneeze.”

Olivia blinked several times. “Elizabeth.”

Aunt Hattie fell to her knees. “What about Elizabeth, honey?”

Olivia’s gaze shifted to Jonah’s. “She’s gone. Dead... murdered. Marcella Binder shot her in the back. I...I saw Elizabeth die.” She buried her face in Jonah’s chest.

With a strangled cry, Aunt Hattie reached a hand to Big John and he hugged her to him. Jonah could feel their shock and grief. These people had practically raised Elizabeth as their daughter. He would give them a moment to digest what Olivia had just revealed.

Olivia would need time to mourn as well, but they couldn’t spare that now. He pulled her up and slid his arm under her uninjured arm. Pressing a kiss to the top of her head, he whispered, “I’m sorry for the loss of your sister.”

“We’ve got to do something about this. That woman—that murderer—has to be brought to justice.” Big John’s voice trembled in rage.

Olivia lifted her head. “He’s right. And little Sammy died in the wagon crash, so she was indirectly responsible for his death...and poor Tag’s.”

She tried to get up, but Jonah held her back. “You need to rest after all this, sweetheart. You had amnesia because of a head wound, remember?” He kissed her forehead and got to his feet.

His gaze locked with Big John’s. “The law in Redstone is a marshal who has jurisdiction over that whole area. We’ll go into town and get the sheriff to wire Redstone to take in the woman and her accomplices, including the local sheriff.”

Olivia reached for his hand. “Do you have to go with Uncle John?”

“I think I do. I can fill the sheriff in about the situation better than Big John.”

Aunt Hattie sat down on the sofa in the place Jonah had vacated. "I'll watch over you, dear. I think the men should go now."

Jonah hovered over Olivia to plant a kiss on her pale lips. "Everything will be well, sweetheart. Just send up a prayer for us."

Not lingering, he followed Big John to the door, only stopping long enough to grab his hat off the hook by the door. "Let's ride horseback. It'll be faster that way."

Chapter 16



While Aunt Hattie cooked dinner, she and Olivia shed tears over Elizabeth and reminisced over the good times. “Toby is going to be so upset,” Olivia said. “Elizabeth was closer to him than I was.” Toby was her twelve-year-old cousin and Uncle John and Aunt Hattie’s youngest son. Olivia had been away serving with her missionary uncle, providing medical aid to several Indian tribes during most of Toby’s growing-up years.

“I won’t say that. He loved you both, but Elizabeth took care of him longer.”

“Where is Toby?” Olivia would’ve asked sooner if she hadn’t collapsed.

“He went off up in the mountains with a few other boys with Dave Branch and his son. Mr. Branch is going to teach them how to fly fish, whatever that is.”

Olivia chuckled softly. At least she and Aunt Hattie had veered away from the horror surrounding Elizabeth’s death. She glanced out the window. “I wish Jonah and Uncle John would get back.”

Aunt Hattie patted her knee. “So much happened, I forgot to congratulate you on your wedding. Jonah seems to be a fine young man...and a preacher. Are you prepared to be a preacher’s wife? I’ve heard the congregation expects more from the wife than the preacher.”

“I haven’t thought about it. I’ll support Jonah in his ministry, whatever he does.”

“You’ll be a wonderful wife. I just hate you’ll be moving away.”

“I’ll miss you and Uncle John and Toby too, but we’ll keep in touch.”

Neither spoke for a while, then Aunt Hattie shoved to the edge of her over-stuffed chair and, with a grunt, stood. For as long as Olivia could remember, her aunt grunted when getting up from her seat. It had nothing to do with age. “Come on in the kitchen. I have to start supper. I’m sure the men will be back by suppertime.”

Wanting to grunt as well, Olivia pushed herself off the sofa with her uninjured hand. She would be so glad when she could get rid of the cast and sling. “I’ll help you.”

Aunt Hattie prepared a venison roast while Olivia awkwardly chopped vegetables. Without the use of both hands, she had to lay the vegetables out on the table to apply the knife.

