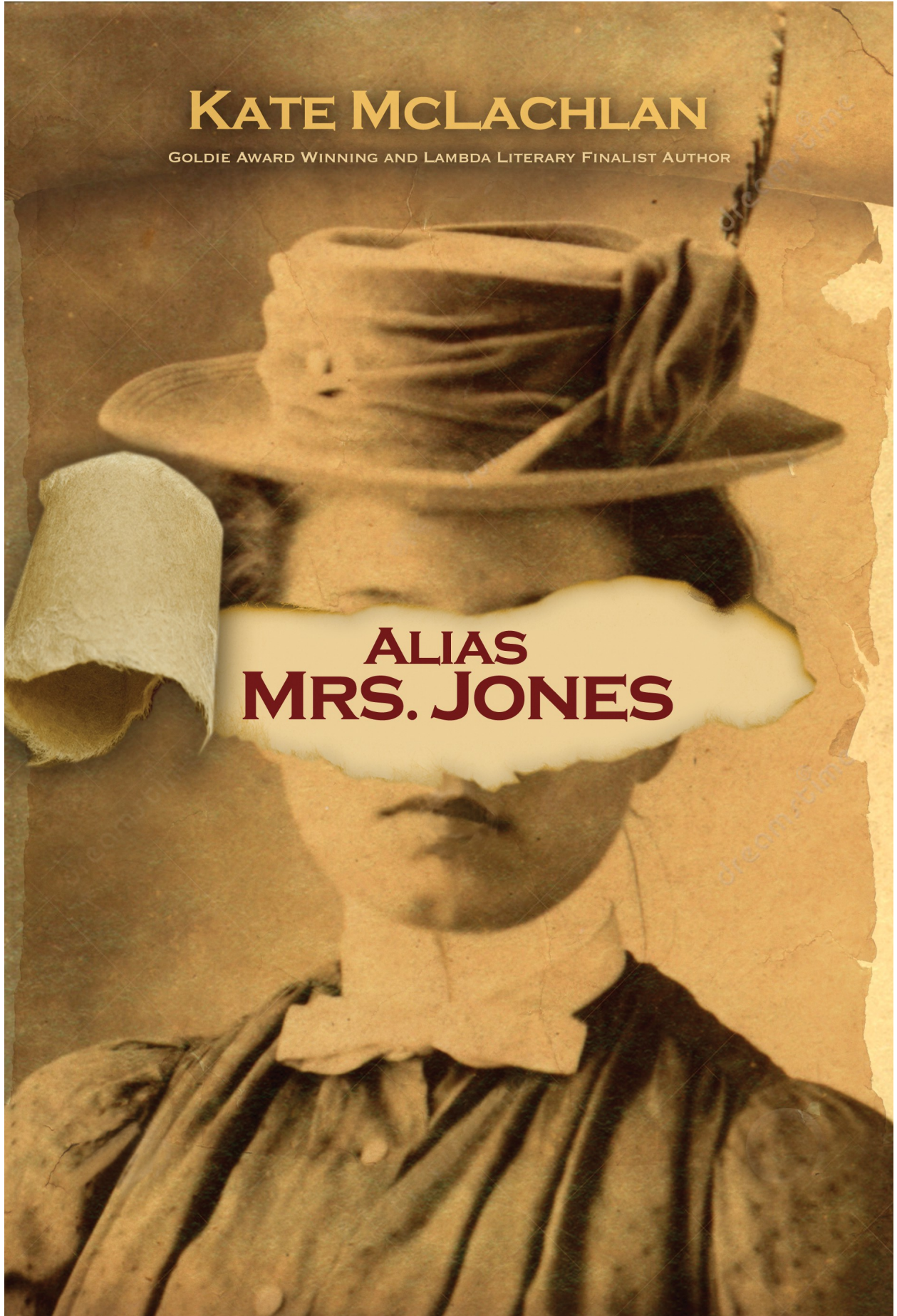


KATE MCLACHLAN

GOLDIE AWARD WINNING AND LAMBDA LITERARY FINALIST AUTHOR

**ALIAS
MRS. JONES**



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by

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Print ISBN 978-1-61929-282-6
eBook ISBN 978-1-61929-283-3

First Printing 2016
9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Cover design by Acorn Graphics

Published by:

Regal Crest Enterprises
1042 Mount Lebanon Rd
Maryville, TN 37804

Find us on the World Wide Web at <http://www.regalcrest.biz>

Published in the United States of America

Acknowledgments

1996. That's when I finished the final draft of the earliest version of *Alias Mrs. Jones*, which at the time was titled *The Wrong Track*. That was back in the day before electronic submissions, email responses, or e-books. In 1996, you still had to write and mail a query letter and wait four weeks, six weeks, sometimes eight or twelve weeks, just to find out if you would be allowed to submit your manuscript, or even a bitty piece of it.

I kept the responses I received, twenty-nine of them, nearly all form rejections. As often as not they were scrawled on top of my own query letter returned to me in my SASE. For those too young to remember, SASE is a Self-Addressed Stamped Envelope, without which your letter would be promptly thrown into the trash. I received one of my query letters back with a red-inked stamp on top reading (I think), "We a-----ate your qu---- and ---- our inability to re---- this material at this time." I received a very friendly letter that asked to see my manuscript along with "\$38 to cover handling." Sometimes, stunningly, I'd receive a response that said, "Please send first 50 pages& SASE" or "We would be pleased to look at the first three chapters and synopsis. Please remember to enclose a SASE large enough for the return of the material." And occasionally, very occasionally, I'd be asked to send in the entire manuscript (with SASE, of course.)

When that happened I would run to Kinkos and print a copy, or sometimes two, of the manuscript, double-spaced and single-sided, package it up in a manuscript box, and mail it off. By this time, just to get my book into the hands of someone who would read it, I would have invested \$25-\$30 *per submission!* And then I would wait again--eight weeks, three months, six months, once more than a year, for the rejection slips to trickle in. I kept them all. There are twenty-nine of them.

I did manage to get one literary agent interested enough to ask me to rewrite the entire book, which I did. But through bungled miscommunication (which occurs with excruciating *slowness* when writing letters through the mail to New York literary agents), I decided she was a flake, and I'm pretty sure she decided I was a flake too, and we abandoned each other.

Shortly afterward, I started law school, which effectively ended my writing career for a while. When I started up again a few years later, I wrote a new book (*Rip Van Dyke*) and sent it off electronically to lesbian publishers that I didn't even know existed in 1996. It was published in 2010, and I've published six books since. Last year, I picked up *The Wrong Track*, renamed it *Alias Mrs. Jones*, and rewrote the thing from beginning to end.

It's a historical mystery. Rewriting it sent me back in time, not only to 1902, when the events of the story take place, but also to 1996 and the early years of my writing. How excruciating it was to have to wait! wait! wait! wait! for someone to read what I wrote! I wanted feedback. I craved feedback. I needed feedback!

For that reason, I want to acknowledge the many people who read, seemingly with pleasure, my early versions of this book. After all, I wrote it for them. Oh, sure, I wanted everyone to read my books. I still do. But back then I really had no idea if anyone would read what I wrote except my family and friends, and it was them I thought of when I wrote it.

So thank you for keeping me writing, my sisters, Theresa, Joyce, and Jo (always listed in descending order of age or, as Jo claims, descending bra size.) They read everything I handed them and acted as if they liked it. Thank you to the Riverside Middle School crew, who read my

books and asked for more— Linda, Jodie, Steve, Sue, and if I forgot anybody, I'm really sorry but it was a *very* long time ago. Thanks to Patricia, of course, my personal writing buddy and cheerleader.

And thanks to Tonie, of course, for supporting me through the excruciating rewrites that occurred simultaneously with packing, moving into a new house, and learning a new job. Maybe now we can hang some pictures!

Dedication

For Patricia, my first writing partner and best friend forever.

Chapter One

THE STEAMING ENGINE of the Great Pacific lurched into the St. Paul depot. The depot clock read six o'clock, but that February morning of 1902 was still black as night. I peered out the window, but all I could see was a blurred string of electric lamps on the platform, a reflection of the bright interior of the car, and me. I didn't look as tired as I felt, nor as frightened.

I gave myself a tiny nod of encouragement and directed my scrutiny to the reflection of the passengers entering the car. Single men, some in pairs, husbands and wives, one small family, and a few ladies traveling alone like me. All seemed more interested in securing a seat than they were in me. I silently urged a single lady to choose the backward-facing seat across from me, but a man stopped beside me. He dropped his bag onto the opposite seat and lowered himself beside it. I tucked my feet back to allow room for his legs, though he was not a large man. A quick glance showed him to be about forty years old with a neatly curled mustache, freshly pressed suit, stiff white shirt cuffs, and nails that were polished and buffed. He met my eyes, and I returned my gaze to the window.

I felt experienced and jaded beside the freshness of the new travelers settling in, for I had been riding already for a day and a night. I was just starting to breathe easier when, through the glass, I saw movement on the station platform. Three figures emerged from the darkness of the station into the artificial light cast on the platform. Glints reflected from something shiny on the lapels of two of the men. I eased back, reached a hand to tilt the brim of my hat, and peered through my fingers. A third man walked between the other two, his arms held unnaturally behind him. They escorted him to a car behind us and disappeared from view. Moments later the two lawmen returned, laughing this time, and walked off the platform into the darkness. Their prisoner was now incarcerated on the train.

My heart thudded. I couldn't help but imagine myself in the place of that unfortunate prisoner. How would it feel to be escorted onto a train, or anywhere else for that matter, handcuffed and in full view of the public? Sweat pricked my forehead and I closed my eyes.

"Excuse me, ma'am? Are you all right?" It was the man from the seat facing me. He leaned over me with a concerned look on his face. "Are you all right? May I get you some help?"

"No." I let out my breath, only then realizing I'd been holding it. "No, thank you." I opened my handbag and reached for my handkerchief, closed the bag awkwardly, and dabbed the linen to my forehead. I felt the stranger move away. I hoped he would find another seat, but a moment later I felt a light touch on my shoulder. He stood beside me again, a cup in his hand.

"It's a clean cup," he assured me when I hesitated.

I lay the handkerchief in my lap and reached for the cup. The water was cool and fresh, having just been replenished by the porters.

"Thank you." I handed the cup back.

The stranger noticed that I used only my left hand. He frowned at my right arm, which I cradled in my lap, and moved his gaze to my swollen lip.

I turned to look out the window once more. "Thank you," I said again, dismissing him. There was a time when I would have welcomed a stranger's concern, craved it even, but it was too late for that now.

I felt him move away again to replace the cup. Before he returned to his seat, the whistle blew and the train chugged forward. I was relieved. The noise from the engine precluded conversation. I could close my eyes and feign sleep.

It was ironic that I'd captured a stranger's attention now, when it was so unwelcome. I'm not the sort of person who is noticed much. My hair is muddy blonde, my eyes a pale gray, my lashes indifferent. I am not fat or thin or tall or voluptuous, though I am rather on the small side. Often, like a child, I am neither seen nor heard.

I dozed. A shudder woke me as the train lumbered to a stop. It was bright daylight, and a peek out the window showed a sign that read St. Cloud. We were still in Minnesota.

A few of the passengers gathered their belongings. I glanced at the man opposite me, and he slid his eyes behind me. He made no move to leave, and I wondered how far he was traveling. My own ticket would take me as far as Seattle, the end of the line. I had no plans after my arrival there. When I purchased the ticket, I only intended to get as far from New York as possible. If the stranger was traveling as far as me, we might spend the next day or so avoiding eye contact with one another. I wished I hadn't fallen asleep. The porter must have checked the man's ticket. If I'd been awake, I might have heard his destination.

I was hungry. At the start of my journey, I'd tackled the grand dining car, but with my right hand out of commission, it was more effort than it was worth. I had since subsisted on the snacks and drinks peddled by boys at the frequent stops. I saw one enter the car with a tray of meat pies and a bag of fruit. I opened my handbag for some money.

"Allow me, ma'am," the stranger said. "Over here, boy."

"Oh, no, I couldn't let you—"

He handed over the money while I still fumbled with the clasp on my coin purse. A moment later, he held a fragrant pie and an orange toward me.

"Thank you." I took the pie, and he placed the orange beside me on the seat. He had purchased a pie for himself as well, and we ate in silence. The pie was pork, and it was delicious.

The orange is what finally broke down the barrier of etiquette that held us apart. There was no way I could peel the orange with one hand, and there is something intimate about a man peeling a lady's fruit for her. He handed me a juicy morsel and took one for himself. He popped his into his mouth. I ate mine gingerly, mindful of my sore lip, but we both ended up with juice on our chins, and that made us laugh.

I blinked, as the cut on my lip opened, and winced as the acidic juice found the wound. The stranger stopped laughing. He jumped up and went to the back of the car to fetch another cup of water.

"Better?" he asked when I had taken a drink.

I nodded. "Thank you." It seemed I was always thanking this man. I dabbed my handkerchief at my lip. There was very little blood.

"My name is Talbot Stanfield," he said.

"Mrs. Jones," I replied. "Eleanor Jones," I added, though I normally called myself Nell.

To my surprise, the next few hours passed pleasantly. Mr. Stanfield was a kind and humorous companion. He did not ask about my injuries, and I did not explain. Conversation with him lightened the tedium of the journey and helped me ignore my physical discomforts. The rumble of the wheels over the track that had prevented conversation earlier was now only a relaxing hum.

"My wife is a great reader of novels and ladies' journals," he told me. "My older daughter is more interested in fashion and young men. She's only sixteen, but I fear she'll leave the nest

soon. My younger daughter thinks her sister is silly. She likes to pretend she's a lawyer, like me, and has set up a little office in her schoolroom. She keeps us laughing, that one. How about you, Mrs. Jones? Do you have children?"

"No, I've not been so fortunate. Where are you traveling to, Mr. Stanfield?"

"I'm going to Hillyard, a little town in Washington. I don't suppose you've heard of it?"

"No, I'm sorry."

"Oh, don't be sorry. I'm not surprised. It's just a little railroad town. I work for the railroad. Have you heard of Spokane?"

"I'm really not familiar with western geography. Is it near Seattle?"

"No, nowhere near it. Is that where you're heading? Seattle?"

I gave a slight nod. "Why are you going to Hillyard?"

"I'm chiefly headed there for business reasons, though I hope to look up an old friend as well. They're having a little trouble out there with incorporation."

I had no interest in or understanding about incorporation, but I encouraged him to go on. If he noticed that I steered the conversation away from myself every chance I got, he was too gentlemanly to say so.

"The town wants to incorporate, you see, to generate taxes and provide services. Fire department, police, hospital, that sort of thing. It's really necessary. They have nearly two thousand people there now, and it's growing."

"So what's the problem?"

Mr. Stanfield grinned and rapped the wall of the rail car with a knuckle. "My employer is the problem. The Great Pacific Railroad. That's my job, to go out there and smooth everything out."

I raised my brows in encouragement, and he continued.

"Like I said, Hillyard is a railroad town. The Great Pacific practically owns the town. That's where its maintenance shops and materials yards are. Just about any work done on a locomotive west of St. Paul is done in Hillyard. So it's a big business, you see, for such a little town. If they incorporate, the taxes generated by the Great Pacific alone would easily support the town. But GP doesn't want to pay taxes."

"Oh, I see," I said, and I thought I did. "So you're going to stop the incorporation?"

"Oh no, they need to incorporate the town. But they don't need to include the Great Pacific in it. My job is to convince the town to incorporate without annoying its biggest employer."

"But then the town won't get tax money from the railroad."

Mr. Stanfield shrugged. "It's called a compromise. They can't have everything. If they insist on including the Great Pacific shops, GP will just pull out, move its headquarters somewhere else. That would be expensive and they don't want to do it, but they will. Then where would Hillyard be?"

I could see his point, but I felt a bit sorry for the little town of Hillyard. Everyone knew the railroad was hugely prosperous. It wouldn't hurt the Great Pacific, would it, to pay taxes to support a little town that existed solely to work for the railroad? Of course, I knew nothing of business.

By the time we entered North Dakota, the sun had set, and I could see nothing of the scenery but dark shadows. The porter entered the car and began folding down the upper sleeping berths. Passengers in the back of the car rose from their seats so the cushions could slide together to form lower berths. Curtains strung along the makeshift bunks above and below provided some privacy for each berth. There was no official rule, but the men moved toward the front of the car and ladies moved to the back.

Mr. Stanfield rose and studied me gravely for a moment. He looked suddenly years older and reminded me of my father when I was young. "Mrs. Jones, you worry me. I'm not going to ask you to confide in me," he assured me. "I only hope that if my wife is ever alone and in trouble, like you are, someone will look after her."

My face burned and I looked away. I was quite sure that if he knew what I had done, Mr. Stanfield would never place his wife in the same category as me again.

Chapter Two

THERE IS NO ladylike way to crawl into a sleeping berth. The floor of the berth, which was also the bed, was the same height as the seats that made it. I sat and swung my legs in, then scooted forward until I could pull the curtain closed. It created a tiny room barely large enough for me to sit upright, and I was glad I was not taller. A gas lamp installed on the wall of the compartment provided light, and I turned it up. The privacy provided by the curtain was welcome, though it was not complete. I could hear the rustling and banging of other travelers arranging themselves in their berths, and I knew they could hear me too. The noise was muffled, though, the details erased by the rhythmic sound of wheels on steel beneath us.

I removed my boots and my jacket, unbuttoned the collar of my blouse, and took as deep a breath as I could. The night before, I was too anxious to remove any of my clothing. I'd been nearly certain that at any moment the railroad police would whip open the curtain of my berth and haul me off to jail. Now, with the distance between me and New York widening every hour, I was more relaxed. Still, I hesitated to remove my corset. My ribs ached, and I longed to be free of the restricting stays, but once the laces were loosened I didn't know if I would be able to retie them. The more I thought about it, though, the more the knot beneath my left breast burrowed into my flesh until it felt like a knife was thrust into my ribs. I gave into temptation. I unfastened my belt and removed my blouse and corset, nearly melting in sudden comfort as the ties gave way. I reached under my silk vest, sighed, and slid the fist of bills into my hand.

I crossed my legs beneath me, dropped the bills in the bowl created by my skirt, and brought my right arm close to the light. The wrist was swollen and discolored, the marks from Robert's fingers clearly visible. I curled my fingers into a loose fist. It hurt, but I didn't think any bones were broken. It wasn't my first injury from Robert's hands. They usually healed if left alone.

I pulled my vest up, pressed against my right breast, and craned my head to get a better view of my side. I saw purple, but the angle would not allow me a clear view of the bruise.

It was cool in the sleeping compartment, but there was one more thing I wanted to do before dressing again. I picked up the roll of money and peeled off the bills one by one. There were thirty-one of them. Thirty-one hundred dollar bills. I had already used one of the bills to finance my journey. That meant I had stolen three thousand, two hundred dollars.

I shivered. Where could I hide the money? Its last hiding place had been too uncomfortable. My purse was too small, my corset too tight, my lace drawers too loose, and my travel bag stowed too far away in the baggage compartment. After a moment's thought, I stripped off my fine cashmere stockings and lined them with bills, fifteen for the right leg, sixteen for the left. It was February, after all, and cold. The extra layer would help to keep my legs warm. I donned my corset again, tightening it the best I could, then the blouse, skirt, and jacket.

The image of the prisoner being escorted to the train by those two lawmen was fresh in my mind. If I were suddenly arrested, I would at least be decently clothed. That taken care of, I turned down the light, lay flat on the cushions, pulled the scratchy wool blanket over me, and was asleep in an instant.

Of course I dreamed of lawmen, and in my dream I was the prisoner. I sobbed as I walked between them, my hands cuffed behind me so tightly my wrists ached, but the men only laughed over my head at a joke I couldn't understand.

I was awakened by the sound of curtain rings sliding above my bed. I sat up, my heart in my throat, but it was not my curtain. The train had stopped. Someone was climbing into the bunk above me. I heard a gasp, a grunt, a giggle.

"Papa, watch your hand," someone whispered.

I leaned toward the curtain, opened it just a sliver, and peered out. A plaid skirt, red and pink, flashed across my vision.

"Oof!" The bunk creaked as its occupant landed. I instinctively raised my arms to protect myself from a crash, but its supports held.

"Be a good girl," Papa said. "Remember, Mr. Dunn will meet your train. You'll know him by ___"

"I know, Papa, you've told me a dozen times. I'll know him by the red kerchief in his pocket."

"Mind him. You'll be all right," Papa said, and he left without another word.

The bunk bounced a time or two as its occupant settled in. The train started up, and I closed my eyes.

I awoke the second time when I heard whispers coming from above, which was puzzling, since there was no room in the upper bunk for two people. I sat up, peeked out my sliver, and confronted the front panel of a pair of men's trousers no more than two inches from my nose.

"I couldn't believe how long your papa hung about," the man said. His voice was low, but I was very near. "I thought for a moment he'd decided to go all the way to Hillyard with you."

"Him? He can't wait to be rid of me, but I couldn't brush him off. He'd have suspected something."

The whispers stopped momentarily, replaced by the sound of heavy breathing and wet kisses.

"Where's your bag, Mabel?" the man asked finally. "We can get off at the next stop."

"Not the next stop, sweetums," my upstairs neighbor said. "You know I'll go with you wherever you want, but I have to at least let Mr. Dunn know I can't teach for him after all."

"Why? What's Mr. Dunn to us? You've never even met him, and we'll never see him again." His voice turned wheedling. "Come with me now, honey."

I heard a gasp and a giggle and more heavy breathing. A movement in the front of Floyd's trousers made me avert my eyes. "Stop it, Floyd. Not here. There's somebody sleeping down there, you know."

I released the curtain and sat as still as I could.

"I'm serious, Floyd. Papa arranged it. Mr. Dunn is expecting me to start teaching on Monday."

Floyd heaved a loud sigh. "Mabel, honey, he only gave you that job because your father asked him to. You think he can't find another teacher?"

"Don't you think I'd be a good teacher, Floyd?" Mabel's voice was sulky.

"I think you'd make a better wife."

"Oh, Floyd," she said as if she enjoyed his answer and followed it up with more kissing.

I wondered about the odd coincidence of hearing about Hillyard, a town I'd never known existed, twice in the same day. It was like learning a new word and suddenly hearing it everywhere. Then I realized it was no coincidence at all. The train was stopping in Hillyard, after all. Presumably other passengers would alight there as well.