“Jonah is getting a good cook. Does he even know that?”

Olivia stopped to wave the knife in the air. “I’ve become rather proficient at wielding a knife with one hand.” She’d been cooking with Aunt Hattie since she was ten, so she was confident she could cook for her husband and any children they might have.

Children? They hadn’t even talked about children, but then there hadn’t been time. Theirs had indeed been a whirlwind courtship, if one could call it a courtship at all. Yet, she knew God had brought her and Jonah together and they would love each other all the days of their lives, with or without children.

Aunt Hattie stopped bustling around the kitchen, which was her custom as she cooked, and placed her hands on her hips. “If you don’t mind, I’d like to go tell the Nichols about Elizabeth. Tandy and Elizabeth were very close.”

“Of course. I can keep watch on the roast and finish up the meal.”

Aunt Hattie slipped out of her apron and hung it on the wall hook. “All right, but don’t you reinjure that arm. I won’t be long.”

The Nichols lived in a cottage a brisk walk down the road. Mr. Nichols was the ranch foreman.

Olivia sliced the bread and set the table in readiness for the meal. The venison roast filled the kitchen with such a delicious aroma. It reminded her of the venison she and Jonah had roasted on the campfire. It had lasted them three days, just barely. She knew he’d enjoy tonight’s dinner.

A knock at the front door drew her attention. Who could be calling? A neighbor? Surely Aunt Hattie wouldn’t go to the front door, and even if she did, it wasn’t locked during the day. But maybe Uncle John had locked it when he and Jonah left.

Wiping her hands on her apron, she trekked to the door. She opened it and recoiled. Marcella stood on the threshold.

“Aren’t you going to invite me in, Olivia?” Marcella barged in before Olivia could collect her senses.

“I’ve been waiting over a week for you to get here. What took you so long?” Marcella closed the door and slid the lock into place. She turned around to face Olivia, pulling a pistol out of her waistband.

Olivia drew in a sharp breath as she walked backwards.

Marcella grinned wickedly, her eyes wild with a touch of insanity. “Don’t think of leaving. Get over there by the wall. We have some things to discuss.” She closed the distance between the exit and Olivia. “Did you toss poor Sammy out of that wagon on purpose?”

The question was so absurd, it angered Olivia, giving her a surge of courage. “No, it was an accident which wouldn’t have happened if Elizabeth hadn’t asked me to take him and flee from you.” She hiked her chin. “That was right before you killed Elizabeth. Do you remember?”

Marcella raised the pistol, her finger on the trigger. “It was all her stupid husband’s fault. If he’d written his will as I

asked him to, I wouldn't have had to kill him or Elizabeth.” Her features contorted into an ugly grimace. “Or you.”

The woman was clearly insane. Olivia had to keep her talking until the men got back with the sheriff. She sent a frantic prayer that they'd arrive soon. “I don't know what you're talking about. What about a will?”

“Sam promised me when I married him he would leave the ranch to me. Riley didn't want it anyway—or so he said. Lies, all I got was lies.”

Sam was Riley's father. It wouldn't have been necessary for him to make out a will since Riley, as his only son, would have inherited, anyway. “What lies, Marcella?”

Fortunately, the madwoman seemed to want to air her grievances. “Sam kept putting off making the will and when he died, I appealed to Riley to leave the ranch to me as Sammy's guardian. I know all about ranch management. My father had a large ranch in South Dakota before we were cheated out of it. And anyway, Elizabeth hated how isolated the place was. He knew that. He agreed to that. He said he'd made out the will.”

Olivia glanced out the window, willing the men to come. “He didn't make out a will?”

“Oh, he made out a will all right—leaving everything to Sammy with Elizabeth as guardian and in the case of Elizabeth's death, naming you as his guardian.”

“Me?”

“Oh, yes, and there was more as I just found out. Riley added a codicil, stating that in the event of both Sammy's and Elizabeth's deaths, the ranch would go to you.” Marcella's features darkened and Olivia could almost see the demon inside her.

“That makes no sense.” Truly it didn't. The woman's insanity had twisted her thinking. Marcella must be possessed. Olivia frantically tried to remember how to confront demons, and all she could think of was... “Satan, I rebuke you in Jesus's name. Come out of her.”

Marcella's high-pitched laughter bounced off the walls. "It's too late for that, Olivia. I know the Scriptures better than you do. Remember that the Disciples failed to call out demons as Jesus had, and you have far less power than the Disciples."

"Then why would Riley have left the ranch to me? I hardly knew him."

"Just to spite me. He deserved to die." Marcella hiked the pistol, sighting Olivia down the barrel. "Ask him when you get to hell."

"You can't get away with it, Marcella. They'll send you to jail—or the insane asylum."

The madwoman became even more agitated. The pistol shook. "Make no mistake, I'll never let them take me back there. Coley says there are no eye-witnesses left, so they can prove nothing. And there will be no eye-witnesses to your death." She seemed to have calmed herself and the pistol steadied. Coley must be the outlaw sheriff who was helping her get control of the ranch.

Please God, help. Lord help her, she could think of nothing else to stall the woman. Loud pounding came from the other side of the door, and Olivia's hope soared. That was Jonah.

"Open the door, Marcella. Sheriff Fynn is with us. You can't escape."

"If you come in, Olivia dies," Marcella shrieked.



Jonah threw his head back and silently prayed. Surely God wouldn't take his Olivia from him so soon. How could he go on? His whole future was filled with Olivia.

"Sheriff, you stay out here and keep her talking," Big John said. "Jonah and I will go around the back way."

Why hadn't Jonah thought of that? Because he was paralyzed with fear. *I have not given you a spirit of fear.* No, he couldn't let emotions control him. They would save Olivia from that madwoman. He jogged along with Big John to the back door. It swung open easily and they could hear the women clearly now.

"Your time is up, Olivia."

"No, wait, Marcella. You said yourself no one witnessed the other murders. You won't be convicted. They won't take you back to that asylum, but if you murder me in front of the Carson Valley sheriff, you will surely be convicted."

An eerie silence fell as Jonah took the lead, moving toward the front room, his Winchester repeater raised.

A gunshot blasted and he bounded into the room.

Olivia stood frozen to the wall, staring at the woman on the floor.

Marcella lay flat, her arms splayed out, the gun still in her hand. Her eyes were closed, but blood gushed from her temple and out her mouth. He squatted to press two fingers to her neck, knowing all the while he wouldn't be able to find a pulse.

Big John had let the sheriff in and he hovered over Marcella and Jonah. "She dead?"

Jonah pushed up. Bile rose in his throat and he wished he could go outside and cast up his accounts. "Yeah. Looks like she turned the pistol on herself at the last moment."

He felt Olivia at his side and pulled her into a side hug. "You are not hurt?"

"No. She came to kill me but when you arrived, she knew she couldn't get away with another murder, and she'd vowed never to go back to the asylum."

"Guess this was the only way out for her," the sheriff said. "Big John, will you help me carry her out and let me borrow a horse to lay the body over?"

In answer Big John went to Marcella's feet and the sheriff lifted her by the shoulders. "You can take my horse, Sheriff. It's already saddled. Jonah, get rid of that rug before Hattie get's back," Big John said, backing out the door.

After Jonah rolled up the bloody rug and hid it in the outside bushes, he returned to Olivia, taking her into his arms, reluctant to let his wife go. He held her tight, praising God they'd been in time. They swayed together, almost like dancing. Then Olivia jerked back. "The roast." She ran to the kitchen and he tagged along, the smell of roasted venison tickling his senses.

"Let me help you with that." She couldn't take that heavy pan out with one hand. He grabbed a dishrag and a towel to protect against the hot pan and carried it to the table, setting it on the crocheted hot pad Aunt Hattie had set there for this purpose.

As soon as he'd freed up his arms, Olivia went back into them. "She said I had inherited that ranch down there in Colorado." Her gaze held his. "Jonah, I don't want the ranch. I don't want to go back down there."