I thought about my pending arrival in Seattle, a destination I'd chosen for no reason except a desire to flee as far as I could from New York. I knew no one there. What would I do when I got there? I envied Mabel, not for her "sweetums" Floyd, but for having a destination with a purpose, for being met by Mr. Dunn, and for having a job when she got there.

"Don't you want to come with me now, Mabs?" Floyd's voice shook.

"Oh, I do, I do." Mabel's breathy voice shook as well, and I wondered what Floyd was doing with his hands up there. "But...Oh, Floyd, I need to at least let Mr. Dunn know I'm not coming."

That's when I opened the curtain, stuck my head out beside Floyd's hip, and said, "I'll tell him."

Chapter Three

MR. STANFIELD INVITED me to join him for breakfast in the dining car the next morning. With his assistance, locating a table and getting service was much easier than when I had tried it myself that first day. I ate a surprisingly good omelet, gazed out at the Montana scenery, and asked, "How long will you be in Hillyard, Mr. Stanfield?"

"Perhaps a week," he said. "Or two. Possibly as long as a month. The incorporation vote won't be held until the middle of March. They shouldn't need me for that, but the company may decide to keep me there anyway, just to be safe."

I sipped my coffee. As long as a month. If I decided to leave the train in Hillyard, I might have the comfort of Mr. Stanfield's friendship for as long as a month. It was a tempting thought when compared to a cold and friendless arrival in Seattle.

But the plan that had seemed flawless to Mabel, Floyd, and me the night before revealed its holes in the light of day. It was a simple plan. I would leave the train in Hillyard and present myself to Mr. Dunn as Miss Mabel Chumley. He had never met Mabel, had never even met her father, and only offered her the position as a favor because of some investment advice from Mr. Chumley that had made Mr. Dunn money. Mr. Dunn would have no reason to suspect I wasn't the new schoolteacher. Mabel and Floyd would be able to run off and get married without any worry of pursuit, since Mr. Dunn would telegraph Mr. Chumley that his daughter had arrived safely. Mr. Dunn would get his schoolteacher, and I would get a new life.

I knew nothing about teaching. That was the first hole in the plan, but frankly, it didn't concern me much. If a flighty miss like Mabel Chumley could teach, I certainly could. More troublesome was the worry that eventually Mr. Chumley was bound to learn that a stranger was impersonating his daughter. He would tell Mr. Dunn, and I would be caught. It would not happen right away, though. Miss Chumley had boarded the train in Minot, North Dakota, nearly a thousand miles from Hillyard, too far for spontaneous visits. Mabel assured me her father would not be troubled if he received no letter from her for several weeks.

It was the immediate problem, though, that convinced me to abandon the plan. How could I live in Hillyard and be known to Mr. Dunn as Miss Chumley and to Mr. Stanfield as Mrs. Jones? I would be caught in a lie by at least one of them, a lie that would only raise questions about who I really was. I couldn't risk it.

Of course, I could still get off the train in Hillyard if I wished, without impersonating Miss Chumley, but I had told Mr. Stanfield I was going to Seattle. How would I explain my changed destination? He would think me a dime novel railroad adventuress, or worse. In trying to maintain my friendship with Mr. Stanfield, I could lose it.

"Are you always such a quiet breakfast companion, Mrs. Jones?" Mr. Stanfield asked. "I must say, you're very different from my wife and daughters. They chatter so much I have to take my newspaper to the office to read it."

"What sorts of things do they talk about?" I asked, diverting him once again into talking about something other than me. It wasn't difficult. His face lit up when he spoke of his family.

"Violet, as I said, is nearly sixteen. When she's not talking about some young man she saw the day before, she talks about those she hopes to see later that day, or she tells us of hats and

dresses and other fripperies girls her age enjoy. I confess I don't listen to her much. My wife is very kind with her, but even she grows impatient after a time. My wife has grown interested in reform work, like Miss Addams in Chicago, and thinks young girls ought to devote some of their energy toward helping others."

"She sounds like a worthy woman." I felt some envy for Mrs. Stanfield. I tried to teach English to immigrant children one time at a settlement house in New York, but after I came home excited about what I'd seen and done there, Robert forbade me from ever going again.

"And your younger daughter," I asked. "What does she talk of?"

"Oh, my little Dora. It changes every day. Just yesterday, she couldn't stop talking about a toy steam engine that she saw in the Sears Roebuck catalog. I don't know what she wants to do with it, but she wants it very badly. She's not interested in boys at all yet, thank heaven." He laughed. "Sometimes I think she wishes she was one."

I smiled. "I think most girls do, at one time or another, especially when looking at toys in the Sears Roebuck catalog. There's really not much you can do with a doll, after all, except hold it."

He laughed again. "I never thought of that."

Mr. Stanfield continued to entertain me with stories of his family all the way through Montana, which took most of the day, and into Idaho. After taking so long to traverse Montana, I was surprised at how quickly we crossed the narrow northern strip of Idaho and entered Washington.

"Yes, we like to joke that the front of the train leaves Idaho before the back of the train gets in it," Mr. Stanfield said. He checked the pockets in his jacket, his bag, and glanced around the seat as if making sure he had everything. I had no idea where in Washington Hillyard was, so I was unprepared when, only minutes later, the conductor announced our arrival there.

I looked out the window. It was not quite dark. The land was flat and covered in snow.

The train slowed, and Mr. Stanfield rose. He swayed with the movement of the train and felt the pockets of his trousers. His mind seemed already on the business waiting for him, but then he leaned forward and braced himself with one hand on the back of his seat and the other on the back of mine. His eyes, steady and brown, were only inches from mine.

"Mrs. Jones, do you have funds?"

"Funds?" I thought of the money in my stockings.

"Will you be all right?" he asked in a stern voice.

He was asking if I needed money. I nearly laughed and lowered my head. "I'll be fine," I said to my gloved hands.

Apparently he did not believe me. The train screeched to a halt, and two ten-dollar bills fluttered onto my lap. I looked up to protest and saw only the back of Mr. Stanfield's coat as he exited the train.

I snatched the bills and rose to follow him and return it, but I paused and slowly sat back down. I was not the helpless and penniless widow he apparently thought me, but it would be easier to accept his twenty dollars than to explain why I didn't need it.

I peered out the window at the little depot. Several men stood about in the gathering twilight, but there was no sign of Mr. Stanfield. He must have gone in a different direction. I did see a man with a red handkerchief bulging from his breast pocket.

Mr. Dunn. He watched the disembarking passengers searching, I knew, for Mabel Chumley. I thought of Mr. Stanfield again, so kind and devoted to his daughters. How devastated he would be if one of his daughters vanished on a journey across the country. Would Papa Chumley feel the same when Mr. Dunn telegraphed him that his daughter had not arrived on the train?

I rose, a decision made. Despite my vow of silence to Mabel and Floyd, I would tell Mr. Dunn about their runaway marriage. I would then return to the train and continue my journey to Seattle. Mr. Dunn would be disappointed, but at least Mr. Chumley would not have to endure the horrific worry of the unknown.

The porter helped me descend from the train to the depot platform. It was colder than I'd expected, and the wind was harsh. I stepped forward. As I did so, Mr. Dunn stepped forward as well, a welcoming smile on his face. "Miss Chumley?"

I opened my mouth to deny it and explain, but a man behind him on the platform turned in that instant. A shiny badge glinted on his lapel, and he cradled a shotgun in his arms. I glanced at him. His eyes moved rapidly over my hat, my dress, and my face as if he were noticing and memorizing everything about me. His eyes narrowed when they reached my split lip. A woman alone is always suspect, but one who looked as if she'd been in a fight and who interfered in the runaway marriage of an innocent school teacher would arouse suspicions even more. From the way he looked at me, I was already convinced he would not forget me. I couldn't risk his questions.

So when Mr. Dunn asked again, "Are you Miss Chumley?" I answered, "Yes. Yes, I am."

Chapter Four

BY THE TIME Mr. Dunn retrieved my travel bag from the baggage car, it was completely dark, and the wind now carried a few stinging snowflakes with it.

“The sleigh’s at the livery stable,” Mr. Dunn said. “It’s just a step this way.”

We walked parallel to the railroad tracks across a frozen road lined on both sides with berms of snow. A building on our left blazed with electric lights that reached out and illuminated our path.

My traveling hat provided little warmth. I pulled the collar of my coat around my neck and hunched my shoulders to try to protect my ears. Mr. Dunn seemed not to feel the cold, though his black wool overcoat and sealskin cap may have accounted for that. He was a stocky man, not very tall. His face was clean-shaven, and his cheeks puffed out round as if he held a jawbreaker in his mouth. He was older than me and not as old as my father, but beyond that I could not tell his age.

“That’s the streetcar terminal.” Mr. Dunn inclined his head toward the brightly lit building. “You can take a trolley from Hillyard into Spokane any time. A car leaves every fifteen minutes during the day. Well, not right now. Our trolley workers are currently on strike. They’re still running a few trolleys, but nobody in this town uses them. We’re a working town. We won’t go against a strike.”

“How far is it to Spokane?” I asked. My breath was white.

“Five miles more or less. Do you know about Spokane? It’s the biggest, fastest growing city this side of St. Paul. There must be a hundred thousand people living there, or nearly so. It won’t be long before it’s the biggest city in the entire state.”

“What about Seattle?”

“Seattle?” He scoffed. “That poor city’s got nowhere to grow. They spend all their time and money now just moving dirt around, tearing down hills and filling in mud holes, just to find room for the people they’ve already got. They picked a poor place to build a city. But Spokane is limitless. Did you see the prairie as you came in? It could become a western New York.”

I reflected that New York’s founders also chose a poor spot on which to build, but I said nothing. It was clear that Mr. Dunn felt great pride in his neighboring city. We reached the livery stable, and Mr. Dunn stowed my travel bag beneath the seat of the sleigh and helped me into it. We headed west, away from the railroad tracks, on a wide road upon which streetcar rails were laid leading from the trolley terminal. A restaurant beside the terminal did a brisk business, from what I could see through their painted windows. A saloon on the far side opened its doors to let out a burst of laughter and two staggering men in denim overalls. On my left a glittering theater advertised vaudeville acts, and a few men and women stood on the sidewalk chattering and laughing as they waited for the doors to open, seemingly oblivious to the snowflakes that swirled about them.

The coldest of those flakes seemed to find their way underneath the hood of the sleigh to strike me. Mr. Dunn turned right onto a darker street. I ducked my head and pressed back against the seat to try to keep warm. Almost immediately, though, Mr. Dunn pulled on the reins and stopped the horse.

“Here we are,” he announced and jumped down.

I looked up, surprised. We had traveled no more than two blocks north, and the lights from the theater still glowed behind us. In front of me was a three-story clapboard house painted white. Smaller houses, similar in structure, were built along both sides of the street. It was a pretty neighborhood, made prettier by the snow that sparkled in the electric lights attached to tall poles on each corner. I had seen electric street lights in New York, on Broadway and Fifth Avenue, but I’d never seen them on a modest little street like this. A light hanging over the wide front porch of the house before me indicated this house was electrified as well.

Mr. Dunn helped me from the sleigh. The front door of the house opened, and a woman stood in the doorway.

“Here she is, Mrs. Dunn,” Mr. Dunn said. “Right on time.”

I ascended the stairs, and she stepped back to let me in. “Come in, Miss Chumley. You must be cold. Stand by the fire. It’s so unfortunate it had to snow like this on your first day here.”

I followed her to the hearth. She was a slender woman, taller than her husband. She wore an embroidered net dress, white over dark navy, with the stylish high collar and wide sleeves of the Gibson look. Her eyes were a deep blue and her hair, lighter than mine, was simply styled with a side part and a figure eight in the back. She used no puffs or curls to try to look younger. Her beauty was simple, but her lack of vanity made it more appealing.

“But Husband, where is her trunk? You simply must go back and get it.” She shook her head and smiled as if we were friends already. “Men don’t understand these things, do they, Miss Chumley? How could he think you’d get by without your trunk?”

Mr. Dunn turned to leave.

“Wait,” I said quickly, to stop him. “I don’t have a trunk.”

Mrs. Dunn’s brow quirked, but only slightly.

“I thought it might be better to wait,” I said, “and get what I needed after I got here.”

“What a good idea,” Mrs. Dunn said, as if it were perfectly normal for a schoolteacher to cross the country without a trunk. “You’ll have a better idea of what’s necessary after you get settled. Take her bag upstairs, then, Mr. Dunn.”

“I’ve left the horses standing.” Mr. Dunn turned again toward the door. “I’ll bring it up when they’re stabled.”

“Oh, never mind.” Mrs. Dunn rolled her eyes and lifted my travel bag in one hand with no difficulty. “He spends more time with those horses than he does with the children. Come with me, Miss Chumley. I’ve put you in the guest room at the front of the house. You’ll be comfortable there. “

“I’m certain I will,” I said. “You have a lovely home.” The rooms were simpler than those I was used to, but the careful placement of a few fine pieces of furniture made them comfortable. The only clutter was of a homey nature. An open atlas lay beside a globe and a spread of papers on the parlor table. A newspaper lay folded open on a chair, and a damp coat was draped over the back of another chair near the door.

Midway up the stairs, Mrs. Dunn scooped up a boy’s leather baseball glove from a stair, and a few cigarette cards decorated with baseball players fluttered out to the floor. She stooped to retrieve them.

“My son.” She waved the cards. “He collects them. They seem to be more important to him than life itself, yet I find them scattered all about the house. Of course, you understand boys that age, Miss Chumley. He’ll be in your class.”

“How nice.” I wondered what age boy we were talking about.

“I must tell you, Miss Chumley, there is no one in this town more grateful than I that you’ve finally arrived. I’ve been teaching the class, you see, and I simply don’t have the time. It’s no job for a married lady. This is the bathroom. You’ll have time to bathe before dinner. I only agreed to do it because Mr. Dunn was in such a bind finding a teacher. It’s a job much better suited for someone like you. And here is your room. I’ll leave you now. We dine at seven.”

She dropped my bag beside the bed and left me. I slumped against the door in relief. How nice to be alone at last. As pleasant as Mrs. Dunn was, she was the sort of ideal woman who made me feel inadequate, the kind of woman who always spoke smoothly and never wore too few pins for the weight of her hat.

I pushed off from the door and looked about the room. The wallpaper was a design of lace and roses, and the curtains at the window were white and ruffled with satin ties dangling from the sides. A fringed crochet quilt covered the bed, white with pink ribbons threaded through it.

The hint that I bathe before dinner was unnecessary. My underclothes were stiff with the dried perspiration of four day’s travel, and cinders from the train rubbed black and gritty in every crease of my body. I lifted the satchel and took it with me down the hall to the spacious bathroom. The room had apparently been included in the original design of the house. It was no closet room tucked into a corner when plumbing was added, like in most of the older homes I knew.

I ran water into the tub and briefly mourned the bath oils that still sat on my dresser in New York. I opened my satchel and examined its contents. My nerves were frayed when I packed it, of course, but I was still surprised at the randomness of its contents. Three corset covers would be plenty, but I packed no drawers. I had four pair of gauzy lisle stockings and none of cotton or wool. Nearly a dozen sanitary towels took up a large proportion of the space in the bag, and I would not need them for weeks. I’d packed a wire bustle that I hated and had never worn, two pair of silk gloves, a pair of patent leather boots that needed to be re-heeled, and my summer dressing gown. That was it. No dress, no skirt, not even a clean shirtwaist. I would have to wear to dinner the same tired brown suit I had worn for the last four days.

I stripped off my clothes. I hung my skirt and shirtwaist on a hook and tossed my dirty underclothes into the satchel. I removed my stockings, enjoying the cool feel of the shiny linoleum on my bare feet, and paused to count the bills once more. The amount hadn’t changed. With no better hiding place, I wrapped the stockings around the bills in a rough ball and dropped it in the satchel as well.

The tub was porcelain enamel and it was large, as long as I was tall. I turned off the spigot, climbed in, and immersed myself in hot water up to my nose. I sighed and blew bubbles into the water. The muscles in my back, my neck, and my sore side relaxed completely for the first time in days. The heat made my wrist throb, but I thought it was better.

My future was uncertain, but when I considered that I could, at that very moment, have still been sitting in a dirty drafty train heading toward Seattle and even greater uncertainty, I decided I had made the right decision. For a while, at least, I could impersonate Miss Chumley. No one would have any reason to suspect I was not her, except for Mr. Stanfield, and I was unlikely to run into him. I could teach at the school and have time to collect my thoughts before I figured out my next move.

I dried off with a bath towel and listened to the house. I was still damp and warm, and I was reluctant to put my travel-stained clothing back on so soon. All was quiet. I pulled the dressing gown from the satchel. It was made of thin lawn, nearly transparent. I slipped it on. I clutched

my clothes and satchel to my breast and, feeling brave and daring, dashed from the bathroom to my room at the end of the hall.

I made it safely. I dropped the satchel onto the bed and turned to the wardrobe, which had two large beveled mirrors on its panels. I shrugged the dressing gown off my shoulders, let it fall to the floor, and examined myself.

I had not seen a reflection of myself unclothed in four years. Robert believed mirrors cultivated vanity. Aside from a small mirror at his shaving table and a mirror in the front hall to ensure our hats were on straight, we had no mirrors in the house. Seeing myself now was almost like seeing an unclothed stranger.

My belly was rounder than I remembered, my hips wider, and my breasts fuller. I turned and examined the bruise on my side. It was darkest purple where Robert's fist had landed, but paler smudges branched up and down where the whalebone from my corset had pressed hard into my side. I smiled at the memory of Robert's howl of pain when his hand made contact with the corset, but the smile faded when I remembered how angry it had made him. The hair between my legs was still blonde, tangled, and rather long. I turned to examine my backside, and the door crashed open.

"Miss Chumley, at last! Mother said— Oh! Pardon me."

A girl in her teens stood in the doorway, staring at my nudity, eyes wide. I quickly tugged my soiled vest from the satchel and pulled it over my head. The girl averted her eyes and started to back out, then seemed to change her mind and entered the room, closing the door behind her. Her gall astonished me.

"Who are you?" I asked bluntly, though her likeness to Mrs. Dunn gave me a hint.

"I'm Fannie Dunn." She came farther into the room and sat down in the rocking chair, curling one leg underneath her, and looked directly at me again. "You're Miss Chumley?"

I bent and retrieved my dressing gown. "Of course," I said. "Who else would I be?"

"You look older than I thought. Papa said you were twenty."

I am several years older than twenty, but not so much so that Mr. or Mrs. Dunn had doubted my identity. "It's a family trait," I said, pulling the gown around me. "We Chumleys all look older than our age. Now perhaps you'll allow me to dress?"

She pressed her toe to the bed and set the rocker in motion. "Certainly." She wriggled her backside and seemed to settle in. "I'm not at all put off by the naked body. You may dress in front of me."

"I'm afraid I am not so modern as you," I said.

She was nothing but a girl, perhaps fifteen years old, but an air of burgeoning maturity about her made me reluctant to dress in front of her. Her face had the round, dimpled prettiness of a child, and an immense blue taffeta bow at her neck held back strawberry ringlets that fell nearly to her waist. Her shape, however, was tall, sturdy, and womanly, and her bosom more generous than mine. The skirts of her sailor dress swirled above her ankles in what her parents no doubt thought was charming innocence. The effect was decidedly the opposite. I imagined that one day soon her parents would notice that their little Fannie had grown up, but it hadn't happened yet.

"As you like," Fannie said, but she didn't move. She smiled suddenly. "I'm so glad you're finally here. As soon as Papa told me you were coming, I knew we'd become friends."

"Friends?" I asked. "Aren't I too old to be your friend?"

"That's all right. I'm quite grown up for my age, and there's no one else in this town I can talk to."

"How old are you?"

“I’ll be fifteen in two months.”

“You’re fourteen? I’m, uh, six years older than that.” I was, in fact, twice her age. “Are you telling me there’s no one in all of Hillyard more suitable for you to talk to than me?”

“The girls my age are so childish,” she said. “And Mother and Papa won’t let me visit with older girls because they think I’m too young. You’re just perfect, Miss Chumley, and you’re right here in my own house. They can hardly keep us apart, can they?”

How delightful. The last thing in the world I needed was to be saddled with an adolescent girl for my new best friend. “I’m afraid I have to agree with your parents, Fannie.” I moved to the door. “I’m not a suitable companion for you.”

“Where did you get all that money, Miss Chumley?”

My hand froze on the doorknob, and the blood drained from my face. “What do you mean?”

She turned her head and looked at the bed. I followed her gaze. My modesty had been my downfall. When I’d pulled my underwear from the bed, I’d inadvertently tumbled the satchel open. There, clearly visible in the rumpled pile of dirty clothes, were over thirty hundred dollar bills.

I stared at her. “I—” My brain flooded with ideas. I scrambled through them to find a credible explanation for why I would have a satchel full of money, but too much time had already passed.

Fannie rocked forward in her chair and placed her feet firmly on the floor. “Tell me the truth,” she said with a tiny smile. “What have you done?”

I felt a moment of fear, which quickly turned to despair. It wasn’t fair! She was just a child. I was so close to being rid of my past. It wasn’t fair that everything should be ruined because of this nosy girl.

“I haven’t done anything,” I said, but the words sounded unconvincing even to me.

“I don’t believe you, Miss Chumley,” Fannie said. “Nobody gives a girl that much money for doing nothing, and you’re only a schoolteacher.”

I realized that all was not lost. Fannie suspected me of doing something underhanded, but she did not seem to suspect that I was anyone other than Mabel Chumley. What reason would Mabel give for having so much money? What reason would make sense to Fannie? I let my shoulders slump, mimicked Mabel’s pouting lips, and sat on the bed.

“My father wouldn’t give me any money,” I said, “and look what he makes me wear.” I pinched the cloth of my brown travel skirt.

Fannie crinkled her nose.

I nodded. “I just wanted to buy some prettier clothes, so I took some of his money. I knew where he hid it. I only skimmed a few bills off the top. I didn’t know how much it was until later. Please don’t tell.”

“Friends don’t tell secrets on their friends,” Fannie said. She shot me an arch look. “And we are friends, aren’t we Mabel?”

She knew she’d won. I was being blackmailed into being bosom friends with a fourteen-year-old girl. I smothered a sigh and forced a smile. “Of course we are, Fannie.”