He kissed her forehead. "You don't have to. When we get back to Tinsley, we'll get Mr. Tinsley's lawyer to take care of selling it. There's a lot of good you can do with the money."

A little grin graced her pretty lips and he could feel her relax. "You're thinking of those women in the cribs, aren't you?"

"I was. They need a clean, safe place to go, if they turn their lives over to Christ and, as the town's preacher, I'm going to do my best to persuade them."

"We have a lot to plan, don't we?"

"We do, but there's plenty of time." He didn't give her a chance to answer as his lips came down on hers.

Epilogue



Six Months Later

The baby reached her tiny, fisted hands into the air and yawned. Stooped over the cradle, Olivia coaxed a smile with her finger. Instead, the baby blew milk bubbles, not surprising since she'd just been fed.

Olivia straightened with her hands on her hips. "She's beautiful, Lucille, and growing like a weed."

"Please call me Lucy. Tim does and I like it. It makes me feel like the old life back at Pa's ranch is gone forever."

"He'll come around. We're still praying, and I believe he'll get so curious about his granddaughter, he'll pay you a visit, maybe by Christmas."

Lucy twisted her lips to one side. "Probably not by this Christmas, though. I'm just glad Tim and Jonah got our house finished by winter. I can't believe it's really mine." She giggled. "Maybe one day I'll be able to cook on that new stove as well as you do."

"You will. It takes time. Your house is beautiful. I just hope they get our addition built onto our house by spring." She patted her stomach.

Lucy jumped to her feet. "Are you with child? When?"

"Yes, next April if my calculations are good and I think they are."

"Does Jonah know?"

Olivia laughed. “Of course, Jonah knows, but we decided to wait until after Christmas to make an announcement to the church. You know how the congregation is and so much is going on for Christmas.” Including the children’s play she was in charge of. Aunt Hattie was right. Being a preacher’s wife was a full-time job. Still, she managed to help Doc Henry when he had to perform surgery, which wasn’t too often.

Lucy glanced out the window. “Speaking of Jonah, he just pulled up to get you.”

Olivia gathered her things while Lucy opened the door.

Jonah came in, his gaze searching for Olivia. A look passed between them that never failed to send a mellow feeling into the pit of her being. “How are you doing, Lucille?” he asked Lucy. “You’ve done wonders to the house. How do you like it?” He made a beeline to the cradle, and stood smiling down at the baby.

“I love it and Tim said he was going to build on a proper nursery in the spring.”

“I’ll help him,” Jonah said, not taking his eyes off the baby. He loved his little niece and he’d make a wonderful father, Olivia had no doubt.

They said their good-byes to Lucy and got onto the waiting buggy, the buggy Jonah used to visit the sick and needy in his flock. They would discuss those needs tonight because Jonah shared everything—problem or blessing—with her.

Olivia tucked the wool blanket over her legs. The weather had turned colder with low brooding clouds, hinting at snow. Jonah released the brake. “I think Lucille and Tim love each other very much, don’t you?”

“Yes, very, if happiness is evidence of love. I know our love makes me happy.”

He reached in his coat and took out an official looking document. He handed it to Olivia. “Here is something that will make you happy.”

She opened the paper. It was the deed they'd been waiting for. "So this means the ranch was sold?"

"It does. Everything has been legally settled and you have in our bank account enough to run the ministry for downtrodden women. We'll pass by the house so you can see the plaque that is now in place."

She reached over to kiss his cheek. "You know very well the bank account is in your name, but that's all right with me."

"It might be in my name but everything I have is at your disposal, sweetheart." He picked up the reins and they got underway. "The lawyer did have one bit of bad news."

"Oh, what?" Whatever it was, it wouldn't ruin her good mood.

"They had to let that Sheriff Coley, down in Saltlick, go. Not enough evidence. However, he won't be able to serve as a lawman anyplace, so there's that."