“Splendid.” She clasped her hands beneath her chin and smiled, as thrilled as if the friendship had been my idea in the first place. I expected her to question me further about the money, but she seemed far more interested in her own concerns. She hopped up from her chair, plopped herself onto the bed, curled into a cozy ball, and settled in for a nice girlish chat. I tidied the contents of the satchel and let her talk.

It turned out to be a mundane tale. Fannie had a suitor. His name was Will Sims. He was the most wondrous young man who had ever taken breath, but he lived on the far side of the railroad tracks that bordered the town, which apparently made him unacceptable in Fannie's circle. Her parents knew nothing about him. She rhapsodized about Will for some time, going into detail about his intelligence, strength, and good looks, becoming coy only when she touched upon the physical side of their relationship. I soon understood why she was unable to speak her thoughts to other children her age.

I was a reluctant conspirator, but I felt a need to speak. "Fannie, your mother has spoken to you about what happens between a man and a woman? On their wedding night, I mean?"

She gave me a tender look. "I know all about it, Mabel. Do you?"

I bit my lip and gave a brief nod. She assumed me a maiden, of course.

"Will and I don't do that. There are other things," she smiled at the ceiling, "that we do instead."

My mind went blank for a moment before my imagination took off, and in the next instant it was I who was blushing like a schoolgirl while Fannie watched me in some amusement.

A bell rang from downstairs, and Fannie leaped from the bed. "Oh Lord, it's time for dinner! I won't be able to hear your secret tonight, Mabel," she said. "Perhaps tomorrow you can tell me how you injured your hand and got that awful bruise on your side."

I clapped a hand to my sore rib. "Perhaps," I said, but she was already gone.

Chapter Five

THERE WERE FOUR at dinner besides me: Mr. and Mrs. Dunn, Fannie, and Guy, a small, compact, quick-moving boy with round blue eyes that flashed in unison with the light glinting off his silverware as he ate. He didn't speak except to say, "How d'you do?" when I was introduced as his teacher. He didn't take his eyes off me either. I couldn't determine his age, but he was younger than Fannie.

"Guy, don't eat so fast," Mrs. Dunn said. "You don't want Miss Chumley to think you rude."
"Yes ma'am," Guy said. "No ma'am." His spoon slowed, but barely.

We were eating soup. The twist of the wrist needed to bring the spoon to my mouth was painful, and I barely managed to get a few spoonfuls in me before Mrs. Elsey, the cook, entered the dining room with a steaming platter. She placed it beside Mr. Dunn and collected our bowls. She shot me a curious glance, not her first, and returned to the kitchen. Mr. Dunn took a large fork and began filling our plates.

"Do you know who Matty Mathewson is, Miss Chumley?" Guy asked suddenly.

I didn't recognize the name and wondered if I should. Was Mr. Mathewson someone Miss Chumley ought to know?

Mr. Dunn placed my plate in front of me. I looked at it with dismay. It was a thick slab of roast beef, a perfect shade of pink. My mouth watered for it, but I had no idea how I was going to eat it.

"Girls don't like baseball, Guy," Fannie said.

I looked up and met Guy's eyes, his expression hopeful and disappointed at the same time. "I've seen a baseball game," I said.

"You have?" Guy asked. "Have you seen the Giants play?"

I had, in fact, seen the Giants play in New York City, but I realized too late that I could not tell him so. "No, not the Giants." I picked up my knife and pressed it against the meat. Pain shot up my arm. "The team I saw was called the Titans," I invented.

"Oh." His eyes slid to his mother and back to me. "They won't let us play baseball at school."

"Now Guy, Miss Chumley will not allow you to play baseball at school either," Mrs. Dunn said. "One broken window is enough."

"We didn't do it," Guy said.

"Guy." A warning sounded in Mrs. Dunn's voice.

Guy grew a mutinous expression. "It was a trolley striker."

"Don't talk back to your mother," Mr. Dunn said mildly. "You'll find, Miss Chumley, that trolley strikers are the scapegoat for everything around here." He reached over, took my plate, and handed me his. The meat was cut up into bite-sized pieces. "It's true someone shot at a trolley. No one was hurt, but people are feeling jumpy. It was a trolley striker, most likely, trying to stop people from riding while the strike is on, and it worked."

"Why did you cut Miss Chumley's meat for her?" Guy asked.

An awkward moment of silence followed the question that only I could answer. "I injured my wrist," I finally said. "I fell. On the train. There was a sudden stop. Sheep on the tracks, I believe."

"Is that how you hurt your mouth too?" Guy asked.

"Yes." I glanced at Fannie. If she were going to tell about the bruise on my side, now would be the time to do it. She said nothing but gave me a sly look. My secrets were safe with her, it said, as long as her secrets were safe with me.

"Your questions are impolite, Guy," Mrs. Dunn said. "A gentleman doesn't notice a lady's appearance except to compliment it."

Guy lowered his head, chastened. "You look very nice, Miss Chumley."

In the parlor after dinner, Mrs. Dunn showed me the lessons she had been preparing for the students. "These lessons are for the third graders," she said. "You'll have them for most of the day. They leave at 2:30, and then you'll teach seventh grade geography to end the day. That's Guy's class."

"Oh." It seemed like a lot of teaching for one person. "When am I expected to start?"

Mrs. Dunn hesitated. I had the impression she wanted to say tomorrow. Mabel and Floyd had the wrong idea about who was doing a favor for whom, I realized. Hillyard really did need a schoolteacher. "Today is Thursday," Mrs. Dunn said. "Shall we say Monday? That should give you enough time to find a place and get settled."

"Thank you. I'm sure it will."

"Meanwhile, you'll want to read these essays written by the seventh graders." She handed me a stack of papers. "It will help you get to know the students a bit before you meet them."

"Thank you."

A bell chimed at the front door. "That will be Dr. Keating," Mrs. Dunn said. "He's come to look at your arm."

"What? Oh no, I don't need—"

"Come now, Miss Chumley, if you can't even cut your own meat, you can't very well handle books and chalk and forty children all at once, can you? Where is Mrs. Elsey?" She moved to the door and opened it. "Oh! I expected Dr. Keating."

A woman laughed. "I am Dr. Keating too, Emily, don't forget. My uncle has been called away, and one Dr. Keating is as good as another, I assure you."

Mrs. Dunn stepped back from the door. "Of course. Here is your patient, then. Miss Chumley, you'll be seen by young Dr. Keating, it seems. Miss Chumley is our new schoolteacher. Oh, Mrs. Elsey, there you are. Please take Dr. Keating's coat and dry it in the kitchen."

The doctor shrugged out of a rubberized slicker and handed it, dripping with slush, to Mrs. Elsey. "I'm sorry about your floor, Emily. Here, Mrs. Elsey, you'd best take the hat too. And let me remove my rubbers. I can't ride without them in this weather, or my feet turn to blocks of ice, but I don't need to tromp around your house in them."

"Surely you didn't ride your bicycle in this weather," Mrs. Dunn said.

"I did," the doctor said cheerfully. "It's faster than hitching up the horse, and easier on the poor beast too. She doesn't like getting wet."

I rose when the doctor entered and held my arms behind my back with a vague idea of resisting an examination, but the first thing she did was extend her hand to me in greeting. "Miss Chumley, is it?"

The gesture surprised me into bringing forth my right hand, but I pulled it back when I realized how painful it would be to have it shaken.

She raised a brow and dropped her hand. "Emily is kind enough to call me Young Dr. Keating. Most people call me the lady doctor. Some call me Adelaide. My uncle calls me addled, but only in fun, I hope."

"Miss Chumley's right arm is the reason we called you," Mrs. Dunn explained. "Oh?" Dr. Keating looked directly into my eyes, her expression open and inquiring. "What happened?" Dr. Lyme, Robert's doctor, was so uncomfortable around women he wouldn't even meet my eyes, and he never commented about the cause of my various injuries except to warn me never to refuse Robert's advances. The few times I bothered to lie to him, he accepted what I said without a blink.

I glanced at Mrs. Dunn. "I...I fell."

"I see." Dr. Keating tugged at a wide belt at her waist and pulled around a black bag that had been resting on her backside like a bustle. She slid the bag from the belt and placed it on the table. "Emily, do you think you could get me a fresh cup of coffee? I just had dinner with the Finches. I think they only make coffee on Saturday night and they drink from the same pot all week long. Don't let Mrs. Elsey make it. Her coffee is no better than mine."

"Of course," Mrs. Dunn said. The doctor had given her no polite way to refuse the servant's errand.

As soon as Mrs. Dunn left, Dr. Keating pulled her vacated chair close, sat down, and looked up at me. "Will you let me take a look at your arm now, Miss Chumley?"

She had ginger hair, a wide face with cheeks still ruddy from her ride in the snow, and friendly eyes the color of cinnamon. She was unlike any doctor I had ever seen. I sat, unfolded the cuff of my right sleeve, and tackled the buttons.

I was too slow. Dr. Keating took my arm, unbuttoned the cuff, and folded back the sleeve. She turned my wrist gently to examine all angles.

"It was a twist like this?" She made a motion with her hands that made me wince, though she didn't touch me.

I nodded.

She placed her hand in mine. "Clasp my fingers."

I wrapped my fingers around her hand, but did not squeeze.

"There's no obvious break," she said. "It's impossible to know for sure, of course. You may have a slight fracture, or it may just be a bad sprain. I'll wrap it up for you. If it's a sprain, it should get better soon, as long as you're gentle with it. Now, what happened here?" She raised her fingers to my lip and tugged gently so she could look inside. Her face was no more than two inches from mine. She smelled of sweat and snow. "I might have stitched that if I'd seen it sooner, but it's too late now. No matter. Mouth wounds heal quickly. Were any teeth loosened?"

"No."

She sat back and met my eyes again, her expression serious but good-natured. "Anything else?"

"No, nothing." The bruise on my side was ugly, but my ribs were uninjured. I was familiar enough with broken ribs to know that.

"Mm. Mrs. Elsey," she called out. Her voice was as loud as a man's, and I jumped. "Mrs. Elsey! Oh, there you are. Will you bring me some flannel? Cut into strips if you can, a couple yards long."

"I have it here," Mrs. Elsey said, handing a bundle to the doctor.

“Aren’t you the clever one?” Dr. Keating asked. “Thank you. You can leave us alone now.” She put my arm in her lap and wrapped the flannel snugly around my hand, wrist, and forearm. “How does that feel?”

I wriggled the fingers. “Better.” I had limited use of my fingers, but my wrist felt supported and secure.

“The wrap will come loose. It always does. I’ll come see you again in a day or two and wrap it up again. Are you staying here?”

“No. Yes. I mean, I’m staying here tonight. After that, I, uh—”

“She will stay with us until she finds a place of her own,” Mrs. Dunn said, entering the room. She placed a tray with a pot of coffee and one mug on the table. “I doubt it will take long. After being with children all day, she’ll long for a peaceful evening, and she won’t find that here, with Guy running about all the time.”

“Well, the town isn’t large,” Dr. Keating said. “Emily will tell me where you’re staying and I’ll stop in and check on you.” She stood and threaded her bag back onto her belt, which she latched around her waist. “Sorry about the coffee, Emily, but I forgot I have to check on Mrs. Dawson. She goes to bed early. If I keep her waiting up for me, I won’t get paid until next year and Uncle will have my hide.”

“Thank you so much for coming.” Mrs. Dunn was too clever not to have deduced that the coffee was a ruse to get her out of the room, but she revealed no irritation. “I’ll get your coat.”

Dr. Keating moved to the door and bent to pull her rubbers over her shoes. “You should go to bed early as well, Miss Chumley. You’ve had a long day.”

“I will.” It had indeed been a long day, I reflected, and a lot had happened. Fewer than twenty hours ago, I had never even heard of Miss Chumley. Now I *was* Miss Chumley.

Chapter Six

DESPITE MY FATIGUE, I didn't sleep well. The bed was soft, but noises kept me awake. Trains ran through town continuously, even at night. I heard busy shouts coming from the rail yards, where apparently the work never stopped. Inside the house it was also noisy. Guy ran up and down the stairs multiple times. Fannie knocked on my door and even called my name, but I pretended to be asleep. Late that night I heard the front door below me open and close more than once, and the sleigh creaked beneath my window. I'd learned the Mrs. Elsey didn't live in, but did she leave so late? Perhaps Mr. Dunn gave her a ride home.

I finally fell into a deep sleep in the early hours of the morning, and when I woke I was fresh and filled with optimism. I looked forward to my first full day of being Mabel Chumley. I wandered downstairs and found only Mrs. Elsey in the house. Mrs. Dunn and the children were at school, and Mr. Dunn was at work.

"You work long hours, Mrs. Elsey," I said. "I think I heard you leave last night."

"It wasn't too late. Here, this is for you. Mr. Dunn asked me to give it to you."

It was a list of boarding houses, a carefully sketched map of Hillyard, and a twenty-dollar advance in my pay.

"How kind of him," I said. "He didn't have to do that."

"He's a good man," Mrs. Elsey said.

My first task of the day, I decided, was to buy a new shirtwaist. Wherever I found to live would be my home, I hoped, for some time, and I wanted to make a good first impression. I stepped off the front porch of the Dunn's home and turned left toward the downtown area I had seen the night before.

My spirits were high. Most of the snow had melted. A mere half inch remained on the ground, but it was fresh and shone like a crystal carpet in the unexpected sunlight. A fresh, narrow track of a bicycle tire ran along the edge of the road. I wondered if it was Dr. Keating riding by. The air was cold, but the blue sky and bright sun made it feel warmer. I almost felt like skipping. I had not felt so free in years.

I reached the Crystal Theater, so gay and glittering the night before, but it was dark and abandoned in the morning. A sign on the side of the building advertised a contortionist, a ventriloquist, and a trio of female singers "of amazing proportions!" A smaller sign, higher up, announced "The Virginian" as a coming attraction.

I entered the little downtown proper and passed a bank, a cigar store, a café, a real estate office, a meat market, and a liquor store all on one block. In the window of each establishment was a placard urging citizens to "Vote NO on Incorporation — Keep Railroad Jobs in Our Town!" or "Vote YES for Incorporating Hillyard — Ensure Fire and Police Protection for YOUR Family!" Men and women bustled about, shopping and conducting their business in an efficient manner. The snow in the street was churned into dirt forming half-frozen mud that crunched when stepped on, but wooden sidewalks in front of the stores protected shoppers from the worst of it.

I found Pemberton Department Store. Twenty minutes later I emerged three dollars poorer but wearing a new linen shirtwaist, carrying my old one in a box under my arm. The blouse fit almost perfectly. I was ready. I consulted my list and prepared to meet the first landlord.

Mr. Dunn had apparently designed the list with my future salary in mind. He didn't know about my extra funds, of course, and had directed me to boarding houses that were within a schoolteacher's financial reach. The result was depressing. The rooms shown to me were small and poorly furnished. Some had disturbing, unidentifiable odors. Others had even more disturbing odors that were all too easily identified. Only one clean, well-furnished room was shown to me, and I was even offered a discount, but I didn't like the way the landlord smiled at me when he offered "this room right here next to mine." I declined.

Finally, when I was nearly ready to give up, I passed a large, square house that was not on my list. It was three stories tall and looked as if it had been recently constructed. Two signs were propped in the front window with dark flourishing letters reading "Rooms for Rent" and "Cook Wanted." I ascended the steps and knocked on the door.

"Rooms or Cook?" the woman asked sharply as she opened the door. She was skinny and old, at least seventy, with white hair that was cut short and stuck out in messy angles from her head. She looked like a character in the Little Nemo newspaper comic. Her lips nearly disappeared in a thin line in her face, and the cords in her neck stuck out like telegraph wires. Smudges of flour caked one side of her face, the backs of her hands, and the front of a large apron that wrapped around her like a sheet. Her eyes were dark, bright, and intelligent, and they sized me up immediately. "You want a room."

"I'd like to see it," I said.

She sighed and stepped back, opening the door wider to let me step into the hall. "Well, come in then. They're good rooms, but I really need a cook."

"I'm sorry," I said. The entry was small. A set of double doors on the right was closed. On the left were stairs, beyond which I could see a public parlor crowded with gleaming new furniture.

"Doesn't matter. I need boarders too. Follow me."

The polished stairs were free of scuff marks, and the delicately flowered yellow wallpaper had no smudges or finger marks. There were no unpleasant odors.

"Is your house new?" I asked as we turned on the landing and continued up.

"Yup. Only been here two months, and I already lost two cooks. Didn't want to take the trolley, of course, with all that's been happening. My name's Ida Mae Higgins, by the way. If you take the room, you can call me Ida Mae. I put ladies on the second floor and gents on the third. Mrs. Lombard and Miss Shupe share the big rooms on this side. Mrs. Williams and her little girl have this first room. There's the bathroom for the ladies at the end of the hall, and this here's your room."

It was two rooms, actually, both of them small but charming. Two chairs and two small tables formed a cozy circle in the sitting room. There was no fireplace, but an accordion-shaped steam radiator assured me of heat. A door in the back of the room led to the bedroom, which had a narrow bed pushed along one wall, a dresser with a mirror angled to the right of the bed, and a built-in closet was opposite it. All the furnishings were new and matched the rooms.

"Eighteen dollars a month, breakfast and dinner included. No cooking in the rooms of course. Laundry's extra, once a week. Pay in advance."

The rent was steep, more than Mr. Dunn had told me to pay, but it didn't matter. I'd never had a home of my own. I coveted those rooms with an almost physical urgency. And after all, I wasn't exactly limited for funds. I opened my handbag.

MR. DUNN'S MAP showed that the school was just four blocks from the boarding house in a northwesterly direction. I decided to familiarize myself with the route. As I headed west toward Market I passed a vacant lot with a large sign hammered into the ground with thick wooden posts. The urgent print on the sign made me stop to read it.

FUTURE SITE OF
HILLYARD CITY HALL, JAIL AND FIRE DEPARTMENT!
VOTE FOR INCORPORATION MARCH 16TH 1902

I wondered if Mr. Stanfield was having any success convincing the townspeople to incorporate without including the railroad.

The mud on Market Street had softened as the sun rose higher. I passed the same businesses I'd seen earlier, and I found myself taking a proprietary interest in them. This was my home now. That would be my drug store, my bakery, my bank. I was already familiar with Pemberton's Department Store, and soon I would be familiar with the other businesses. The people too, I thought, as I exchanged a cautious smile with a woman who passed me on the sidewalk. Some of these people would become my friends, and I played a game with myself trying to guess which ones they were.

I stopped in front of Hennessey's Confectionary. Through the window I could see long gleaming wood and glass cases filled with treats. I opened the door. The smells that greeted me made my mouth water: hard candies, licorice, toffees, caramels, popcorn, chewing gum, and chocolate. It was as well stocked as any New York candy store.

"May I help you?"

"Yes," I said. "I need some chocolate."

The woman behind the counter laughed. "You need it?"

"Yes." I moved toward her. "I most certainly need some chocolate."

"You are a genuine chocolate lover then." The woman's smile deepened and gained warmth. "The imposters only want it."

I scanned the selections, and she waited in silence. I was the only customer in the shop, but I could hear a baby crying in the back. The woman seemed oblivious to the noise, but a moment later a young girl appeared in the open doorway with a damp, squalling toddler in her arms.

"Mother, he wants you. I can't make him stop crying."

I felt sorry for the girl. She wasn't big, and she could barely hold onto the thrashing child.

"In a minute, Carrie," the woman said in a hushed but perfectly audible voice. "Can't you see I'm with a customer?"

A look of exasperation crossed the girl's face. "I can take care of her, Mother, but I can't take care of Teddy. He wants you."

"I said in a minute. Take him back—"

She was interrupted by a loud thud from the ceiling, followed by stomping footsteps and the crash of a door banging open. “God damn it!” an enraged male voice roared from above. “Shut that damn kid up. Don’t make me come down there and do it, I’m warning you!”

We all froze, even Teddy. I felt my own heart speed up at the angry tones, though I wasn’t the target of his wrath. Carrie and her mother exchanged distressed looks that I understood all too well. The door above slammed shut again and the steps crossed back across the floor.

The woman looked at me. “He works nights. He needs his sleep.” Her eyes pleaded with me to understand, and I nodded to show that I did. She glanced at my lip, and a grim smile crossed her face. We understood each other. Teddy began to fuss again, and the woman sprang into action.

“Take care of her,” she said to Carrie, nodding her head at me. She snatched the baby from the girl’s arms and disappeared into the back.

The girl moved to stand behind the counter. She was barely tall enough to see over it, but her demeanor was that of an adult. “What would you like, ma’am?”

“I would like a quarter pound of fudge,” I said. “No, I’d like a whole pound. And a quarter. Can you make it in two packages? A pound in one and a quarter pound in the other.” Fudge would make a nice gift for the Dunns.

I watched Carrie measure and wrap the fudge. She was a fair skinned girl with light brown hair pulled back into two limp braids tied together at the end with a thin ribbon. She didn’t seem to be any older than Guy, and I wondered why she wasn’t in school. She placed my packages on the counter and said, “It’s seventy-four cents, ma’am.”

I handed her a dollar. As she made my change, the door behind me opened and the bell above it tinkled. I turned to see who had entered—and reeled as I found myself face to face with Mr. Stanfield.

His face lit up when he saw me. “Mrs. Jones! What are you doing here? I thought you were in Seattle by now.”

I shook my head, my heart in my throat. I knew I risked running into Mr. Stanfield at some point, but I hadn’t really thought it likely, and I certainly didn’t expect it to occur so soon. “No, no, you’re mistaken. I’m not Mrs. Jones.”

He gave me a look of disbelief. “Come now, I’m not mistaken. I know you too well.”

“No, you’re wrong, sir.” I was acutely aware of Carrie listening to every word we said. “I am the new s—”

But he had stopped listening. He stared over my shoulder, and his expression grew as shocked as I felt.

“Hester!” he said, his voice mostly air.

I turned. Carrie’s mother stood in the doorway, her face white. She held onto the doorjamb as if to keep herself from falling.

Carrie rushed to her. “Mother, are you all right?”

Mr. Stanfield again said, “Hester,” and took a step forward.

I did not stay to hear more. I took advantage of his distraction to escape with my fudge.

I lost interest in seeing the school. I had been carrying the package with my shirtwaist, along with my purse, in my left hand. Now with the addition of two packages of fudge, my purchases had become cumbersome. I turned my steps toward the Dunns’ home. I longed for nothing more than a quiet evening in the privacy of my new rooms at Mrs. Higgins’ boarding house.

It was bad luck running into Mr. Stanfield, but it needn’t be a problem, I decided. He didn’t know I was in Hillyard as Miss Chumley. He would think my behavior odd, certainly, and rude,

but not anything worth pursuing. I could avoid Hennessey's Confectionary in the future as well as the railroad offices where Mr. Stanfield would most likely be found. I need not see him or Carrie or Carrie's mother—Hester?—ever again, and no one would discover that Mrs. Jones and Miss Chumley were one and the same. I would be more careful, I decided, and everything would be all right.

I gave Mrs. Dunn the larger package of fudge and informed her that I had rented rooms. "I can move in tonight, if I can get some assistance with my things."

"So soon? Nonsense. There's no need for you to leave until you're ready, Miss Chumley."

"Thank you," I said. "You're very gracious, but I am ready. I'm eager to get settled."

"You should wait until tomorrow at least. When Mr. Dunn returns from his office and we've all had some dinner, we'll discuss it."

"I really am most eager to move to my new rooms tonight. Perhaps I could take my satchel over now, and Mr. Dunn could bring the books tonight, or tomorrow even."

"Absolutely not. You must at least have one last dinner with us. People will think we refused to feed you, and the children will want to say goodbye." She smiled still, but there was an edge to her voice.

I was being rude. If I continued to press, I thought I might receive an instruction on my manners as Guy had the night before. I smiled, nodded, and went upstairs to pack.

Guy was lively at dinner, but he was the only one who was.

"Teacher, teacher go away, Saturday's a day for play!" he chanted as soon as I sat down.

"Guy!" Mr. Dunn shouted. "You apologize to Miss Chumley this instant."

Guy's face turned red, and he blinked back surprised tears, but he didn't apologize. "It's just a song, Dad," he said. "All the kids say it."

Mr. Dunn's fist hit the table. "I said apologize. No dinner for you, young man—"

"No!" Guy wailed.

Mrs. Dunn laid a hand on Mr. Dunn's arm. "Don't, Angel," she said. "The children do sing it every Friday. He didn't mean to insult Miss Chumley."

Mr. Dunn turned his frown toward his wife and it immediately lost its fierceness. His shoulders slumped and he seemed to shake himself. A moment later he shot me a half smile. "I suppose I'm the one who owes you an apology, Miss Chumley. I'm sorry. I'm tired today, that's my excuse. Guy, I'm sorry."

"It's all right, Dad," Guy said, but his voice was small. "I'm sorry, Miss Chumley. I didn't mean for you to go away. It was just for fun because tomorrow's Saturday."

I smiled at him. "It's funny, really, because I am going away. I'll see you at school on Monday, but I'm leaving this house to my own rooms. Tonight, if Mr. Dunn will take me?"

"What?" It was Fannie's turn to raise her voice. "That's not fair!"

"Whatever do you mean, Fannie?" Mrs. Dunn asked. "How could it be unfair to you that Miss Chumley moves to her own lodgings?"

Fannie glared at me. I worried for a moment that she might betray our "friendship" so soon, but she only shrugged and clamped her lips together. Our agreement remained. Fannie wouldn't tell my secrets because she didn't want me to tell hers.

Chapter Seven

I ARRIVED AT the boarding house too late to meet the other boarders. They'd all eaten and either retired for the night or gone out for the evening. I didn't mind. I was delighted when Ida Mae gave me the key to my room and left me. I turned the lock on the door and experienced the feeling of being truly alone for the first time in my life.

I grinned. Robert could not disturb my sleep that night. Fannie would not barge in. I could remove all my clothes and dance naked in the middle of the room if I chose. I could paint my face or smoke a cigarette or wear trousers, and nobody would even know. I had no face paint or cigarettes or trousers, of course. I didn't even have a book to read. I did have some reading material, though.

Moments later I lay sprawled across the bed comfortably dressed in only my vest and drawers, steam heat wafting from the radiator nearby, with a stack of seventh grade essays spread out before me. I selected the first paper. It was crumpled and smudged with ink. After a brief struggle, I was able to make out the words.

Tranporation by Dewey Murphy

You can take a trolly to spokane that is transpotation. I have never took a traly into spokane but on time I climed little boldy with some author fellos and we sall spokane in the dis-tins. it was a in spring site.

Good heavens! I couldn't even read it. I set the paper aside and reached with some apprehension for the next. Were they all that bad?

Transportation

By

Russell Gordon Walker

Transportation is taking people and things to other areas. It is mostly done by things on wheels like trains and carriages. Also, people can walk on their feet and carry things and ride on horses and bicycles. They can take a ship.

Someday they will fly in the air.

Transportation is faster than it used to be. This is good for our country because it helped to settle this vast land. Once people had to walk everywhere they went and carry everything on their backs. Then it took a long time to settle any land. If that's the way it still was then I think our country wouldn't be settled yet.

Some people have automobiles, mostly rich ones. They're more reliable all the time, but we need better roads.

Well, Russell Gordon Walker seemed to have a firm grasp on the subject of transportation. I didn't know if I could have addressed the topic so thoroughly myself, and I was greatly relieved that Dewey Murphy's writing was not representative of the entire class. I read on. The remaining

essays were much the same. All were better written than Dewey's, but few were spelled as well as Russell Gordon Walker's. Only two other essays stood out.

TRANSPORTATION

By

Guy Dunn

Transportation can be done by a lot of things like trains and ships and wagons but best of all is automobiles. My dad is going to get an automobile someday maybe a Haynes Runabout. Its the best kind I think. Someday I will get an automobile too. I will get a sturdy one for long trips. My dad says someday there will be roads all the way to New York. When that happens I will drive my automobile to New York to watch the Giants play.

Some people say that only rich people buy automobiles because they're snobs. My dad is rich but he is not a snob and neighthar am I.

When I get my automobile I will be a good driver and not danger peoples lives and I will transport my mother and my sister to town.

I laughed out loud. The last line was squeezed into the bottom of the page, no doubt added when Guy remembered that his mother would be reading his essay. The other essay that caught my attention was not an essay at all, but a poem.

TRANSPORTATION

by Carrie Hennessey

**A tiny child learns to crawl,
then to walk and not to fall.
Later he will learn to run
and jump and play in rain and sun.**

**He'll pull a wagon and a sled
and try not to fall on his head.
He'll ride in buggies pulled of course
by the greatest beast of all, the horse.**

**He'll ride them too but that's not all,
he'll ride a bicycle and probably fall.
Someday he'll take a boat on water
with a girl, somebody's daughter.**

**When he reaches a greater age
he might drive a horseless carriage.
When going long distances in the rain
he'll ride the splendid big black train.**

**Someday he might fly in the air
when traveling from here to there.**

**When it's time to take his final trip
he'll fly on wings with golden tips.**

I felt a chill when I read it. I was astounded that the young girl I'd seen at Hennessey's Confectionary, the girl with the squalling brother and the angry father and the limp ribbons, was able to think about transportation in such a broad, sweeping context, let alone put it to rhyme. But that was not what chilled me.

I would not be able to avoid Carrie after all. Would she remember, when she met me as Miss Chumley at school on Monday, that Mr. Stanfield had called me Mrs. Jones?

I crawled under the covers and looked around my brand new cozy bedroom. I should leave. I should take the trolley into Spokane and from there catch a train somewhere far away, not in the direction of Seattle, somewhere the Great Pacific Railroad did not go. It would be no tragedy if Miss Chumley did not arrive at the school on Monday morning. Her father would be notified of her disappearance; he would likely assume she had run off with Floyd, which was only the truth. I had money. I could create a new alias and go somewhere I was not known as Miss Chumley or Mrs. Jones or, most importantly, myself. I could go where there was no Mr. Stanfield or troublesome Fannie or Carrie Hennessey. I could start fresh somewhere else.

The problem was I didn't want to.

I liked the people I had met so far. I liked Mr. and Mrs. Dunn, Mrs. Higgins, and Dr. Keating. I liked Hillyard, and I loved my rooms. I liked Guy, and I wanted to meet Dewey Murphy and Russell Gordon Walker and the other students whose essays I had read. Fannie was a bit of a problem, but I thought I could handle her, now that she couldn't barge in on me in my room anymore.

I wrestled with the problem long into the night until I finally fell asleep. When I awoke, I saw things in a different light. Carrie might not have heard Mr. Stanfield call me Mrs. Jones at all. If she did, she would also have heard me deny it. Unless Mr. Stanfield discussed me with her, which was unlikely, she would have no reason to disbelieve me. What child doubts her teacher?

In any case, I need not leave immediately. I would not see Carrie until Monday at school, if I chose to stay. That gave me two days to decide whether I ought to stay or leave, and I intended to enjoy them.

I met my fellow boarders at breakfast, where conversation was dominated by Grace Shupe, a stout woman in her fifties with loose jowls that wobbled when she talked, and by Jane, the two-year-old daughter of Cora Williams, who joined us at the table in a highchair. Miss Shupe seemed quite interested in me, but since her interest lay more in telling me about myself than asking me questions, I was not bothered by her. "You'll make a good teacher," she said upon being introduced. "You'll be firm with them, I have no doubt, and accept no nonsense. It's too bad about your hand, there. You'll need to get help when it comes time to paddle them. Spare the rod and spoil the child, I say."

"No!" shouted Jane from her wooden high chair. "No want oats!"

"You can save yourself a nickel by getting what you need for your rooms right here in Hillyard," Miss Shupe said. "There's no need to go into Spokane for them. You won't want to take a trolley, and the prices are too high there anyway. I saw some fine pillows at Pemberton Department store. You'll want to look there."

"More jam!" said Jane.

Miss Shupe shared rooms with Trissie Lombard, a plump little woman who did not speak at all except to say, "How do you do?" upon being introduced, which perhaps accounted for their

compatibility. Cora Williams was a pretty girl, no older than twenty, who complacently granted each of Jane's demands. Fred Mapes was the only other boarder, and the lone occupant so far of the third floor of the boarding house. He was tall and thin with a narrow mustache and spectacles. He barely looked up as he ate his meal.

"What are your plans for today, Mabel?" Ida Mae asked when Miss Shupe paused to eat her sausage.

I had thought to take a trolley into Spokane, actually, where I could spend money freely without anyone wondering where I got it. "I need some items for my rooms," I said vaguely. "Stationery and such."

"You'll find the best stationery at Graham's in Spokane," Miss Shupe said, "but there's fine stuff as well at Minthorn's Drug Store, where Fred here works. Fred will show you. You'll want a little rug for your feet to put beside your bed, too. Trissie got two of them for a dollar at Tuppin's Dry Goods over by Luke's Livery Stable."

"I'd be happy to show you the shops," Mrs. Williams said, "if someone will watch Jane."

"Let her do her own shopping, Cora," Ida Mae said. "You know how it is when you move into a new place. You want everything just to your liking."

I was able to slip out of the house without Cora Williams or Fred and without letting Grace Shupe know which direction I was headed. When I got to the trolley stop, though, a rough looking man with sandy hair stopped me.

"Here, miss, where are you going? Don't you know there's a trolley strike going on?"

"I—yes, I heard that, but I need—"

"Didn't you hear? Somebody's taking shots at the trolleys these days. You want to get shot?"

"No, I just thought—"

"Look, miss, riding the trolley right now is like taking food outta my babies' mouths and feeding it to the lousy rich fellas that own the line. Is that what you want to do?"

"No." I backed away. "No. I'm sorry. I didn't realize."

I scurried back to downtown Hillyard. Spokane was five miles away, too far to walk, especially with packages. I would have to spread my shopping out and pretend to pinch my pennies.

In the end, I might as well have taken Grace Shupe with me, since I ended up following her advice to the letter. I bought stationery at Minthorn's, where Fred directed me to the correct shelf. I bought a little rug at Tuppin's Dry Goods and two lovely pillows at Pemberton's. I also bought bath salts and new drawers and cotton stockings and a bottle of Jergens hand lotion. It was too much to carry. I had much of it delivered, but I carried the last package with me as I headed back home. I was tired but satisfied and looking forward to brightening up my rooms with my purchases.

I was on the far side of Hillyard when I started back. I'd carefully avoided Hennessey's Confectionary, but now it was on Market on the block right in front of me. Rather than risk running into Mr. Stanfield, Mrs. Hennessey, or Carrie, I turned and walked west one block to the next street, Haven. On the corner I stopped. The Hillyard Jail and Marshal's Office was right in front of me. It was an old wooden building, but smoke rose from the chimney and I saw movement behind the window. I looked over my shoulder, trying to decide whether it was safer to risk running into the Marshal or Mr. Stanfield or Mrs. Hennessey or Carrie.

To my surprise, I saw a pack of boys running up behind me, waving their arms and shouting. At first I thought they were calling for me, but then I heard snatches of their words.

“Baseball—tracks—body! Dead body! Marshal Mitchell, Marshal Mitchell, we found a dead body!”

They ran past me to the door of the marshal’s office. They thundered in, and I scurried past, certain the Marshal had his hands too full to notice me passing by with my little package of new underwear. I couldn’t resist peeking in as I passed the window and saw the marshal listening to the boys, one of whom was Guy Dunn.

Chapter Eight

“THEY FOUND THE man beside the railroad tracks north of town,” Fred said as he passed the mashed potatoes my way. “They hadn’t identified him yet when I left the drug store. They’re fairly certain he’s not from around here, though.”

I spooned potatoes onto my plate and handed the bowl hesitantly to my right. Cora reached around Jane and put some potatoes on the toddler’s plate.”

“No!” Jane shrieked, kicking the underside of the table with shoes as hard as rocks. “No want ‘tatoes! No want potatoes!”

“Did you hear that?” Cora asked us with a proud smile. “She said potatoes, clear as day.”

“I heard he’s that incorporation man,” Grace said.

I nearly dropped the gravy boat. “Incorporation man?”

“A fancy lawyer the railroad sent out,” Grace said. “He’s disappeared. He was scheduled up for some meeting today with some of the incorporation leaders, and he never showed up.”

I absently ladled gravy onto my potatoes and passed the boat on.

“They say he wore a fine suit,” Ida Mae said, bringing a basket of freshly baked rolls in from the kitchen. She might not enjoy cooking, but she was good at it. “It’s bound to be him. Too bad about his face, though. Identifying him won’t be easy with his face a bloody mess like that.”

“Ida Mae, please.” Fred shuddered.

Ida Mae laughed. “What’s the matter, Fred? Make you queasy in your gut, does it? Don’t be such a woman. You don’t see any of us ladies going all pernickity.”

Actually, I wasn’t feeling very hungry anymore, and I noticed that silent Trissie Lombard, sitting across from me, had put her fork down as well.

“How did he die?” I asked. “Did a train hit him?”

“I heard he was shot,” Fred said.

“Well, if it is that incorporation main,” Grace said between mouthfuls, “I’m not surprised he got himself shot. Somebody should have warned him before he got here. He could’ve at least watched his back.”

Ida Mae chuckled. “From what I hear, he didn’t get it in the back, Grace.”

“Warned him about what?” I asked.

“About the way this town feels about incorporation,” Grace said. “This is a railroad town. Most of the folks here make their livings from the railroad, like me, and the railroad don’t want incorporation. They’ll pull out, and we’ll all lose our jobs. This fellow comes from back east, pushing for incorporation. I’m not surprised he got himself shot.”

“But he supported incorporation,” I said. “He was working on a compromise.”

Everyone but Jane stopped eating and stared at me.

“How do you know that, Mabel?” Grace asked.

“Yes, how do you know so much about it?” Ida Mae asked. “You just got here.”

I wished I’d kept my mouth shut, but there was no hiding it now. “I met Mr. Stanfield on the train,” I said. “He explained it to me.”

“You knew him?” Grace asked. “What kind of suit was he wearing?”

“The marshal might want to talk to you,” Ida Mae said. “They might even need you to help identify him.”

“Oh no,” I said, horrified. It seemed very hard that everyone was talking about Mr. Stanfield as if he were nothing more than a character in a dime novel. He was my friend. He gave me twenty dollars. He peeled my orange for me.

“I’m sorry,” Trissie said softly, speaking for the first time that night. The quiet sympathy in her eyes nearly made me cry.

“Oh, I forgot to tell you,” Ida Mae said, “that lady doctor stopped by to see you today. She wanted to look at your arm.”

“Dr. Keating?” I felt sharp disappointment at missing her visit, and my feelings of being ill-used grew stronger. At the same moment, Jane finally had her way with the potatoes, flinging the entire plate into the air to land with a crash on the table. A large glop of potatoes and gravy landed on the front of my new white blouse. It was too much. My eyes filled with tears. “Excuse me.” I tossed my napkin and fled up the stairs to my room.

I cried a bit, but even as I did so I was aware of a thread of happiness that I had such marvelous privacy to be able to cry alone and unobserved in my own home. By the time I dried my tears, I could hear bathwater running and shrieks coming from the bathroom down the hall. Cora and Jane were taking their Saturday night baths. Grace and Trissie must have been listening too, because as soon as Cora and Jane left the bathroom, they entered it and spent some time taking their baths too. I heard Trissie laughing for the first time and wondered what was so humorous about bathing with Grace. It hardly seemed fair that four women and a child had to share one bathroom on the second floor while Fred had one all to himself on the third.

I was still waiting for Grace and Trissie to come out of the bathroom when I heard a soft knock on my door. I opened it, and Cora stood there, still damp from her bath. She smiled shyly. “Hello Mabel. Jane’s asleep. She always falls asleep right after a bath. I wondered if you’d like to step over and visit for a moment and see my room while you wait for the bathroom. It’s so nice having another lady my age in the house.”

“Oh.” I was surprised, but I shouldn’t have been. Cora seemed to me barely older than Fannie, but she was twenty years old, and she thought I was too. “Certainly, I’d like to see it.” I closed my door and walked down the hall to her room. She only had one room for the two of them, but it was large, and she had decorated it so that it appeared more like a parlor than a bedroom. Two pictures hung from every wall. Colorful antimacassars adorned the backs of the chairs, and swathes of silk draped over the two little tables. On top of them she’d arranged exotic plaster animals in amusing tableau. One corner of the room was a makeshift nursery with a crib, where Jane slept, beside a tiny rocking chair and assorted toys. I was charmed that she was able to transform the bare room, such as mine, into a home.

“This is lovely, Cora. How long have you lived here?”

“Almost two months. My husband set me up here. He sends us money every month for the rent.”

“That must be hard on you, being left here alone.”

“We miss him terribly. We’re very much in love, you know. Tell me Mabel, do you have a beau?”

That startled a laugh out of me. “Heavens no.”

She blinked. “But why? You’re young, and you’re not bad to look at. Don’t you have a man back home?”

I considered inventing a sweet-ums of my own, someone like Floyd, but I couldn't do it. "I'm a schoolteacher," I said. "It's not a job for a married woman."

She giggled. "If you were married, you wouldn't have to be a schoolteacher, silly."

"Perhaps I'd rather be a schoolteacher."

Cora laughed out loud at that.

"What's so funny here?" Grace asked. She and Trissie had finally emerged from the bathroom, and they joined us at Cora's doorway. They were damp and still smiling from whatever had amused them so in the bath. "Your turn for the bath, Mabel. You'll want to get in quick. It's getting late."

"Mabel says she doesn't want a beau," Cora said. "She'd rather be a schoolteacher."

"Is that so?" Grace asked. She tilted her head as if she found me curious.

I shrugged. "I don't start until Monday, but I think I'll enjoy it."

"I think you'll make a fine schoolteacher," Trissie said softly.

"Thank you. Please excuse me. I'm going to take Grace's advice and have my bath now. Good night."

THE GRIM NEWS was confirmed next morning by the newspaper—the dead man was Mr. Talbot Stanfield of St. Paul, Minnesota. The cause of his death was a shotgun blast to the head, but enough of his face had apparently remained to make identification possible. Murder was strongly suspected. Aside from the bare facts of the case, though, Mr. Stanfield was not discussed at the breakfast table. It was Sunday, and the talk was of church.

"I go to St. Peter's Lutheran," Ida Mae said. "It's not too far from here. It's a pretty walk."

"I go to St. Patrick's," Fred said. "I'm Catholic, you know. You're welcome to join me, Mabel. Are you Catholic by chance?"

"Course she's not," Grace announced. "Come to Hillyard Methodist with me and Trissie, Mabel. Those friends of yours go there. The Dunns."

Growing up I had attended church most Sundays, of course, with my mother and father. After Mother died, I went less frequently. Sometimes I attended with Papa, sometimes alone, and sometimes not at all.

Robert was a God-fearing man. I pictured him even now, seated at His right side, wearing golden wings and a smug smile, waiting for judgment to be made upon me. Robert knew his Bible inside and out and could quote passages to fit any occasion. Even with his fist in the air, poised to strike, he could spout scriptures that made me seem the sinner, he the redeemer. We had attended church together every Sunday. Sometimes we would both stay afterward to socialize. Sometimes only Robert stayed. No one ever noticed that the days I left quickly, speaking to nobody, were the days I wore the heavy veil, even in summer. Or if they noticed, they didn't care.

"I won't be going to church," I said. Surprised looks greeted my announcement, but I ignored them. Robert was dead. No one could make me go to church.

"What will you do then, Mabel?" Cora asked.

I had some idea of finding Dr. Keating to see if she could rewrap my arm, but I didn't like to say so. "I have some lessons to prepare," I said.

“Oh, Mabel!” Cora clasped her hands on her breast as if praying and looked at me with a pleading expression. “Since you’ll be here anyway, would you watch Jane for me? I’d love to go to church, but it’s so hard to take Jane with me. I haven’t been in so long. Would you? Please?”

I looked at Cora’s soft, anxious face. She was so young. I glanced from her to little Jane, who was in the process of spitting out a morsel of ham with an outraged grimace.

“She won’t be any trouble, I promise you. She’ll probably sleep the whole time. You’ll still get all your lessons done. Please?”

Jane had slept like a lamb the evening before. How hard could it be? “I’d be happy to,” I said.

By noon I had to laugh at how I’d been conned. Jane did not sleep. We made paper flowers and finger puppets. I sang songs and told stories. We played hide and seek and hide the thimble. We pretended to be tigers and elephants. Finally, when I was worn out from playing, we stood at the window of their room and played “watch for Mama.”

But Mama did not come.