She pushed all thoughts of the evil that had taken the lives of her sister and brother-in-law out of her mind. Vengeance belonged to the Lord.

Jonah stopped in front of the drive to the site where Elizabeth's Refuge would be built, a twelve-bedroom house for women who wanted to escape the cribs. "The plaque is beautiful." The bronze sign dedicated the land to the Riley and Elizabeth Binder Foundation, a charity for the weak and oppressed.

She leaned into her husband. "It's ironic, isn't it? God sent you to help me regain my memory, and here He's using us to help these women forget their past."

"Maybe that's why the Scripture tells us the ways of God are mysterious." He slapped the leathers to get the horses on their way home.

That was something Olivia would have to ponder on later. As she'd come to find out, there were some things best left forgotten.

The End

Thank you for reading Olivia and Jonah's story. Please leave a review so I can keep bringing you these books. The next book in this series is *Caroline*. Watch for the pre-order coming in January 2024.

Before you go, on the next page, you'll find a short excerpt of another of my Christian, historical romances with a fast-paced, heart-warming plot, and unique, likeable characters, as well as suspense laced throughout. The following is an excerpt from *Mail Order Kaitlyn*, a standalone story in the *Secret Baby Dilemma* series.

Excerpt: Mail Order Kaitlyn

Kaitlyn Ashton could see Boston Harbor from her tiny attic apartment. She knew how those pilgrims must have felt as they arrived to this land, because the same hope of freedom stirred in her heart. Tomorrow she would leave for an unknown land. Leave for freedom.

It wasn't always like this. She used to love this city. Papa would take her to the wharf and buy fresh fish at least once a week. Memory brought back the call of the seagulls, the seaside scents, the big ships passing by.

All that changed the winter she was twelve. Papa and Mama died of influenza within a few days of each other. She'd been sent to Aunt Martha's down in New Jersey when the illness struck their street. Sometimes Kaitlyn wished she'd stayed and died with her parents. Although Aunt Martha and Uncle Albert were good to her, they had nine children and couldn't keep her. They'd brought her back to the orphanage. Unfortunately, the worst orphanage in the state.

She didn't blame them. It was the only one with an opening, but was run by a harsh woman who'd never shown a bit of pity for any of her charges.

The thing Kaitlyn hated most about the orphanage was the lack of privacy. No place to call her own other than one side of a bunk in a crowded dormitory. She'd only been allowed to take what could be held in her old carpet bag, which she'd kept under the bunk.

She couldn't blame the other children for their hateful behavior, either. They suffered as she did. Still, every child competed with every other one for attention and food. And all yearned for freedom.

The only one she could depend on was Janelle Singletary, her bunkmate.

Janelle had it better than Kaitlyn, maybe because she was so beautiful and seemed to know how to get her way. When they were seventeen, Janelle had talked Kaitlyn into running

away. Kaitlyn had feared they'd be found and dragged back. After all, they worked in the orphanage, mainly in the kitchen, and their work would be missed.

She needn't have worried, however. No one came looking for them. They'd lived on the streets for over a week. Both of them looked for jobs, of course, and Janelle found one as a waitress in what was called a gentleman's club. They were too naïve to know what that was, and the pay was very good compared to other establishments.

Kaitlyn would thank God a thousand times the proprietor refused to hire her.

The café she found work at down near the harbor paid much less, but the lady who ran the kitchen was kind. Since she worked in the kitchen, she managed to avoid the crass patrons—mostly fishermen and sailors—except for the few times she had to waitress. She received a dozen proposals a week, but she didn't take them seriously. She still had dreams of finding a husband who would come home every night.

Although the cook's assistant job paid little, she did earn money to rent a place of her own here in this old four-story hotel. Although it took nearly every penny of her wages, it was worth it to Kaitlyn. At last, she had a place of her own, though it was nothing more than a tiny, sparsely furnished attic room. Her pay at the café included meals, so she didn't need anything else.

She finally had a space of her own, but after two years, she dared to yearn for more. A home. Love. Children. And now she'd found a husband to make that possible.