We saw Fred return and heard his footsteps go upstairs. We saw Trissie and Grace walk up the steps and heard Grace’s booming voice discuss the sermon with herself. A few moments later, we heard them leave again. It was one o’clock, and I had been watching Jane since ten-thirty. How long did Cora plan to stay at church?

A few minutes later, Ida Mae walked up the street with four other women, none of them Cora. I realized I didn’t even know which church Cora had gone to.

“Come with me, Jane,” I said. “Let’s go talk to Mrs. Higgins.”

I carried Jane downstairs and hesitated. No one was in the dining room, but I could hear voices coming from behind the door to Ida Mae’s private rooms. I heard a door open at the other end of the house, and the chattering voices sounded louder. I walked through the silent dining room into the kitchen and saw Ida Mae setting cups on a tray.

“Mishigans!” Jane shouted.

“Oh, hello there, Mabel. Cora not back yet?”

“No. I wondered, does she go to your church?”

“She was there all right,” Ida Mae said, “but she left right after the service. An hour ago at least. Poor thing. She hardly ever gets a minute to herself. It’s not easy taking care of a little one all alone.”

“She told me her husband sends her money every month. Where is he?”

“He’s down in South America somewhere working on that canal they’re cutting.”

“Panama?”

“That’s it. I met him before he left. He’s a good boy. They just got married too young.” Ida Mae pinched some tea leaves, crumbled them into the china teapot, and poured boiling water from the kettle over them. “That was Cora’s doing, of course. She thought it would be romantic to run off and get married.” Ida Mae’s voice left no doubt as to her feelings about such nonsense.

“When do you think she’ll be back?” I asked.

“Couldn’t say. Next time you’ll know better, I guess.” She lifted the tray. “Come in here a minute, Mabel. Some people here I want you to meet.”

I followed Ida Mae into her quarters.

“This is the girl I was telling you about,” Ida Mae said to the women sitting in her living room. “Mabel, this is Mrs. Noonan, Mrs. Reed, Miss Franklin, and Mrs. Steele. Ladies, this is Miss Chumley, a new schoolteacher just arrived in town.”

The names rattled out too quickly for me to match them with the faces except for Miss Franklin, the youngest of the group. She was tall and thin with a droopiness about her that made me think she would feel better if only she would eat something. The other three women had achieved various stages of plumpness but otherwise varied only in the color of their hair, which ranged from brown to black (certainly dyed) to a comfortable gray. The dyed woman startled me by reaching her arms out toward me.

“Oh! There’s Jane. Come here, baby. Come to Nana.”

Jane went to her readily enough, but the brunette scoffed. “You’re not her Nana. Don’t confuse her like that.”

“So Cora got you to watch her, did she?” asked the gray-haired woman. “You want to watch that, Miss Chumley. She’ll take advantage of you.”

“Sit down, Mabel. Have some tea with us.”

I sat on the couch beside Miss Franklin. It was a deep couch.

My feet did not quite touch the ground, but Miss Franklin seemed comfortable enough. Ida Mae handed me a cup.

“She doesn’t have a Nana of her own, poor little baby.” The dyed woman cuddled Jane. “She won’t be confused, will you lovey?” She stroked Jane’s hair while Jane’s grimy hands fondled the pleats on the woman’s pristine blouse.

“How do you feel about the women’s vote, Miss Chumley?” Miss Franklin asked.

“This is my suffragist group,” Ida Mae explained. “Did you have the vote in North Dakota?”

I knew that women could not vote in New York, but I had no idea about North Dakota. I was grateful when the gray haired woman said, “Of course not, Ida Mae. You know no state east of Utah has given women the vote.”

“I know that,” Ida Mae said. “I just couldn’t remember if North Dakota was east or west of it. We had the vote in Idaho. I got used to it. I should have thought about that before I moved over here. I would have stayed there.”

“No, don’t say that, Ida Mae,” the brunette said. “We need you here in Washington. We never would have got organized like we are here without you.”

“Well, that’s so,” Ida Mae said. “I guess it’s my lot in life.”

“Ida Mae has been invited to speak at the Washington Equal Suffrage Association Convention,” the brunette told me proudly. “She’s contributed more new members than any town except for Seattle.”

The front door chimed.

“Are you expecting someone else?” Miss Franklin asked.

“No.” Ida Mae rose and went to the front door. A moment later she returned with Dr. Keating a step behind her. “Look who’s finally decided to join us.”

“Dr. Keating!” All four women beamed, and Jane and the dyed woman clapped.

“This is wonderful,” the brunette said. “We always like to welcome new members, but a lady doctor...well, that says something, I think. People will take us more seriously with you as a member.”

Dr. Keating smiled. “Thank you, Mrs. Noonan.” She wore a man’s short overcoat and no hat. She pulled off a pair of leather gloves and said, “I don’t know what I’m a member of, though. I just stopped by to see Miss Chumley.”

The four women looked at me with varying degrees of surprise.

“You can spare us a few minutes, Adelaide,” Ida Mae said. “This is my suffragist group. You do want the vote, don’t you?”

“Yes, please sit down, Dr. Keating,” Miss Franklin said. “Let me pour you some tea.”

“I guess I can sit for a moment, and of course I want the vote.” Dr. Keating removed her coat and unbuckled her medical bag from her waist. There were no more chairs, so Miss Franklin scooted one way and I the other to make room between us on the couch. Dr. Keating draped the coat over the back of the couch, set the bag on the floor, and sat. Her weight caused the couch to sag and me to lean sideways into her. I pushed myself upright again. Dr. Keating shot me a grin and said, “It’s good to see you looking so well, Miss Chumley.”

Miss Franklin handed Dr. Keating a steaming cup. “We were just talking about Ida Mae’s invitation to speak at the Washington Equal Suffrage Association Convention this year.”

“Really, Ida Mae?” Dr. Keating asked. “That’s quite an accomplishment. Have you thought about what you’re going to say?”

“You have to talk about temperance,” the gray-haired woman said.

“Are you for it or against it, Mrs. Steele?” Dr. Keating asked.

So Mrs. Steele was the gray-haired woman, and Mrs. Noonan was the brunette, which meant the dyed woman holding Jane was Mrs. Reed. I tried to memorize their faces.

“For it, of course,” Mrs. Steele said. “Drink does nothing good for any man, and it’ll wreck a home quicker than a speeding locomotive.”

“I agree with Mrs. Steele,” Mrs. Noonan said. “Aside from tonics and cures, of course.”

“Lips that touch liquor will never touch mine,” Miss Franklin pronounced as if delivering a frightening ultimatum.

I leaned forward to see around Dr. Keating. Miss Franklin’s chin was up and her lips were pursed. I met Dr. Keating’s eyes and read a message not to laugh, which only made me want to. I quickly looked away.

“I’m not so sure,” Ida Mae said. “We’ve got the women on our side for the most part, but it’s the men who can give us the right to vote. We have to cut ourselves off from the Temperance Union if we want more men on our side, at least here in Hillyard.”

“Oh, they’re not going to like that at the convention,” Mrs. Steele said.

“Well, they’re going to have to like it sooner or later,” Ida Mae said. “We have to make people see that the women’s vote is more than just a women’s issue. Too many people think it’s a trivial matter, that giving women the vote is just a nice thing to do for the ladies. We have to make them see how important it is. It’s women’s votes that will save this country from the ruinous course it’s on.”

“Very nice, Ida Mae,” Dr. Keating said. “You should use that line in your speech.”

Ida Mae looked a bit self-conscious. “Well, I have written a little bit of it already. But it’s true. As long as women are kept from making the important decisions, things will only get worse. I tell you, socialism will take over this country before you know it.”

“You sound almost pleased about it, Ida Mae,” Mrs. Steele said.

“Maybe I am,” Ida Mae said. “It would be best if we could take care of our own people without it, but we’re not doing a very good job of it, are we?”

“Speaking of taking care of people, I’d better get back at it,” Dr. Keating said. “Miss Chumley, will you let me take a look at that arm of yours?”

“Don’t go so soon, Dr. Keating,” Miss Franklin said.

“I must, I’m afraid.” Dr. Keating stood and picked up her bag. “I have other patients to see this afternoon too. I don’t have much time for meetings, I’m afraid, but if I can show the people of this town that a woman can do a man’s job, maybe they’ll start to think a woman can vote too. Miss Chumley, where can I examine your arm?”

“We can go to my rooms, but I’m watching the baby.” I rose and reached for Jane.

“No, no.” Mrs. Reed hugged the child close. “You just leave her here with me. Go let Dr. Keating do her doctoring. I’ll take care of this little lamb.”

I couldn’t believe my luck. “Thank you, Mrs. Reed. If I see Cora, I’ll send her right in.” I scampered out of the room before she could change her mind. Dr. Keating followed me and I led her upstairs.

“I see you’ve taken off your wrapping,” Dr. Keating said.

“Yes. I took it off to bathe last night, and I couldn’t wrap it again by myself. I think it’s better, though.”

I opened the door to my sitting room and turned on the electric light with a surge of pride. Dr. Keating was my first visitor.

She walked in and looked around. “Charming,” she said, but without the high praise I felt the room deserved. I followed her gaze and saw the room through her eyes. I realized that, as much as I loved the little room, it wasn’t charming at all, especially when I compared it in my mind with Cora’s room. Aside from the furniture there was nothing in it except for one plum-colored pillow and a stack of seventh grade geography essays.

“I’m going to get a nice rug for the center of the room,” I said. “And pictures for the walls, of course, and books. I only moved in Friday night.”

Dr. Keating raised her brows just a smidge and said, “I was hoping for a kettle.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. There’s no way to heat water except downstairs. Well, there’s hot water in the bathroom, but that’s all. Ida Mae thought fireplaces were unnecessary upstairs, since we have these nice steam radiators.” I placed my fingers on the accorded iron. It was hot, but not hot enough to blister my skin or boil water. “Did you want some more tea? I did see a nice oil burner yesterday at Tuppin’s Dry Goods, but Ida Mae doesn’t allow cooking in the rooms. And it cost a dollar,” I added when I remembered that I was a poor schoolteacher. “Would you like me to go downstairs and bring up a tray?”

“No, no, I don’t want tea. I thought we might boil the flannel for your arm, but it’s not necessary.” She scratched her head and made a grimace with her nose.

“Is something wrong, Dr. Keating?”

“No, no, not at all. I just wondered who turned on the spigot.”

“The spigot?”

“You didn’t make two peeps downstairs. And now...”

I slapped my hands to my mouth. I’d never been accused of talking too much before. It was as if my impersonation of Miss Chumley was changing me into someone unlike me. “I’m sorry,” I said through my fingers.

“No, don’t be sorry, Miss Chumley, and don’t stop, please.” She put her hand on my shoulder and smiled. “I like you this way. It’s a bit of a surprise, that’s all.”

“I couldn’t speak downstairs,” I said. “By the time I thought of something to say, somebody else was already talking.”

Dr. Keating nodded. “It happens that way sometimes, doesn’t it? And suffragists are not meek women. Go get your flannel, Miss Chumley.”

I retrieved it from the bedroom. When I returned to the sitting room I found she had made herself at home by moving the two chairs together. She sat in one and waved me forward to the other.

“Sit here,” she said. “I can examine your arm best from this angle.”

I sat and she took my arm. Her hands were larger than mine, and freckled. She turned my wrist about, wiggled my fingers, and pressed her own in various spots along my hand and arm. I watched her face as she worked. She had a gap between her two front teeth, and she thrust her tongue along it as she concentrated. Her braid, which was looped tightly at the back of her head, could not control the individual copper hairs that escaped and curled about her head like a thousand tiny halos.

She pressed on a particular spot on my wrist, and I sucked in a breath. She gave a nod, returned my hand gently to my lap, and sat back in the parlor chair, her arms resting along its sides. "I don't like the looks of it," she said. "It shouldn't still be swollen like that. I think a bone in your wrist is broken. I ought to put a plaster cast on it."

"Oh no, not a cast," I pleaded. "It's not that bad. It doesn't feel broken."

"Yes, it does," she said. "You wouldn't hiss like that when I touch it if it didn't."

"But I can move it."

"Only in some directions. If you move it out of place, it'll hurt like the dickens."

"But I start teaching tomorrow. I don't want to have a cast on my first day. How will I write on the blackboard?"

She stared at me and sucked at the gap in her teeth as she thought. "All right," she finally said. "I'll wrap it again, but we'll use fresh flannel and I'll make it good and tight." She rummaged in her bag and came up with a roll. I gave her my hand and she began wrapping.

"What grade are you teaching?" she asked.

"Third," I said. "Except for one class at the end of the day. Seventh grade geography."

"Seventh grade? They'll be as big as you."

"Really?" I pictured Guy and Carrie, the only seventh graders I'd met. They were both smaller than I. Thinking of Guy reminded me of something else. "Did you hear about that man who was killed yesterday?"

"Hear about it? I should think so. They came and roused my uncle out of bed to look at him and declare him dead. Uncle still acts as coroner around here, though I've offered to do the job." She laughed, but not with humor. "I'm too dainty to look at dead bodies, they say."

"I suppose there isn't any doubt..."

"About whether he was dead? No, he was dead all right. He was shot in the head, you know. His face was...well, you don't need to know the details."

"I mean, is there any doubt it was him? Mr. Stanfield?"

She paused in her work and looked up. "Why? Did you know him?"

"No, not really. We rode the same train out here. He was kind to me."

She frowned. "It was him all right. He had papers with him. He had a watch engraved with his name. They were his clothes and they were tailored for him perfectly. I'm sorry." She finished wrapping and pinned the last bit of flannel place. "There you go. Be gentle with it and it should do." She closed her bag and stood. "I'd better go finish my rounds."

I opened the door and escorted her out. She paused in the hall. "I'll stop by in two or three days and rewrap it for you."

"That's not necessary. I know you're busy. My arm is fine, Dr. Keating. You don't have to ___"

She put her hand on my shoulder. "Do you want a cast?" There was a glint in her eye.

"No. Thank you, Dr. Keating."

She squeezed my shoulder. "I'm not too busy to look at your arm. And I wish you would call me Adelaide. I feel we will be friends."

I felt a rush of pleasure. “Thank you. I will. I feel that too, Adelaide. Please call me N— Mabel.” I nearly said Nell. A hiccup of a question crossed her eyes, but at the same moment the door below opened and Grace and Trissie breezed in.

“Adelaide!” Grace called out. She trotted up the stairs. “I’m glad to see you. Didn’t expect to see you up here, though.”

“You never know where I’ll turn up,” Adelaide said cheerfully. She removed her hand from my shoulder to slap Grace on the back like a man. “It’s good to see you, Grace.” When Trissie reached the top of the stairs, Adelaide leaned down and kissed her on the cheek. “You look lovely today, Trissie. New hat?”

Trissie blushed and nodded. “Are you leaving?” she asked.

“She has time to come in and visit with us,” Grace pronounced. “You haven’t seen our rooms yet, Adelaide.”

“I’m sorry, I don’t have time today. I have patients waiting for me. Another time, perhaps.” Adelaide turned back to me. “I’ll see you in a day or two, Mabel.” She smiled, gave a backward wave, and was gone.

Grace and Trissie stared at me with some surprise.

“I didn’t know you were so cozy with our doctor, Mabel,” Grace said.

I shrugged, held up my wrapped hand in explanation, and slipped back into my room.

Chapter Nine

A COLD WIND blew through my coat and flapped my skirts as I made my escape from the house. Fat white clouds scudded across the sky and blocked the sun more often than not, but I didn't mind. Anything was better than being cooped up inside with Jane. Poor Cora. She'd returned to the house, finally, and took Jane off my hands. I didn't blame her for wanting a day of freedom, but I would not be duped by her again.

I made my way downtown. The railroad did not rest on the Sabbath, and neither did its workers. Even on Sunday the pool halls and saloons of Hillyard were open and busy, but the businesses that might welcome a lady were all closed. Pemberton's, Minthorn's, and Hennessey's Confectionary were all locked and dark.

I followed the silent trolley tracks west from downtown, then walked north two blocks and reached the school. It was closed too, of course, but I only wanted to see it before tomorrow. The building was solid brick, three and a half stories high with an elegant bell tower perched on top. I counted thirty-six windows on one side of the building and twenty-four on the front, not counting the many small panes that surrounded the entrance. "Hillyard High" was engraved in the stone across the top of the front door, but I knew from Mrs. Dunn that the building currently housed the elementary grades as well as the high school. It was an impressive building for the size of the town. I wondered who provided the funds to build it. The railroad?

The school was the last building in town. Beyond it a snowy plain spread wide, bisected by train tracks and a churned up road that paralleled them. On the right side of the tracks, in the distance, I saw small figures running about and heard the shouts and laughter of young boys. Avoiding the muddy snow, I stepped up onto the tracks and matched the length of my stride with the distance between the wooden ties. The sounds of the boys' voices grew louder as I approached.

"Two balls! Come on, pitch it right."

"I am. That was a perfect pitch."

"Was not. You couldn't hit the side of barn if it rolled up to you."

"Oh yeah? Watch out. You better hit this one. It's going to be perfect."

"Foul ball!"

"Look out lady!"

A small white ball smashed into the ground beside me and shattered, pieces of it rolling into the ditch that ran alongside the tracks.

"Dead man's foul. You're out."

"That is not a dead man's foul!"

"Is too."

"Is not."

A herd of boys ran toward me and what was left of the ball. There were six of them, and one of them was Guy Dunn. A large boy with a round freckled face slid a foot into the shallow ditch and bent low.

"See? It's in the ditch."

“That’s not dead man territory. Besides, that’s not where it landed. Look it landed up here, didn’t it lady?”

Guy stood back from the others and looked embarrassed. “Hello, Guy,” I said.

“Hello, Miss Chumley,” he mumbled.

The other boys grew still and eyed me. After a long moment, a dark-haired boy, taller than Guy, squared his shoulders and said, “Hello, Miss Chumley. Guy said you’re going to be our Geography teacher. I’m looking forward to it ma’am. I’m Russell Gordon Walker.”

“I’m pleased to meet you, Russell.” I’d seen his name on one of the essays I’d read, but I wasn’t sure which one. I looked at the other boys and wondered if any of them would be in my class too.

“This is Dewey, ma’am,” Russell said, waving his arm at the freckle-faced boy in the ditch. “He’s in our class too.”

“Hello, Dewey.”

He flushed bright red and looked at the ground.

“These other fellows are eighth graders. They’re not in our class.”

I was relieved. They were big boys. “I didn’t realize you could play baseball in the snow,” I said.

“It’s not baseball,” Guy said. “It’s a snowball. See?” He reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a ball of snow that glistened with a solid coating of ice. “We make them ahead of time. You make a snowball and roll it in water and let it freeze.”

“You must go through a lot of them in one game,” I said.

“Yes, ma’am,” Russell said. “They usually crack up when we hit them with the bat. It’s good practice anyway. And sometimes they fly, like this one.”

“What’s a dead man’s foul?” I asked.

Several boys talked at once. “It’s where we found the body. Right over here, ma’am. Dewey found it. Tell her, Dewey. Rory hit a foul ball past right field and Dewey went to get it and found the body. Now it’s an immediate out if the ball goes there. Tell her, Dewey.”

But Dewey was the only boy who didn’t speak as they led me to dead man’s foul territory. It was only a few yards farther up the tracks, and I would have recognized it without their help. The ground was clearly disturbed. Footprints much larger than the boys’ trampled the snow and dirt and dry winter weeds. Wagon wheel tracks led horizontally from the scene, over the railroad tracks, and onto the road back to town.

“There was blood everywhere when we saw it,” one of the bigger boys said. “It was all over his head and on the snow. Marshal Mitchell covered it up.”

“Maybe you can still see it if we dig,” another eighth grader offered. He kicked at the ground.

“No, no.” I put out a hand to stop him. “That’s all right. But this must be where he was killed, then.”

“Yes, we got some of the shot,” Russell said. He pulled off his mitten and dug into a pocket to show me the pellets of lead he’d scavenged from the ground. “Marshal Mitchell took some of them, but we got the rest.”

“Why would he have come out here?” I asked, but the boys just shrugged and pocketed their gruesome souvenirs. I turned my back on the site of poor Mr. Stanfield’s death. I could think of no reason for Mr. Stanfield to have traveled half a mile north of town where there was nothing but a snowy playfield. Could he have been taken there by force? But why?

“I’ll see you boys tomorrow,” I said, and headed back toward town, once again stepping from wooden tie to wooden tie, developing an odd rhythm in my gait that accompanied my thoughts.

The only person I knew in town who might know something of Mr. Stanfield was Carrie's mother. Mr. Stanfield had called her Hester. Perhaps one night after school I would stop at Hennessey's Confectionary and ask her.

By following the tracks, I reached the northern edge of Hillyard. There the tracks diverged and multiplied, threading out like veins in a body toward the various railroad shops that spread out on the east side of town. I stepped off the tracks onto the road that started beside Hillyard Lumber on my right. Most of the main downtown businesses showed only their backs to the railroad tracks. A few, like the lumberyard, the furniture store, and the depot, faced the rail yards.

I passed the lumberyard and the neighboring blacksmith shop. The next building was the undertakers. As I approached, the door opened and four men, one of them the marshal, hauled out a casket. I stepped back to avoid his notice.

"Over to the loading platform," the marshal said. "Train should be coming in about twenty minutes from now." The men maneuvered the casket toward the railroad station.

I guessed there might be someone besides Mr. Stanfield who had died in Hillyard in the last few days, but probably not someone whose body had to be sent off on a train overseen by a lawman. It had to be Mr. Stanfield's body in the casket.

"Hello, Mabel."

I spun around. Fannie stood in the shadows of the blacksmith shop watching the men carry the casket away. Standing beside her was a tall blond boy with a narrow, serious face. He looked about sixteen years old and wore an old stained coat and faded denim trousers. They were not the sort of clothes worn by people like the Dunns. Will Sims, I assumed.

"Will, this is Mabel," Fannie said. Her nose and eyes were red, as if she'd been crying. "Let's tell her."

"No," Will said. "Why? How will that make it any better?"

"Because she won't tell," Fannie said. "We made a deal, remember? I'll tell about her if she does."

If Fannie had told Will about our deal, it meant she'd already broken her part of it, and the self-conscious look Will gave me confirmed it.

"This is different, Fannie," Will said. "It's too big, and it's nothing to do with her."

"But I want a grown up to know," Fannie said. The words were childish, but the nature of her news, I suspected, was not.

"I'm really not the right grown up to tell," I said.

Her mouth drooped and quivered like little Jane's did when she didn't get her way, and fresh tears spurted from her eyes.

"Come on, Fannie," Will said gently. "We can handle this by ourselves." He took her arm and led her away.

Chapter Ten

A LINE OF red-faced boys sat in the back row of the third grade classroom. They seemed to be holding their breaths and exerting some sort of internal pressure.

“What on earth are you doing?” I asked.

“Make them stop, Miss Chumley,” Sarah cried. “They’re trying to blow air out their eyes. Oh, make them stop.” Her voice quavered as tears flooded her eyes. “Their eyes will pop out!”

Stone-hearted Minnie laughed. “Let ‘em. They’ll have to go to the blind school in Spokane.”

Jackie released his breath with a whoosh. “Is that true, Miss Chumley?” he asked with an air of scientific inquiry. “Could we really pop our eyes out, from the inside?”

Who would have guessed my knowledge of anatomy would be insufficient to teach third grade? Still, it seemed a reasonable assumption to me, and Mrs. Dunn had advised me to act as if I knew the answer even if I didn’t.

“Absolutely,” I said. “And I won’t allow it in my classroom. Keep your eyes in your heads, children, and let’s return to our lesson.”

Thanks to Mrs. Dunn’s preparations, the lessons were proceeding smoothly enough. It was the children themselves who baffled me. They seemed to be good children. Now that they had been told not to pop their eyes out, they were willing to obey. But who would have thought such a rule would be necessary?

“Sit still, Jerry.”

“I am sitting still,” Jerry said with complete sincerity, while simultaneously bending sideways to peer into his desk, dropping his pencil, scratching his bottom, and kicking the back of the desk in front of him.

“Stop talking,” I told Celia.

“I’m not talking, Miss Chumley. I’m just telling Joan not to hold her pen like that ‘cause one time I did that and I got ink all over my dress and it never came out and my mama got so angry.”

“That is talking, Celia,” I pointed out. “You’re talking right now.”

“But I’m not really, Miss Chumley. I’m just explaining about how I was telling Joan about her pen.” She was as sincere as Jerry. How could I convince a child to stop doing what she didn’t realize she was doing at all?

It seemed to me, as I cast my mind back to when I was their age, that my classmates and I sat as still and mute as corpses all day. Was my memory faulty, or was my understanding as skewed back then as theirs was now?

I glanced at the clock and at the times listed on the lesson plans Mrs. Dunn had written. I was appalled at how slowly the day was progressing.

“All right class, it’s time for your reading lesson. Please take out your books and open them to page 150.”

Dozens of little heads disappeared as the students scabbled in the storage compartments of their desks. Large white bows bobbed above the heads of the girls. Some of the bows were stiffly starched and pristine, others limp and poorly knotted, but every single girl had one. It seemed to be a uniform of some sort, much like the boys’ caps, though the caps were not allowed in the

classroom. The caps were of two types, baseball caps and railroad derbies. The boys had divided themselves into two groups, for which the caps seemed to be badges or symbols of some kind.

“Page 150,” I reminded the class as books landed on desks. “‘Somebody’s Darling’ is a poem from the Civil War—”

“Miss Chumley, Annie’s looking at me. Tell Annie to stop looking at me.”

I sighed and looked at the clock.

THE AFTERNOON PASSED more quickly than the morning. The students helped me learn their routines. A spelling bee and an arithmetic game were followed by geography. They were learning about maps, they told me, and were allowed to use paint. At two-thirty they stampeded out amidst a crumpled mess of paper, spilled paint, and open paste jars, and finally, it was time for my last class of the day. I climbed the stairs to the second floor where the classrooms for the upper grades were located.

The first thing I noticed upon entering the seventh grade classroom was that the white bows were smaller and less numerous. Many of the girls had already lowered their skirts and looked like young ladies, but the boys didn’t differ all that much from the third graders.

Guy sat up straight when I entered the classroom. He smiled, pointed, and nodded to his friends. I recognized Russell Gordon Walker and Dewey Murphy, whose essays I had reread the night before. Russell nodded, but Dewey only dropped his head onto his folded arms to hide his red face. Poor Dewey.

Carrie Hennessey sat in the front row. She didn’t bother with starched bows, but instead still wore her two braids held together with a ribbon. Her dress was faded, and her stockings drooped. She watched me closely, her face expressionless. Of course she was normally solemn. I knew that from the day at the confectionary, the day Mr. Stanfield came in and addressed me as Mrs. Jones. Mr. Stanfield’s death was tragic and terrible, but at least in this I benefited from it. The only person in Hillyard who had known me as Mrs. Jones was dead. Unless, of course, Carrie had heard him.

“Good afternoon class.” I placed my lesson plans on the table in front of the room. “My name is Miss Chumley, and I’m your new geography teacher.”

They already knew all about it, I could tell. Thirty-four pairs of eyes watched me intently, some eagerly, some nervously, some friendly, but none openly hostile. Somewhere between third and seventh grade, they’d learned to sit still, for they barely moved a muscle.

I cleared my throat. “Mrs. Dunn told me that you are studying imports and exports. Our lesson today is about the exchange of raw materials for finished goods. Can someone tell me the difference between the two?”

A tall girl in a dress too fancy for school raised her hand. “Mrs. Dunn said you would grade our essays? Have you?”

Grade them? “Er, no, Miss...?”

“My name is Olive Parsons, miss.”

“Thank you. No, Olive, I haven’t quite finished grading your essays. I’ve read them, of course. Today we are going to discuss raw materials and finished goods. Who can give me an example of a finished good?”

Guy waved his arm frantically.

“Yes, Guy.”

He stood beside his desk. “An automobile is a finished good. A motor engine can pull with the force of up to twelve horses and can go ten miles an hour on smooth roads. That’s why we need better roads from here to Spokane. My dad says someday they’ll have to make roads everywhere so people can go places in automobiles, but my mom says we’ll always need horses to get over the mountains. I think my dad’s right, don’t you, Miss Chumley?”

“That’s not what Mrs. Dunn said,” Olive protested. “Mrs. Dunn said they’re expensive and dangerous, and I think so too. Besides, why would anyone want to buy his own engine when there are trolleys and trains that go wherever you could want to go?”

A chorus of protests from the boys erupted at this. Russell Gordon Walker’s voice, deeper than the rest, dominated. “That’s not so, Olive. With a train, you can only go where the tracks are laid.”

“Well, with an automobile you can only go where the roads are,” Olive said.

I thought she made a good point, but I realized I had done the one thing Mrs. Dunn had warned I ought never do—I’d lost control of the classroom.

“That’s enough, boys and girls.” My voice was not as deep as Russell Gordon’s, but I brought forth all the force I could muster, and the children looked my way. “Raw materials. We’re going to discuss raw materials. Who can tell me the raw materials that were used to make the desks in this very room? Olive, please go to the board and write a list.”

By the time I headed home after the last bell, I was more tired than I had ever been in my life, even more tired than my first night on the train, when I barely slept. I was hungry, for it hadn’t occurred to me to bring food with me, and my wrist ached from writing on the blackboard all day. A light snow fell and swirled about my boots as I walked home. The fatigue caused by scrambling to stay ahead of the students all day made me careless, and my steps home took me directly past the marshal’s office.

“Excuse me, Miss Chumley.”

I looked up. The marshal stood in his open doorway buttoning his coat. “I’d like to speak with you, if I may.”

My heart leapt to my throat and nearly choked me. “I—ah, ah, I’m actually in a bit of a hurry to get home. I’ve been teaching all day.”

“I’ll walk with you.” He closed the door behind him, joined me in the road, and lifted the books from my arms.

I tried to calm my racing heart. He wouldn’t carry my books for me if he was going to toss me into jail, would he?

“I understand you knew Mr. Stanfield,” he said.

“Me? Oh no.” My voice shook. “I met him on the train coming out here, but I didn’t know him.”

“You knew him better than anyone else in town, it appears. Tell me what you know of him from your time together. Anything at all that you can remember.”

I kept my head down, my eyes on the road, as I thought. This would require a careful rearrangement of the facts. I’m Miss Chumley, I reminded myself. “He was already on the train when I boarded.”

“Where was that?”

“North Dakota,” I said. “Minot.” I had that much information from the real Miss Chumley, but I prayed he would not ask the name of the station. “It was the middle of the night when I boarded, and I met him the next morning. We sat across from each other on the train. We spoke a bit and learned we were both headed for Hillyard.”

“Did he say anything about his plans once he got here?”

“He told me he worked for the railroad,” I said. “He wanted to work with the town on incorporation. He thought he could help the town incorporate and keep the railroad happy too. Is that why he was killed, Marshal? Was it someone against incorporation?”

“It may have been that, or perhaps a trolley striker’s bullet went astray. It may have been something completely different, but I intend to find out. What else did you talk about?”

“He spoke of his wife and daughters. One of them was nearly my age. Perhaps that was why he was so kind to me. He bought me an orange.”

“Why did he buy you an orange?” He leaped on my statement as if it were suspicious.

“I don’t know. I think he was worried about me.” I raised my wrapped hand. “I’d fallen and hurt my wrist. That’s all.”

He squinted at my lip, and I knew he was thinking about its swollen condition when I first arrived. He would ask now how I hurt it, and he wouldn’t believe a fall on the train.

“Miss Chumley! Miss Chumley, wait up a minute, will you?” a voice behind us called. We turned. Mr. Dunn ran up, his boots slipping on the snow. “I’m very sorry, Miss Chumley. Marshal Mitchell, you’re here too. Good. Just as well. I hope you had a pleasant first day of teaching, Miss Chumley?”

“It went very well, thank you.”

“What’s wrong?” Marshal Mitchell asked.

“Nothing, probably, except, ah, you haven’t seen Fannie, have you, Miss Chumley?”

“Fannie? No, I haven’t,” I said. “Is she missing?”

“No, not missing, no. At least, I don’t think... That is, she hasn’t come home from school, and her mother checked with a friend of hers, and it appears Fannie didn’t go to school today at all.”

“Oh dear.” I wondered if Will Sims had missed school too.

“I know she likes to keep secrets,” Mr. Dunn said. “And she likes to pretend she’s older than she is. I thought perhaps she might have confided in you, Miss Chumley. Do you have any idea where she might be?”

I thought she probably ran off with Will Sims to get married, actually, but I couldn’t admit to knowing that. They’d want to know how I knew and why I didn’t speak up sooner. “No. No, I don’t. I’m sorry.”

“Did she take anything with her?” Marshal Mitchell asked. “Have you checked her room?”

“No,” Mr. Dunn said. “Not yet. I’ve been rushing around looking for her. I didn’t think to look at her things.”

“I’ll walk back with you,” Marshal Mitchell said. He dropped my books into my arms. “We’ll check her room. I’m certain we’ll find some indication of where she might be. Good evening, Miss Chumley. Thank you for your help.”

“Good-bye, and good luck, Mr. Dunn. Maybe she’ll be home by the time you get there.”

Mr. Dunn was too distracted to do more than nod. I watched them disappear into the falling snow, assaulted by conflicting feelings of relief and guilt. I could narrow Mr. Dunn’s search for his daughter considerably if I told him about Will and my suspicions about Fannie, but I was grateful that Fannie’s disappearance had diverted Marshal Mitchell from his questioning of me. Once again, as with Mr. Stanfield’s death, I was blessed by the misfortune of others.

Oh, Fannie was probably on her way home at that very moment, I decided, plagued with worry once she realized how late it had become. She’d be in some trouble with her parents, but it would be through her own doings and none of mine.

I shrugged off my guilt and trudged home.

I NEARLY FELL asleep at dinner that night, I was so weary. I would have skipped it altogether, but I felt starved from having no lunch. I ate in silence and let the talk of the table flow around me. Much of it was about the trolley strike and what everyone intended to do in Spokane when the strike was over. After dinner I made arrangements with Ida Mae to provide me with a bit of lunch each day for two dollars more a month, then dragged myself to my rooms.

I really wanted to take a hot bath and go to bed, but it was too early for that. The bathroom order had been established. Cora and Jane went first, Grace and Trissie second, and I would go last, when the bath mat was soaked through and the water from the tap had grown lukewarm. It wasn't worth waiting up for. I would take a cold sponge bath instead.

I removed the combs and pins from my hair, shook it out, and stretched my neck with relief as the weight on the back of it eased. I poured water from the pitcher into the washbowl, and was unbuttoning the front of my shirtwaist when I heard a rap on my sitting room door. I quickly buttoned up again, moved through the sitting room, and opened the door. Grace stood in the doorway, and Trissie peeked around her shoulder.

"Mabel, may we have a word," Grace said. Her voice was hushed, for her, and she peered down the hall left and right as if worried about being overheard.

I forced my tired bones to stand straighter, on guard for her next words, and stepped back. What reason could Grace have to hush her voice with me unless she'd tumbled onto one of my secrets? Both women entered and I shut the door.

Grace looked around and said, "Still moving in, I see. You'll want to get some nice things to put about, doilies and such, to make it homelike. You should step over to see our place. The rooms are the same, reversed of course, but they don't look anything like this. Trissie will embroider some antimacassars for your chairs. Just for show, of course. You won't have any gentleman callers." She laughed.

I glanced at Trissie. She nodded and smiled.

"Thank you," I said.

Trissie touched Grace's arm and sent her a meaningful look. Grace gave a nod and said, "I'm getting to that, Triss. Mabel, we have here in Hillyard a group of women, women like you and me, that meets now and then for a private gathering. Just for talk about what interests us."

"Women like you and me?"

"Yes, old maids and spinsters and women who work for a living. Career women, aren't we? Oh, Trissie ain't a spinster, of course, but she's with me. There's no talk of husbands or babies allowed. Just us and our lives and jobs. We're meeting this Friday at Adelaide's. Can you come?"

"At Adelaide's house?"

"Well, it's her uncle's house, actually, but he don't go upstairs anymore. There's a big room up there on the top floor that we use for our salons. We call them salons, like the Frenchies."

"We'd be so pleased if you could join us," Trissie said.

Her soft voice surprised a smile out of me. She smiled back, and I didn't feel I could refuse after that. Besides, Adelaide would be there, and intelligent conversation with working women sounded intriguing. I'd been one for an entire day, after all.

"Thank you. I would love to join you."

“It’s settled then. You come home from work on Friday, and we’ll all go over together. We’ll borrow Ida Mae’s wagon. You and Trissie are little enough, we’ll all fit if we squeeze. And don’t mention this to the others, of course. Our salons are very select.”

Chapter Eleven

I LOOKED FORWARD to the salon on Friday, but there were four days of teaching to get through before then, and the start of Tuesday was not auspicious. The third grade classroom had not been cleaned. Paper still littered the floor, paint brushes stuck where they had been dropped, and paste in the uncapped jars had dried up. Tacked to the blackboard, which had not been wiped, was a note from the principal.

Miss Chumley, the mess you left this room in is unacceptable! Clean it up immediately and see to it that your room is cleaned daily before you leave! Wipe the blackboard, and paint is for every fourth Friday ONLY.

I crumpled the note, feeling very ill-used. How was I supposed to know it was my job to clean the classroom? Nobody told me. Besides, I had my hands full with teaching thirty-four eight- and nine-year-old children. Children, I now realized, who were not the sweet cherubs I'd thought, but rather were conniving hooligans who had played me for a fool. They knew they weren't allowed to paint on a Monday.

I cleaned the room as best I could before the students arrived, then forced them to finish the job as soon as the morning prayer was finished. For the rest of the day, I kept their little noses buried in schoolbooks regardless of whether they were blowing their eyes out from the inside or not. I felt a bit mean and very much like a forceful career woman when I made them clean the room again at the end of the day. I don't know if they learned any lessons at all that day, but I certainly did.

I left my pristine classroom and went upstairs, where I discovered how little seventh graders care about Brazilian exports when a real life drama was unfolding in their lives. Fannie had not returned the night before, and it was now common knowledge that she and Will Sims were both missing.

"Who can tell me the importance of coffee to the Brazilian economy?" I asked.

Several hands shot up, but only one waved frantically back and forth.

"Guy?"

"Did you hear about my sister?"

"Yes, I did. I know you must be worried, but let's think about Brazil now, shall we?"

"I think she ran away with that boy," Guy said.

"Perhaps, but you don't know that, and it's not proper to spread rumors."

"They were in love," Guy said, the tone of his voice leaving no one guessing as to his feelings about it. The other students giggled.

"Your parents will find out what happened," I said. "Marshal Mitchell will help them. Meanwhile, coffee makes up what percentage of Brazil's exports?"

"Marshal Mitchell never asked me anything at all," Guy protested. "They made me go out of the room, and I'm the only one who even knew about that boy."

"That's enough, Guy. This is not the time or place for this conversation. Now, about Brazil's coffee."

Guy glared at me and then buried his face in his arms for the rest of class. I ignored him until the bell rang, when I said, "Guy, please stay after class." I heard gasps from the other students, but Guy was not in trouble. I was merely curious. I'd thought I was the only one who knew Fannie's secret.

I sat on the desk beside Guy in the empty classroom. "You knew about Will Sims?"

Guy raised his head. Pink indentations creased his cheek where his head had lain, but he hadn't been weeping or sulking like I'd thought. He just looked sleepy. "I didn't know it was Will Sims until last night, but I knew she was sneaking out to see a boy. I knew more than Mother and Dad. They didn't even know that."

"She was sneaking out? When?"

"Lots of times. At night. Her room's right next to mine. I heard her leave all the time, and sometimes I heard her come back. It was always late, after Mother and Dad went to bed."

I recalled the sounds I'd heard the first night I stayed there. If Fannie always made that much noise, I wasn't surprised Guy heard it. The wonder was that his parents did not.

"Did you tell Marshal Mitchell this?"

"No, I told you, they wouldn't even let me stay in the room. I would have told him if he asked me."

"Did you know she was planning to run away?"

"No."

"You didn't notice her packing or acting any differently?"

He squinted out the window and shook his head. "I didn't go in her room. She might have packed something. But she was acting strange ever since we found that body."

"Strange in what way?"

"Sort of scared. Girls are scared about things like that." He stretched his neck to see out the window and waved.

I stood to see what was out there. Carrie Hennessey stood at the edge of the playground in the trampled snow. When she saw me looking, she turned so I could only see her back.

"Is Carrie waiting for you?"

Guy shrugged. "I don't know. Maybe. Sometimes we walk partway home together, if we boys aren't playing snowball. I don't like girls, but her family's sort of friends with Mother and Dad."

"The Hennesseys?" They didn't seem the Dunns' sort at all.

"Not Mr. Hennessey, just Carrie and Jenny and their mother. She knew Mother back in St. Paul."

"Your mother lived in St. Paul?"

"Yes, we all did," he said, as if I was silly not to know it. "That's where we're from. I was just a baby then."

"Why did you move here?"

"Because of Dad's job. He worked for the railroad back then."

It seemed a coincidence that the Dunns and Hester Hennessey and Mr. Stanfield all hailed from St. Paul, but once I thought about it, it made sense. Hillyard was a railroad town, and St. Paul was the railroad's headquarters.

"Did Mrs. Hennessey move here the same time as your family?"

"No, and she wasn't Mrs. Hennessey then. She—" Guy broke off, a startled and wary look crossing his face. "I forgot. I mean, I forget. I have to go now, Miss Chumley. May I go now? Carrie's waiting for me."

I nodded, and he darted to the coat closet and grabbed his coat, hat, and baseball glove. I heard him clatter down the stairs and stood at the window to watch him run across the playground to where Carrie stood. He spoke urgently to her, and they both turned and looked up at my window. I raised my hand in greeting, but they did not acknowledge it. They turned and ran, slipping on the ice, toward Market Street.

I STOPPED AT Hennessey's Confectionary on my way home. I was curious to learn how Carrie's mother knew Mr. Stanfield, and besides, I was out of fudge.

A row of children clutching pennies stood in front of the candy case chattering about the selection before them, while Mrs. Hennessey measured bon bons for a large woman in a green striped dress. The door to the back room was open and a small gate was latched across the opening. The room was apparently lived in, as toys and boots and dishes were scattered about it. Teddy played there with a girl who was a smaller version of Carrie.

I stood behind the striped woman and waited my turn. Mrs. Hennessey glanced at me with a polite smile that faded when she saw me. Her eyes were puffy as if she had been crying.

The striped woman turned to go. I stepped forward, but before I could speak the back door into the kitchen opened and Carrie rushed in. Mrs. Hennessey looked back at the sound.

"You're late," she said sharply.

"I'm sorry," Carrie said. She threw her coat onto a kitchen chair, snatched up an apron, and unlatched the gate into the shop. "My teacher kept us late. I—" She saw me and froze.

"Well, don't just stand there," Mrs. Hennessey said. "The children have been waiting. What would you like, ma'am?"

Without taking her eyes off me, Carrie stepped slowly through the door, latched the gate, and wrapped the apron around her.

"The bon bons that woman was buying looked good," I said. "May I have a quarter pound?"

Carrie released a breath and quickly tied the apron in front of her. She moved to the candy counter, and the children clamored to make their purchases.

"I was sorry to hear about your friend," I said to Mrs. Hennessey.

"My friend?"

"Mr. Stanfield."

"The man who was killed?" She did not pause in scooping bon bons into a paper sack. "He was no friend of mine. That will be eighteen cents."

"But he knew you." I handed her two dimes. "He called you Hester."

She shot a glance at Carrie and said in a low voice, "My name is Helen."

I didn't believe her, but I was too burdened with my own alias to be concerned with hers. "Well, I'm sorry in any case. It must have been a shock."

"Don't say that. I tell you, I didn't know him." She looked me deliberately in the eyes. "Mrs. Jones, is it?"

It took me a stunned moment to realize what she'd said. "Don't call me that," I said through numb lips, and this time it was I who lowered my voice and glanced at Carrie. "My name is Mabel Chumley."

"And my name is Helen Hennessey." We stared at each other for a long moment until she seemed to come to a decision. "Come with me." She opened the gate to the back room. I circled the counter and followed her.

“Mama!” Teddy toddled up to his mother with his arms outstretched.

Mrs. Hennessey picked him up. “Jenny, go help Carrie out front. I’ll take care of Teddy.”

“Good,” the girl said with more relief than respect, and she skipped through the open gate into the shop.