As much as she loved this little apartment, she had no regrets in leaving it, mainly because of the man waiting for her in Dakota Territory. Russell Kensley.

She'd found his advertisement for a mail order bride in the newspaper six months ago. Russ, as he'd insisted she address him from the first letter, had grown up on his parents' farm in Kentucky. He'd worked for a time for the Louisville Sheriff's Office as a detective. Then he and his brother had

settled adjoining sections of land under the Homestead Act in North Dakota, and now they ran a prosperous wheat farm.

A rap at the door interrupted her musings. Mrs. Thompson stood on the other side, a big smile on her jovial face and a basket on her arm. “I brought you some food to take on the train, my dear. I’ve heard the cost of meals is outrageous along the rails, and the food barely edible.” She handed Kaitlyn the basket as she came into the room.

How kind of the sweet lady. Mrs. Thompson was so much more than her employer. She’d become like a mother, and many times Kaitlyn had wept on her ample bosom. “Thank you so much. I’m going to miss your cooking, but I’ll miss you more.” She gestured toward the chairs. “Please, have a seat. I’ve just finished packing.”

Mrs. Thompson settled on one of the two chairs. “Are you sure you want to do this? It’s such a far distance.” It was the same question she’d put to Kaitlyn a dozen times since Russ proposed marriage in his third letter. Kaitlyn knew it wasn’t because Mrs. Thompson would miss her services in the café since a new cook had already been hired.

“Are you sure your intended has a place for you to live yet?”

Russ lived with his brother and sister-in-law, but was building a house now he could afford a family of his own. Her perception in reading through the lines told her he was an honest, hard-working man who would provide well for her. She didn’t know why Mrs. Thompson would think otherwise. She’d shared Russ’s letters in which he described the farm and the house he was building.

He’d explained in his first letter how he and his brother had lived in a soddy for the first three years while they’d gotten their farms in operation. Kaitlyn had heard about the soddies and couldn’t imagine how a woman could keep a house made of dirt clean.

The settlers had no choice because building material and timber were scarce on the wide-open prairie. Russ assured Kaitlyn she wouldn’t have to move into the soddy because he

and his brother had built a substantial farmhouse, bringing in the wood and materials from Jamestown by wagons. They'd also built a large wooden barn, painted red, of course, and a number of other outbuildings.

“We may have to live with his brother and sister-in-law a short time while he finishes our house. Remember, I told you how he'd ordered a house kit by catalogue, which made the process so much faster.” Indeed, over the past six months, Russ had filled two-or-three-page letters, front and back, describing the process, from preparing the basement to white-washing the house. He would wait until she arrived to select the furniture for the parlor. A lady should decorate her own parlor. He hoped she'd approve.

A glance at her tiny seating area where Mrs. Thompson perched on one of the two straight-backed chairs with a side table between, made Kaitlyn want to laugh. Approve? She was ecstatic.

Mrs. Thompson reached her plump hand to take Kaitlyn's. “But my dear, it's way out in the middle of nowhere. I worry about how you will adjust to that wild place. You said yourself, the nearest town was miles away. It takes weeks to receive mail.”

Kaitlyn patted Mrs. Thompson's hand. Looking into the sweet lady's worried eyes, she felt a knot form in her throat, but she forced it down. If she started crying, Mrs. Thompson would too, and they would both end up in a puddle of tears. “Do not fret, I'll write you as soon as I arrive and often thereafter, and I expect to hear from you, as well. Oh, and I'll include a letter for Betsy for you to pass on to her.”

Mrs. Thompson gave her a wobbly smile. “I know God will go with you, even out there.”

“Yes, and I'm sure God is present on the Dakota prairie, so please don't distress yourself over my living conditions. Russ has taken care of everything.”

It was hard to visualize the land through Russ's letters. Flat grassland, bitterly cold in winter and hot in summer, he'd warned her. So much about Russ and the land he described

intrigued Kaitlyn. And pleased her. In fact, as the months rolled by and Russ wrote of delays in building the house, she began to fear the match might never take place, even after he'd proposed to her. Then he'd finally sent her the tickets.