I saw a staircase leading up and wondered if Mr. Hennessey was asleep up there. Mrs. Hennessey glanced that way also, shot me a glance, and led me without apology through the messy room to the kitchen beyond. She closed the door between the two rooms, and we sat at a wooden table.

“I heard him call you Mrs. Jones,” she said.

“And I heard him call you Hester.”

We assessed one another, wary but joined in a secret we shared, a name that only Mr. Stanfield knew, and now Mr. Stanfield was dead.

“Let us agree,” she said. “I won’t reveal your name if you won’t reveal mine.”

It wasn’t right. For reasons I didn’t know, Mrs. Hennessey didn’t want anyone to know her true identity. Badly enough to kill Mr. Stanfield to keep it secret? I didn’t know, but I was in no position to cast stones.

“All right,” I said.

Chapter Twelve

OF COURSE MRS. Hennessey wasn't the only one who heard Mr. Stanfield call me Mrs. Jones. Carrie had been present as well, and she reminded me of it the next day.

"I've graded your essays," I told the class. "I found them very interesting."

Several hands shot up in the air.

"Yes?" I looked at May, a tall dark-haired girl sitting behind Carrie.

"May I pass them out?"

"Oh. Well, yes, I suppose so." I handed the papers to her, and the others lowered their hands with disappointed expressions. "I've written your grade at the top of the paper, and I've put comments on some of them. Please take some time to think about what I've written."

The students practically snatched their papers from May's hands, and before all the papers had even been passed back, hands were raised in the air again.

I nodded at plump little Beanie Sipes. "Yes?"

"May I read my essay to the class?"

"Me too," someone said.

"Can we all?"

"Hm." I pretended to consider it as if granting a favor, but there was no hesitation in my mind. Listening to the students read would be much easier than trying to teach about the economics of imports and exports, a subject that was still fuzzy in my mind. "All right. You may go first, Mr. Sipes."

So the students read aloud and the hour passed easily enough. As we neared the end of it, only one student had not read.

"Carrie Hennessey, will you read your essay?"

"Do I have to?"

The indrawn gasps of her classmates told me they were as taken aback as I was. It was disrespectful and not at all like Carrie. The students watched me closely to see what I would do. I had no choice. Mrs. Dunn's voice rang in my ears. I had to be firm.

"Yes, you have to. Read your essay to the class, Carrie."

She clenched her lips and breathed heavily out her nose, but she reached into her desk and pulled out a crumpled paper ball. She halfheartedly smoothed out the paper and stood at the front of the class. Heaving a sigh, she mumbled her poem, ignoring the rhythm and punctuation she'd so carefully included when writing it. She read like someone who had never even seen a poem, let alone written one. I had never heard Carrie read before and might have suspected that she hadn't written it after all, but the puzzled looks on her classmates' faces told me that this was not the way Carrie normally read.

She finished reading, slouched into her desk, and shoved the paper back inside it. Before I could think of anything to say, the bell rang, and the students surged for the door.

I went to Carrie's desk and reached inside for the essay. I'd given her an A, but I knew I'd also written a comment on the paper. Had it offended her somehow? I smoothed out the paper. "Very imaginative Carrie. Your ideas are original, and your poem is well constructed. Very

clever.” No, there was nothing wrong with the comment, but beneath it, Carrie had scrawled in heavy pencil, “Not so clever as you think you are, Mrs. Jones!”

My heart sank. I’d already guessed that Carrie must have told her mother about the name Mr. Stanfield called me, but why it should make Carrie so angry with me, I had no idea.

It was nearly dark when I finally left the school. I forgot to have the third graders clean the classroom before they left, so I had to do it myself. I took the shortest route home, after a detour around the jail, through the sparsely populated streets west of Market. A mist of freezing rain that day had glazed the snow with a thick crust of ice. My boots crunched loudly and masked any other sounds that might be nearby, and there were no electric streetlights to illuminate the area, so I was completely unprepared when I felt a hard blow between my shoulder blades. I turned with a cry, more from fear than pain, but there was no one there. I felt another blow, this time to the side of my head. It knocked my hat off, and I realized what it was.

I was being pelted by snowballs.

Ice balls, rather. They were hard, compact and deadly as rocks, and I shivered with genuine fear as another icy pellet whizzed by my face with dangerous force.

“Stop it!” I shouted in the direction from which the missiles came. “You could really injure someone!”

A large ice ball struck my chest. I staggered back, just a little, but it was enough to make me slip on the ice. I thought I heard a soft giggle just before another ball exploded in my face. I let out a cry and fell backward onto the frozen ground.

I heard footsteps running away, a woman’s voice calling out, and more footsteps, this time running toward me. I put a hand to my head. A drip on the side of my face was warm.

“It’s Mabel!” the woman said, and I recognized the voice. It was Ida Mae, and soon I was surrounded by my housemates.

“She’s bleeding,” Trissie said.

“I’ll go get the doctor,” Fred offered.

“And the marshal,” Grace said.

“Not the marshal,” I said, though I did not object to the doctor. I struggled to sit up, and Ida Mae helped me. “It was only snowballs.”

“Fred, go get the buggy and bring it here,” Ida Mae said. “It’ll be faster to take her to the doctor ourselves.”

“Can you stand?” Trissie asked. “You shouldn’t be on the cold ground.”

I nodded. The blow to my head did not worry me much. I had some experience with head wounds, and I knew they bled more than they hurt. Before I could speak, though, Grace said, “You take that side, Ida Mae,” and she grabbed my right hand and heaved with all her strength.

My arm felt torn in two. I screamed, fell back down, and curled myself into a ball of pain.

Chapter Thirteen

FRED BROUGHT THE doctor to me after all, since climbing into the buggy proved impossible, and I refused to allow Fred and Grace to lift me up. The boarding house was only a block away. The women escorted me home, while Fred rode off in the buggy to collect Dr. Keating.

We waited in the parlor. I half lay on the divan while Trissie pressed a cloth to my forehead and Grace sat in the corner and brooded.

"It wasn't your fault," I told her for the third time. "I hurt it when I fell."

"I made it worse," Grace said.

"You didn't," I said, though I knew she had. Hot waves of pain throbbed in my wrist, and I could feel it swelling beneath the flannel bandage. Ida Mae served dinner in the dining room to Cora and Jane, but she poked her head into the parlor every few minutes to say "I've turned up the heat," or "Do you want me to bring you some grub?" or "I don't know what's taking Fred so long." I wondered the last myself. I felt weak and wounded and scared for my arm. Adelaide would be competent and cheerful, and I longed for her comforting presence.

When the door finally opened, though, it was not Adelaide's voice I heard, but a stranger's. I opened my eyes and sat up. A tall man with white hair entered the parlor.

"What do we have here, eh? Good thing you're bleeding, miss, or I'd have trouble figuring out who the patient is. You're all white as sheets."

"Miss Chumley is your patient, doctor," Grace said, rising up to join him in looming over me. "She'll need stitches, no doubt, and you'll want to take a look at her arm. It's broken, I'm sure of it. I did it. I admit it. I didn't mean to, but it's all my fault."

"Are you a doctor now too?" the man asked. "Ain't one lady doctor enough for this town, now we got to have two?"

"Of course I'm not a doctor," Grace said, "I considered it once upon a time, to tell the truth, but I never got the schooling."

"You'd make a fine doctor, Grace," Trissie said.

"All right, ladies, get out of my way now, and let me take a look at Miss Chumley." He pulled a chair up to the divan and took the cloth from Trissie. "Ida Mae, will you take these ladies away and give me some privacy with my patient?"

Ida Mae shooed both of the women into the dining room. I finally felt enough in control of my voice to ask, "Where is Dr. Keating?"

"You're looking at him," the man said, fingering my cut. "Oh, I expect you mean my niece. She's busy with other patients. Used to be her backing up me when I was busy, now it's the other way around. You will need a stitch or two here. How did this happen?"

"Snowballs," I said.

"Eh?"

"Ice balls. Someone threw ice balls at me. It made me slip on the ice."

"Mm. Students of yours? Don't be surprised. Hillyard's a small town. Even I heard about the new school teacher. You were lucky, here. Any lower and you could have lost an eye."

"Lucky," I said.

“Hah,” Dr. Keating said. “I have to say things like that. I’m a doctor.” He rummaged in a black leather bag much larger than the one Adelaide carried on her belt. I tried to find a resemblance to Adelaide in his looks. He was tall and so was she, and they both had large teeth, though his were stained brown from tobacco. He was quite old, seventy or more, and gaunt, though he used to be a larger man, judging by the loose hang of his clothes. He pulled black thread and a long thin needle from the bag and made a whistle with his tongue as he threaded it. “You may have a scar, but I’ll make it as small as I can. This’ll sting a bit, so brace yourself.”

It stung more than a bit, but I concentrated on the pain in my arm to distract myself.

“How many stitches?” I asked.

“I think three will do it.” He pulled out his scissors to snip a thread.

“Can you leave the threads a bit long?”

“Eh?” He pulled back, scissors in hand, and peered into my eyes, first one, then the other, as if trying to see whether the blow to my head had knocked me loonie. Apparently satisfied that I was in my right mind, he shrugged and said, “You’re the customer. Half an inch long enough?”

“Make it an inch.”

He handed me a mirror when he was finished. It looked horrible, a gruesome mass of black threads knotted in a rough line above my right eyebrow.

“Thank you,” I said. “It’s lovely.”

“Addie told me you were something out of the ordinary, and I see she was right. You may want to wrap a bandage around it when you go out and about so you don’t scare the good people of the town, but I’ll leave it uncovered for now. Keep it dry and exposed to the air as much as you can. Now let’s have a look at this arm of yours. Addie wrap it like this?”

“Yes.” For some reason my voice wobbled. “She thought it was sprained or maybe broken, but I think it’s worse now.”

He nodded and examined it closely. He was gentle, but it still hurt like the dickens, and I had to lie back at one point and close my eyes. “My guess is you had a crack in the bone. It wouldn’t have been out of place, but when you fell on it or it was pulled, it wasn’t strong enough to take it. That’s when it snapped. I’m going to have to set it for you, I’m afraid. You won’t like it.”

I nodded. It was what I’d expected.

“I’ll make you a plaster cast when I’m finished. I have some gypsum in my bag, and Ida Mae will have some cotton cloth she can cut into strips for me. Look the other way now, you don’t want to watch this.”

I had barely turned my head when I felt a terrible wrenching of my poor arm. I let out a squeak and could not stop the tears that dripped from my eyes, but aside from the horrible throbbing, it was over in an instant.

“Don’t move now,” Dr. Keating said. “I’ll be back with the plaster.”

An hour later I had a neat plaster cast wrapped around my thumb and all my fingers but the tips, and it extended nearly to my elbow. I could not move my wrist at all. It was a relief to have my arm so protected, but a fierce ache still thrummed beneath its surface.

Dr. Keating waved a hypodermic needle at me. “I can offer you an injection of morphine, if you like. It will make the pain go away, I assure you, and it will help you sleep.”

“Thank you, but no. I have to teach tomorrow morning.” I had heard too many horror stories of heroin addiction to risk it.

“Suit yourself.” He dropped the needle back into the bag and closed it up. “The cast may become loose in a day or so when the swelling goes down. I can inject a bit more plaster in there

to hold your arm still, or Addie can. We're on the telephone line, or you can tell her next time you see her."

It was a pleasant reminder that I would see her in two days, for I had not forgotten that Grace and Trissie would bring me to the salon at Dr. Keating's house on Friday evening.

Chapter Fourteen

“MANDY, HOW MANY kegs, of nine gallons each, can be filled from a hogshead containing sixty-three gallons of vinegar?”

“Seven.”

“That is correct. John, if a man travels four miles an hour, how long will it take him to travel forty-eight miles?”

“Uh, five?”

“That is incorrect. Please sit down.”

I wasn't the martinet sending John to his seat. I'd borrowed Ethel, an eighth grader with a desire to teach, from upstairs. In addition to administering the practice of oral arithmetic, Ethel had also led the morning prayer, orchestrated the reading aloud of an ode to a skylark, and directed a spelling bee. She had sent two students to the corner and one to the principal's office, and she'd coerced the remaining students into good behavior with the promise of letting them use real ink instead of pencils when it was time to practice their handwriting.

I sat in the back of the room, rested my poor arm and head, and learned a few lessons about teaching. I had been doing it all wrong. Within minutes of entering the classroom, Ethel had the students rising to answer questions, arms at their sides, with no fidgeting whatsoever. It was something in the tone of her voice, I decided, and her firm discipline. Whatever it was, I was grateful to her. I'd slept poorly the night before, the pain in my arm and the questions in my head both keeping me awake. I could have asked Mrs. Dunn to teach my classes that day. She wouldn't have liked it, but she could hardly have refused, not with my banged up appearance. But I had only taught for three days. I didn't want anyone to think I was looking for an excuse to stay home already. Besides, I was eager to confront two young miscreants in the seventh grade.

Out of consideration for the third graders, I had taped a small piece of gauze over my stitches that morning. Before entering the seventh grade classroom at the end of the day, I removed the gauze, fluffed the black threads, and wrapped a wide strip of cotton cloth around my forehead, tucking the end in to keep it secure. I carried a small mirror in my purse. I pulled it out and examined myself. I looked like I'd been in a war. Perfect.

I pushed up the sleeve of my right arm, the better to show off the cast, and entered the classroom.

“Miss Chumley, what happened to you?”

“You look terrible, miss.”

“Perhaps we shouldn't have class today. You don't look up to it.”

“You should go to the hospital!”

I had not wasted my time in the back of the third grade classroom that day.

“Silence,” I pronounced with the firmness of Ethel. “Everyone sit down. Hands clasped on your desks. Eyes forward.”

They looked shocked but complied with a quickness that proved they had known proper classroom behavior all along. Within half a minute the classroom was silent and still, and all eyes were straight ahead. Or nearly all.

The only two students who had remained silent and avoided looking at me, after their first quick glance upon my entrance, still refused to look forward. Carrie sat obediently with her hands clasped on her desk, but her eyes were cast downward and her lips clenched. Her face was pale. Guy ignored my instructions completely. He slumped in his seat, and his hands covered his face. I had suspected as much, but this evidence that Guy and Carrie were behind the ice ball attack of the day before made my chest burn.

I gave the class the same explanation I'd given the third graders, an ice ball gone astray, and followed with a stern lecture about the hazards of careless play. My anger at the two culprits lent an edge to my voice that the students were unfamiliar with, and they listened meekly, though with some bewilderment. Finally we turned to our lesson. I required the students to stand when they spoke, arms to their sides, and they performed like soldiers. Sad, meek little soldiers, to be sure, and I regretted my harshness almost immediately. I had set the course, though, and had no energy to change it that day. We soldiered on, but I did not call on Guy or Carrie until the bell rang, when I called out, "Guy, Carrie, please remain after class."

Guy had kept his face hidden during the entire class, and at my words he slumped even further. Carrie did not move except to finally raise her gaze from her hands to stare straight ahead.

Their desks were two rows apart. Carrie sat in the front of the classroom and Guy in the middle. I moved to Guy's row and perched myself on the top of the first desk so that I faced both of them.

"I wondered if you'd like to see my stitches," I said.

"What?" Guy croaked.

"No thank you, Miss Chumley," Carrie said.

"No? Oh, I was certain you would want to see your handiwork." I unwrapped the bandage from my head, using the fingertips of my right hand as much as possible to show off the cast. "There. I think you must have been the pitcher, Guy. Is that the right word? Pitcher? You have a strong throw. Look at me."

Guy slid his hands down his face, stretching his cheeks like they were melting, and looked at my stitches. His eyes flooded with tears. "I'm sorry," he said. "I'm sorry, Miss Chumley."

"Look at my stitches, Carrie."

She didn't want to, but she was too obedient a child to refuse outright. She glanced to the left and looked at me. Her eyes flicked up at the stitches and she flinched.

"Dr. Keating says I'm lucky," I said. "A little lower, and I could have lost the eye."

Carrie swallowed.

"There will be a scar, of course," I continued. "It's too bad. I was never a beauty, but I've been told I have a nice complexion."

She bit her lip and turned away.

"We're sorry, Miss Chumley," Guy said again. His face was blotched and wet. "We didn't mean to hurt you. They were just snowballs. We only wanted to scare you."

"Why?" I asked. "Why did you want to scare me?"

Guy chewed his lip and looked at Carrie.

"Carrie?" I asked.

I didn't think she would answer, but after a long moment she turned to face me. Two steady streams trickled from her eyes, but aside from the tears, she didn't look sorry.

"It's your own fault," she said. "You shouldn't nose around in other people's business. Why don't you mind your own damn business?"

“Carrie!” Guy seemed shocked out of his tears. “Don’t talk like that.”

She turned on him. “Oh, you shut your mouth, Guy Dunn. If you weren’t such a blabber, this never would have happened. It’s all your fault.”

“It seems it’s everyone’s fault but yours,” I said.

“It was Carrie’s idea,” Guy said.

“Why, Carrie?”

Her shoulders slumped. “I just don’t want you to bother my mother.”

“Your mother? Does she know about this?”

Carrie’s eyes widened. “No! Don’t tell her, Miss Chumley. It’s just—I heard you call her by her old name. Nobody here knows it, except for Guy’s family, and they never tell.”

“I don’t know it,” Guy said.

“Good,” Carrie said. “You can’t blab it that way.”

“So you pelted me with ice balls so I wouldn’t blab it either?” I asked.

“No,” Carrie said. “I don’t know. I was angry. Mother was so scared after you left, and Guy told me what he said to you after school that day. You know too much about us now, and nobody’s supposed to know.”

“Your warning was unnecessary,” I said. “I wouldn’t have told. Your mother and I have already talked about that. Besides, I wasn’t the only one who knew your mother’s name. Mr. Stanfield knew it.”

“I know,” Carrie said. “But he’s dead.”

I knew Carrie was an intelligent girl before I even met her. I could almost see the thoughts process in her mind, and could see by the expression in her eyes when she understood the implication of her words.

“My mother didn’t kill Mr. Stanfield,” she said.

“No.” I nodded in agreement, though I wasn’t convinced. “But what about your father?”

“He’s not my father,” she said. “And he didn’t know anything about Mr. Stanfield.”

“He could have overheard him in the store that day.”

“He didn’t,” Carrie said. “My mother made sure of that. She didn’t want Glenn to know anything, so she brought Mr. Stanfield back into the kitchen. They only whispered, and Glenn was still upstairs sleeping. He didn’t hear a thing.”

I wished I could be as certain of that as Carrie was.

Guy sat with his arms crossed on his desk, his head resting on them but turned sideways so he could watch us. His face was flushed and still damp from crying, but slack with exhaustion. Carrie’s face split into a tremendous yawn. They had both been under a terrible strain, and their bodies were taking the toll. I sent them both home.

I found a pair of scissors in the teacher’s desk and pulled my mirror from my bag. I trimmed the threads on the stitches until they were barely noticeable, then donned my coat and went home as well, where I went immediately to bed and slept through the night. They weren’t the only ones whose body was exacting revenge.

Chapter Fifteen

FOR A BRIEF time, I went to college, Barnard, the women's annex at Columbia. I was twenty years old at the time. I asked Papa if I could go, and he didn't seem to care one way or the other, so I went, and I had a glorious time. I lived in a house with eight other freshman girls and a house mother, who saw to it that we got in no trouble. The classes and lectures were challenging and sometimes grueling, but the fun we had more than made up for it. We had teas and dances and parties and plays. I belonged to the German Club, and I played on the freshman class basketball team. I was not athletic enough to play for the college team, but we were good enough to beat the sophomores. I had been there five months and had just started working for the college newspaper, "The Barnard Bulletin," when Papa wrote and asked me to come home.

He missed me, I thought, so I dropped it all and went home. Perhaps he did miss me, but the only welcome I received when I got home was a list of everything that had fallen into disrepair while I'd been gone and an article clipped from the newspaper about how college made women unhealthy, unwholesome, and unwomanly. I pretended, even to myself, that I was grateful to be rescued from such a fate. I certainly did not want to be unwomanly.

I spent the next three years being Papa's housekeeper, growing more dissatisfied every day. This was my reward for being womanly? I did not like it. So when I received my first and only proposal of marriage, I married Robert. Papa warned me not to, but I suspected Papa of ulterior motives. After all, when I married, he would have to hire a housekeeper. In the end, of course, Papa was right. Marriage to Robert was far worse than living with Papa, and neither could hold a candle to the glorious life I'd lived for those five short months at Barnard.

It had been nearly eight years, I calculated, since I had attended a social gathering composed solely of women, and Friday evening I was so excited I could hardly sit still on the buggy seat next to Grace. Fortunately we were wedged in too tightly to allow much fidgeting. Grace sat between Trissie and me and handled the reins of Ida Mae's old horse, Tim. It was a short trip, less than a mile, so we didn't have time to get cold or uncomfortable.

Dr. Keating's house was three stories tall, sided in clapboard and painted white, and well-lit with outdoor electric lights on poles, two in the front and one in the back. A white picket fence surrounded the yard. Grace pulled the buggy alongside it to the stable in back, where she unhitched Tim and stabled him alongside two other horses. There was a fourth stall, but instead of a horse, it held Adelaide's bicycle.

We entered the house through the back door without knocking. "We're expected to let ourselves in," Trissie said softly.

"This way," Grace said. We passed through a darkened kitchen to steep stairs leading up the back of the house. A single electric bulb lit the staircase. It was narrow enough I could touch the walls on both sides as we ascended. We reached a landing that led to a carpeted hall with several doors on each side.

"Quiet," Grace whispered, though we hadn't made a peep. We did not stop on the landing, but turned and climbed on to the third floor. It was the strangest entry to a salon I had ever known, and if I hadn't been assured that Adelaide would be at the top, I might have run back home.

We reached the third floor. Grace opened the door into a large room, brightly lit and welcoming, with music and conversation and a fire crackling in the fireplace. I smiled with relief at seeing the comfortable room, but my relief soon turned to disappointment. There were six people in the room, not counting us, but half of them were men, and I did not see Adelaide.

A woman played “So Long Mary” on the piano, and a young man sat beside her to turn the pages. Another woman lounged on a divan leaning back against the chest of a man who draped his arm around her shoulders, his hand nearly on her breast. Both of them held smoking cigarettes in their fingers. A third couple stood beside the window with drinks in their hands.