Mrs. Thompson got to her feet. "I'll hold you to your promise to write, and if you should get there, and this young man isn't all you expected, you can always return."

Kaitlyn hugged her dear friend in a tight embrace. "I'm certain this is the man God would have me to marry. I wouldn't have accepted his proposal, if I hadn't, but please continue to pray for me."

Mrs. Thompson kissed her cheek. "That I promise to do every night." With a little bob of the head, she stepped back. "I'd better go now because I know you'll have to leave early in the morning. There are blueberry muffins in the basket for your breakfast."

After a few more assurances and hugs, Kaitlyn ushered Mrs. Thompson out and fell back against the door with a sigh. Her excitement had grown until she knew it would be hard to sleep tonight. The train would pull out at nine o'clock in the morning.

She started to check everything in her reticule to make certain her papers were in order. Before she'd untied the strings, a loud knock at the door jolted her. Had Mrs. Thompson returned? No, likely Mrs. Hayslip had come to give the apartment another inspection before Kaitlyn vacated.

The landlady had inspected the place this morning, pointing out the lamp globes needed cleaning and the wicks trimmed. She must have decided to make sure Kaitlyn had taken care of that. Fine with Kaitlyn. The globes sparkled now, and the apartment was cleaner than it had been when she'd moved in. She crossed the room to open the door.

Shock made her take a step back. Janelle stood on the other side, holding a baby in her arms.

They stood staring at each other for long moments. "May I come in, Kaitlyn? I need your help desperately."

No greeting. No explanation. Kaitlyn hadn't seen Janelle in over two years. Not since she'd left her at the gentleman's club and began her search for another job. Kaitlyn had heard a lot of gossip, however. In person and in the newspapers.

Janelle had become the mistress of Dawson Elmsworth, a wealthy New York textile tycoon. Dawson had set Janelle up in a fabulous mansion here in Boston, perhaps hoping to keep his relationship with Janelle secret from his family who lived in New York.

It was a poorly kept secret, however, since the press was always looking for scandals. Kaitlyn had wondered whatever happened to Janelle—if she'd been ousted from the house. Banished by her lover.

It wasn't unusual for a wealthy man to keep a mistress, and the gossips concluded Dawson Elmsworth and his family had come to some resolution.

Now Kaitlyn wondered why Janelle would appeal to her for help. "Yes, please come in. Forgive my manners, but...I...I was just surprised. I'm leaving Boston in the morning."

"I know. Betsy told me." Betsy Cline was a mutual acquaintance and the main purveyor of gossip concerning Janelle. "I, too, must leave. That's why I had to come see you tonight."

The baby fidgeted. "Please, have a seat." Kaitlyn pointed to the more comfortable of the two chairs in the corner by the window. It was the place she called her reading nook. She pulled up the wooden chair from her desk as Janelle shifted the baby and sat as gracefully as she always had.

If possible, she was more beautiful than Kaitlyn remembered. Every one of her golden curls was in place under a wide-brimmed hat decorated with ostrich feathers. The deep blue hat perfectly matched her traveling costume trimmed with black velvet. Kaitlyn wasn't an expert on fabrics, but from the rich shimmer, she guessed it must be silk. The style reminded her of those fashions portrayed on the cover of *Vogue Magazine*.

“The baby is beautiful,” Kaitlyn said, wondering why Betsy hadn’t told her about Janelle having a baby.

Janelle bounced the infant on her knee. “This is Oliver. He just turned eight months and is already trying to crawl.” A note of pride, such as one would expect of any mother, touched her voice and features.

Kaitlyn hiked a brow in surprise. She’d have guessed the baby to be a girl, with those golden curls like his mother’s. He jumped on Janelle’s lap and flapped his chubby arms, his eyes the blue of a rain-washed sky, wide and bright under long lashes. He was certainly beautiful enough to be a girl.

“Ollie is the reason I came. I want you to take him with you.”

Kaitlyn’s mouth fell open. “Take him? Where? Why?”

“I can’t take him where I’m going. I’m getting married, but my fiancé refuses to accept him.”

Kaitlyn’s mind scrambled with that information. How could a mother give up her child for a man? “What about Oliver’s father?”

A look of fear touched Janelle’s features. Her eyes dropped to the floor, and she gripped the baby closer. “His father is dead.” Her lovely green eyes met Kaitlyn’s in a teary gaze. “If you refuse to take him, he’ll be placed in an orphanage, probably the Harper Home, and you know how horrible that is.”

How could she forget that place that still evoked nightmares from time to time? “But I’m leaving for North Dakota in the morning to marry a farmer I’ve been corresponding with. I won’t have time to explain to my husband-to-be.”

“Yes, Betsy told me all about it. That’s why I want you, above anyone, to take Oliver. You can give him what I cannot. He’ll have a mother and a father. This man you’re marrying is a farmer and from what I’ve heard every farmer needs all the sons he can get. Haven’t you mentioned children in your correspondence with your fiancé?”

Heat rose in Kaitlyn's cheeks. "I...yes, we both want children, but Mr. Kensley didn't agree to be the father of another man's child."

Janelle opened the bag she'd dropped beside her chair and stuck her hand into its depths. She retrieved a pouch and reached out to offer it to Kaitlyn. "This is five thousand dollars. I trust you to use it for Oliver's needs. If your new husband won't accept him, find the best orphanage you can. I'll contact you within a year, and you can let me know of the outcome."

Kaitlyn took the pouch with a shaking hand. She'd never imagined that much money before, and she couldn't help but wonder where Janelle got it.

"Tie it around your waist under your skirt. There are thieves everywhere," Janelle said in the tone of one who had experience.

Kaitlyn jumped to her feet and dropped the pouch inside her apron's large pocket for now. Was she already considering Janelle's request? How could she refuse with that innocent baby, gnawing on his plump fist, staring at her with big blue eyes?

She knew the fate of babies at Harper House. They were left in cribs to lie in filth and cry in hunger from morning to evening. At the age of three, they were put to work.

Janelle rose gracefully, and Oliver buried his head on her shoulder. "It's past his bedtime," she said. "And I must go or I'll be late." She closed the distance Kaitlyn had put between them. "I know I can trust you. Remember how we lay together on that lumpy cot at the orphanage and shared our dreams of marriage and babies?"

Emotions warring within her, Kaitlyn swallowed the lump in her throat. "I'll take him and do my best. Shall I write to you and let you know when we arrive?" She glanced to her desk, hoping there was a piece of paper for Janelle to leave an address.

“You won’t be able to contact me, but, as I said, I’ll contact you within a year.”

The baby had fallen asleep, and she held him out for Kaitlyn to take. “His clothes and diapers are in the bag, along with two bottles and four small cans of milk. He can eat mashed vegetables and biscuits and there’s a sack of wafers he likes to gnaw on. He’s teething, but he’s a really good baby. You won’t have any trouble at all.” She released a short laugh. “But you know how to care for a baby. You helped in the nursery at the orphanage all the time.”

Kaitlyn nodded, hardly hearing Janelle, so overcome with the feeling of compassion for the bundle she held to her bosom, drinking in his sweet baby smell. In the space of a few moments she’d come to love this little one. If Russ was the man she believed him to be, he’d take this child along with her.

And if he didn’t, he wasn’t the man for her.

Here is the link to Mail Order Kaitlyn:
<https://www.amazon.com/Mail-Order-Kaitlyn-Secret-Dilemma-ebook/dp/B08SZPPF2W>

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Elaine Manders writes wholesome, Christian romance about the strong, capable women of history and present day and the men who love them. She lives in Central Georgia with a happy bichon-poodle mix. When not writing, she enjoys reading, sewing, crafts, and spending time with her daughter, grandchildren, and friends. You are invited to find her books and contact her at any of the following.

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