At our entrance, all six looked at us, but they did not act surprised or stir themselves to greet us except for the man at the window. He approached us, and I thought there was something peculiar about him. He looked familiar to me. His face was flushed, and he had ginger curls about his scalp. Did Adelaide have a brother? I noticed a long braid down his back, and realized the truth. It was a woman! It was Adelaide!

She stared at me as if Grace had brought an orangutan, and I suspected my expression must mirror hers.

“Grace,” she hissed, not taking her eyes from me. “What is she doing here?”

“I brought her along,” Grace said. “I knew you were too shy to bring it up.”

“No.” Adelaide shook her head. “No, she’s not one of—oh good Lord.”

I glanced beyond Adelaide at the others in the room. They watched us curiously, though still none of them moved, and I realized it was not what I’d thought. There were no men in the room. They were all women, but half were dressed like men.

“Mabel, I’m so sorry,” Adelaide said. “Grace is wrong. She assumed something she shouldn’t have. She shouldn’t have brought you here.”

“Oh dear,” Trissie said. “I wondered, but Grace seemed so certain.”

Adelaide scowled. “Grace is always certain, but she is also quite often wrong.”

Grace didn’t hear her, though, for she had slipped through a door beside the stairs and closed it behind her.

“Is it a play?” I asked, for we had performed plays at Barnard, and girls always had to dress like men to play the male parts.

“No.” Adelaide’s cheeks flushed a darker red. “It’s not a play. We just—well, yes, in a way it is. We gather here like this now and then. These clothes, they’re just for fun. We like to, well, it’s just that sometimes women would rather not be with men. Sometimes women want to be with other women.”

“I know.” It was why I had wanted so badly to come to the salon, after all.

“I mean, some women prefer to be with other women.”

Trissie nodded. “It’s true.”

“There’s no harm in it,” Adelaide said, “but people wouldn’t understand. It mustn’t get out that we dress like this sometimes.”

The door beside us opened and Grace emerged, but she was nothing like the Grace I knew. She was dressed completely like a man, in oxford shoes, gray checked pants, vest, coat, and collar. She had unfastened her hair and tucked it down the back of her coat so that it appeared short. She carried a cigar in one hand and wrapped her other arm around Trissie’s waist.

“Well, Mabel, what do you think of me? Quite the change, isn’t it?”

“Indeed it is.”

“I know Trissie likes it,” she said, and Trissie smiled.

“You’re just going to have to change back, Grace,” Adelaide said with a scold in her voice. “You have to take Mabel home.”

“Oh, no,” I said. The evening was strange, but it was interesting, and I certainly didn’t want to go home to sit all alone in my room. “Don’t make me leave. I won’t tell.”

“Course she won’t tell,” Grace said. “Why would she? Did you get any of that good whiskey, like I asked, Adelaide?” She moved away without waiting for an answer, guiding Trissie to a sideboard where bottles and glasses were laid.

Adelaide remained by my side, frowning at me as if trying to figure out what to do with me.

“Truly,” I said. “I don’t care how you dress. Besides, I’ve already seen you. What good would sending me home do?”

Adelaide didn’t answer. Instead, she put a hand to my forehead and used a finger to lift the curl I had arranged over my black stitches. She examined them with a physician’s eye, seeming more professional in trousers than she had in skirts. “Uncle does good work,” she said. “I doubt you’ll have a scar.”

“He told you about it?”

“Yes. He assured me he wasn’t trying to steal my patient.” She half smiled. “When I first moved here, I could hardly get any business at all. I was barely able to even pay my rent by handling the emergencies that came along when Uncle was too busy. Now it’s the other way around. I’m the one who’s busy, and he’s not taking on any new patients at all. Except for those who refuse to be seen by a woman. There are always some of those, of course. I’m sorry I wasn’t home when you were hurt. How’s your wrist?”

I showed her my arm.

“This cast is too loose,” she said. “Not Uncle’s fault. The swelling’s gone down and left too much room in there. It’s not good for healing. I can put some more plaster in it. Let’s go downstairs to the office, shall we? Wait here a minute.”

I glanced at the divan, where the two women still lounged against each other, the fingers of one grazing the breast of the other. They watched us both. Their positions suggested something more than simple pleasure in dressing like men. I thought of going over to introduce myself.

Adelaide must have thought of it too. “No, not here,” she said. “Come with me.” She led me into the room Grace had vanished into when we arrived.

It was a dressing room of sorts, with an upholstered couch, two wooden chairs, and a large wardrobe strewn with skirts and blouses and women’s underclothes. The black skirt Grace had worn earlier lay partly on a chair and partly on the floor beside her shoes. A standing mirror, half again as tall as me, stood against one wall, and another long mirror hung kitty-corner to it.

Adelaide snatched up a pile of clothing and stepped behind a painted silk dressing screen. It was not a tall screen. I could see her head and shoulders as she undressed.

“The girls bring their men’s clothes with them and change when they get here,” she said. “Or some, like Grace, leave their clothes here all the time. She doesn’t wear them anywhere else.”

“Do the other women wear their men’s clothes elsewhere?” I asked.

“Some do. It’s safer for them, oddly enough, when they’re traveling about town at night. There are even some women, believe it or not, who choose to live their lives completely as men. None of the girls here, though.” She shrugged out of her jacket, loosened her necktie, and removed the collar. She unbuttoned the top button of her shirt, and I watched, curious to see if she wore men’s underwear beneath it, but she bent over then, perhaps to remove her trousers, and it was a few moments before she stood upright again. When she did, she had pulled on a lady’s shirtwaist and was buttoning it up.

“Do you?” I asked.

“Wear men’s clothes out and about? No, not often.” She came back around the screen and sat on one of the chairs to tie her ladies’ shoes. She was in a skirt, herself again, though her hair still hung in a braid down her back. “I wouldn’t get away with it. I’m too familiar. Besides, I don’t really need to. People are pretty much used to me riding all over town, day and night.” She rose. “Now let’s go down and take care of that cast.”

We returned to the large room. While we had been gone, the seven women had gathered around the divan, and when we entered, they all turned to look at us. My cheeks burned. I wondered if they expected me to suddenly be wearing trousers.

We took the narrow stairs to the second floor. Once there, Adelaide led me down the carpeted hall to another staircase at the front of the house, grander and wider than the back stairs. A fringed table lamp at the bottom of the stairs gave us light enough to descend safely to the front hall. French doors to the right opened into what, in another house, would have been a parlor. Here, it served as a doctor’s office. Adelaide turned on another light, and I saw the room was furnished with chairs, a desk, a bookshelf, a scale, a chest with dozens of tidy drawers, a glass-fronted cabinet filled with jars and bottles, and a long table. There was even an enameled sink against one wall, all plumbed.

I sat on a chair and watched Adelaide make her preparations.

I knew of Boston marriages, of course, those close friendships between women that pretended to be, and often were treated as, a real marriage. There were girls at college who had such friendships. They roomed together, seemed never to be apart, and were invited everywhere as a pair. I had pegged Grace and Trissie as having such an arrangement when I first met them. I had always assumed, though, that Boston marriages were arranged between women who could not attract the attentions of men. The thought had even crossed my mind a time or two that I might be such a woman, before I married Robert. I enjoyed the company of women immensely, and no man before him had ever noticed me. I wondered if any ever would. When he proposed, such thoughts left me, to my great relief. It meant I was not one of those women after all.

Until now it had never occurred to me that some women might actually prefer a Boston marriage with a woman over marriage to a man. I had never thought of such marriages as amorous.

I saw again in my mind the women lounging on the divan, the hand of one upon the breast of the other. I thought of the smile on Trissie’s normally pinched face as she leaned into Grace, and Grace’s relaxed swagger in her men’s clothes as she guided Trissie away. I thought of the look the woman at the window gave Adelaide when we left the room.

I felt an almost physical shift in my understanding. Boston marriages were not the virginal friendships I had thought. Grace and Trissie were not simply roommates; the laughter I heard when they bathed together took on new meaning.

And Adelaide, did she too have an amorous relationship with a woman? With the woman at the window perhaps?

While I pondered, Adelaide was busy gathering her tools. She laid the bowl of plaster, a pitcher of water, a syringe as large as a turkey baster, and a drill on the table, and pulled two chairs over to it.

“Come sit here and put your arm on the table. It’ll be easier to drill if it’s on a firm surface.”

“You’re going to drill my arm?”

“Not the arm, just the cast.” She lifted my arm, set it on the table, and put the tip of the drill to it. She turned the handle. “Don’t be afraid. I’ve done this dozens of times, and I went to the best medical school there is.”

“Where did you go?”

“A school in Maryland called Johns Hopkins. Uncle sent me. He wanted one of my brothers to go so he could pass on the trade in the family, but they weren’t interested, and that left only me. I was eager, and Johns Hopkins was willing to accept women, so off I went.”

“How many brothers do you have?”

“Just the two, Howard and Nels.” She stopped drilling and blew plaster dust away. She moved the drill and started on another hole, this one four inches from the first. “Howard married a rich woman and saw no need to waste his time studying. He never enjoyed school anyway. Nels took off for the Klondike ten years ago and didn’t come back. I guess he thought it easier to muck gold out of the ground than to marry it.”

“Do you have other family?”

“Just one niece and one nephew, as far as I know. My mother and father died when I was young. Uncle and Aunt took the three of us in, but Aunt died three years ago. It’s only Uncle and me now.” She blew at the plaster dust again. “What about you, Mabel? Tell me about your family.”

I should have seen that coming. “Ah...” I tried to think of what I knew of Mabel’s family. “My father is a dutiful man, but not very affectionate,” I said, recalling Mr. Chumley’s gruff good-bye on the train. The description applied equally to my own father, I realized.

“No other family?”

I had no idea. Why hadn’t I ever prepared for this question? Then again, Adelaide would know nothing of Mabel’s family. I could invent an entire clan for her, and Adelaide would not know the difference. But my mind was blank. I hesitated too long, and she gave me a sharp look.

“My family is nothing out of the ordinary,” I said quickly. “Not half as interesting as yours. Did your brother never send word from the gold fields?”

“Come now Mabel,” she chided. “I told you about mine.”

“Very well,” I said, “if you must know, my mother is rather foolish. I have four sisters, Jane, Elizabeth, Kitty, and Lydia. Jane and Elizabeth are happily married, Lydia less happily, and Kitty and I remain unmarried.”

“And your real name is Mary, and you play piano, but not well.” She paused in her drilling to give me a knowing look. “I’ve read Jane Austen too.”

My face burned. “Y-yes, m-mother was a great reader. She named us all after the Bentley sisters.”

“I have a feeling there’s more to you than meets the eye, isn’t there, Mabel Chumley? I need to drill one more hole on the bottom here.” She moved my arm so that my elbow rested on the table, my hand pointed at the ceiling. “Can you hold it steady with your other hand, like this?” She showed me, and began drilling again. “I’m very good at keeping secrets, you know. You’d be surprised at the stories my patients tell me, and I never share them.”

I bit my lip.

“Besides,” she added, “you already know my great secret. You can be certain I would never tell yours, since I have to trust you not to tell mine.”

It was a familiar bargain. I’d made the same deal with Helen Hennessey, and a similar one with Fannie. I was tempted to take Adelaide into my confidence, but I knew I could not. Just as with Helen and Fannie, I knew the consequences of my secret getting out far outweighed theirs.

Adelaide sighed. "Very well, don't tell me, Mabel or Mary or whoever you are, but don't think you're pulling the wool over my eyes. At least tell me this. Are you being as honest with me as you can be?"

"I am, Adelaide, I truly am."

"I suppose that will have to do. There, drilling's all done, and I didn't pierce you once, did I?"

"Not with the drill," I said, and she laughed.

She mixed the water and the plaster until it was runny enough to pour into the syringe. She squeezed the bulb and sucked the mixture into the syringe, put the tip of it to each of the three holes she had drilled, and slowly squirted. It was an odd sensation, feeling the drippy plaster ooze along my skin underneath the cast, a tickle and an itch all at once.

Adelaide used her finger to smooth the plaster over the edges of the holes, and wiped her hands on a cloth. She grasped my cast in one hand and my elbow in the other. "I'm pressing the inside of the cast against your arm to make sure the plaster spreads evenly inside. Let me know if I hurt you."

She bent close to me. Her eyes were lowered and fixed on her task. Her complexion was light and clear except for a splash of freckles across her nose and cheeks. Her lashes were light, scarcely noticeable from a distance, but close up I could see they were thick and cast a fringed shadow on her cheek.

She glanced up, and her cinnamon eyes gave me a jolt. I flinched.

"I hurt you!"

"No, no," I said. "You didn't. I just..." I shook my head, unable to explain.

"I'm sorry." She rose. "I won't torment you anymore. The plaster's not going to spread any further." She moved to the sink and ran water over her hands. "Same instructions as Uncle gave you, I'm sure. Keep it dry, and don't go banging it about, and it should be all healed in a few weeks. Now, if you don't mind waiting here, I'll go upstairs and send Grace down to take you home."

"Oh no," I said. "She won't want to leave so soon, and I...I don't mind staying."

She frowned. "Some of the girls are drinking spirits, you know."

"Yes, and they're smoking too." I widened my eyes like an innocent.

She laughed. "Very well, Mabel Mary, but you've been warned." She turned out the lights, and we returned upstairs.

I drank no spirits that evening, but I felt an effervescence in my blood that made me giddy. The women accepted me, not quite as one of their own, but as a welcome guest. I had not seen women so lively since college. I'd assumed that it was our youth that made us act so free and wild back then, but now I realized that it might only have been that we were all women. With no men to speak over our voices, we were free to talk. Some women, like Adelaide and Grace, had no trouble speaking their minds when men were about, but that evening I learned we were all women of strong opinions. Even Trissie. Even me.

"I'm all for temperance laws," Trissie said, waving about a glass of champagne. "For the men, that is. They're the ones who beat their wives and starve their children, not us. Women should be allowed to drink all they like."

"And Trissie would be the one to know," Grace said. "She was married to a drunkard once."

"No more." Trissie giggled and tucked herself into Grace's shoulder.

“Corsets ought to be outlawed,” Adelaide declared a while later. “They weaken the spine and obstruct all the internal organs and constrict the lungs. A girl can’t even take a full breath with a corset on. Half the time when a lady faints, it’s only because her corset is too tight.”

I was conscious of my corset. I’d only fainted a handful of times in my life, I took an experimental breath, which was not very deep. Adelaide saw what I did, and grinned.

“Have you never noticed that when a girl faints, the first remedy aside from smelling salts is to loosen her corset? It’s so she can get air in her lungs.”

“What do girls need air for?” Sarah asked, the woman with her hand on her friend’s bosom.

“I’ve not worn a corset since I was twelve years old,” Adelaide said. “Uncle wouldn’t let me.”

“You never wear a corset?” asked Caroline, the woman from the window. She had a waist cinched smaller than a gravy boat, and she could hardly keep her eyes off Adelaide.

“Never,” Adelaide said. “And I tell all the girls on my basketball team not to wear them either.”

“You have a basketball team?” I asked.

“Adelaide coaches the high school girls,” Grace said. “You ought to help her out there, Mabel. You’d like it.”

“You should,” Adelaide said. “We practice after school. You’ll already be there, and I could use someone to cover for me when I get called out on an emergency.”

I was flattered. “I did play basketball in college.”

“You went to college?” Trissie asked.

“Yes,” I said without thinking, then realized Mabel Chumley would not have done so. “I mean no, it wasn’t college, it was just a normal school, for teachers, I mean. It was really just a few girls getting together with a ball. No team.”

“Corsets do more than train the figure, though,” Caroline said. “They teach girls restraint in their appetites, and not only for food. That Dunn girl, for example. Frannie?”

“Fannie,” I said.

“Yes, Fannie.” Caroline nodded. “Her mother never made her wear a corset, and she turned into a hoyden. She wouldn’t be in the trouble she’s in now, if she’d learned a bit of restraint.”

“You’re blaming that on a corset?” Sarah asked.

“I blame it rather on Will Sims,” said Ona, from her perch on Sarah’s lap, where she had landed after several drinks.

In fact, as the evening progressed, all the women migrated closer together until eventually everyone touched someone. Dinah, the woman I’d taken for a young man turning pages at the piano, sat on the floor and leaned against the knees of Mary, the piano player. Trissie perched on the arm of Grace’s chair and draped herself over Grace’s shoulder. Adelaide sat in the middle of the divan, with Caroline on one side and me on the other. Caroline leaned, as best she was able with her tight corset, against Adelaide’s arm. Even I had slipped off my boots and curled my legs up in my corner of the divan. My feet rested against Adelaide’s hip, which was warm and vibrated every time she laughed or even spoke. It made me feel very close to her, and I realized I hadn’t felt such physical closeness with anyone since I was a small child. Robert’s cold midnight embraces certainly had not felt like this.

“You think Fannie Dunn is pregnant?” asked Dinah asked.

“Course she is,” Grace said.

“Too many girls, and boys too, don’t really understand what causes pregnancy,” Adelaide said. “Some people think we ought to teach it in schools.”

“Ha!” said Grace. “That’ll never happen.”

“It’s strange how so many odd things are happening at once,” Mary said. “First the trolley shooter, then that man getting killed, and Fannie Dunn disappearing like that.”

“A trolley striker killed that Stanfield man,” Sarah said.

“No, the trolley doesn’t go that far,” Grace said, “and he was a railroad man, not a trolley man.”

“It doesn’t matter where the trolley goes,” Sarah said. “The strikers are excited. One man fired a shot at the rails, and now they all want to do it. They’re men. It’s not sensible, but there it is.”

“But why was he out there in the first place?” Adelaide asked. “There’s nothing out that way but railroad tracks.”

“Someone took him out there,” Grace said. “Someone who wanted incorporation.”

“But he didn’t want to stop incorporation,” I said.

“How do you know that?” Sarah asked.

“Mabel knew him,” Grace said.

“I didn’t know him exactly,” I said. “We met on the train and chatted a bit. He told me he was in favor of incorporation. He was working on a compromise so the town could incorporate and still keep the railroad work here.”

“Well, I never heard that,” Sarah said, “and if I didn’t, it’s a good bet the man who killed him didn’t know it either.”

“Sarah is the postmistress,” Ona said. “She hears everything.”

The salon broke up late, but it felt too soon to me. The women went into the dressing room to change back into their women’s clothes or gather their wraps. Adelaide stood up and my feet, which had somehow wormed their way underneath her bottom, were suddenly cold. I picked up a boot, which I had pried off without untying, and untied the lace with my left hand.

Adelaide took the boot from me. “Let me,” she said. She dropped to her knees, took my foot in her hand, and slid the boot on for me.

“I can do it,” I said, though I enjoyed the feel of her hands on my feet.

“I can do it better. I have two good hands.” She looked up and gave me a slow smile that made me catch my breath. She saw it, and her hands slowed. With her eyes steadily on mine, she put one arm on the cushion beside me. She put the other hand behind me on the small of my back and pulled me toward her. I felt something inside myself melt. She meant to kiss me, I thought, and I wanted her to. I had never wanted anyone to kiss me before, not even Robert before we were married, when I still cared for him. But I wanted Adelaide to kiss me.

She leaned toward me. “Mabel,” she said.

I stiffened, pulled back, and looked away. What was I doing? I wasn’t Mabel. I was an imposter with secrets, terrible secrets that I could never share with Adelaide or anyone. I couldn’t let her kiss me.

She rose, dropped my second boot beside me, and stepped back. “I’m sorry, I misunderstood.” I could tell by her voice that she’d turned away, though I didn’t dare look. There was no way she could see me shake my head, but she was wrong. She didn’t misunderstand me at all.

Chapter Sixteen

I AVOIDED ADELAIDE after that. It wasn't difficult. She had no reason to seek me out at the boarding house, since I didn't need my hand wrapped anymore, and she didn't attend Ida Mae's suffragist meeting on Sunday. I was busy anyway. The lessons Mrs. Dunn had prepared had run out, and I was on my own. I studied the students' books all weekend, and in the evenings as well. Grace tried to talk to me, but she couldn't speak openly at dinner. I wouldn't answer my door when she knocked, and I waited until after she and Trissie went to bed before taking my turn in the bathroom, so I was able to avoid talk of Adelaide.

But I missed her. We were becoming friends, the sort of friends who could speak with only looks, the sort of friends I'd wanted my entire life and never had. She understood me even when I was fabricating a lie, and she liked me anyway. She wanted to kiss me and I wanted her to. I felt a physical pull from my heart when I thought of her, but I ignored it. I cared for her too much to let her fall for someone like me.

I was late getting home on Wednesday. I'd learned that Adelaide's uncle kept the office on Wednesdays, so that's the day I stopped after school to get my stitches taken out. A pink crescent the size of a dime marked my forehead, but old Dr. Keating assured me it would fade. It was dark when I finally got home.

Ida Mae met me at the front door, which was unusual.

"Mabel, you have some visitors," she said, her voice hushed. "They're in the parlor. They've been waiting for you."

My heart stilled. I did not have the sort of life where unexpected visitors could mean something good. I braced myself, but when I entered the parlor, I relaxed and smiled. It was only Mr. and Mrs. Dunn, standing beside each other at the mantle.

"Hello Mr. Dunn, Mrs. Dunn," I said. "Have you heard from Fannie?"

Mrs. Dunn answered. "No, Miss Chumley, we have not, and I'm sorry to—"

"I told you before," a voice interrupted. "She's not Miss Chumley. I am!"

I turned. I hadn't noticed the rumped figure sitting in the corner chair, but now she rose, and she was right. She was the real Miss Chumley.

"I'm sorry, Miss Ch—that is, ma'am," Mr. Dunn said to me, his manner flustered. "She arrived this afternoon. She has papers, a teaching certificate with her name on it, and my letter."

"That's right," Miss Chumley said. "I can prove that I'm the real Miss Chumley, and you, Miss Imposter, cannot."

She was right again. I stood, dumb and dumbfounded with nothing to say. I glanced at Mr. Dunn, at Mrs. Dunn, and over my shoulder to Ida Mae. They all watched me closely. It was my turn to speak.

I looked back at Mr. Dunn. His expression was sympathetic and encouraging. He wanted me to make it all right. I grasped the back of a chair and leaned against it. "I'm sorry," I said. My voice quivered, and I forced it to steady. "It was wrong of me, I know, but I so needed employment, and I, uh, I've always wanted to teach."

Mr. Dunn winced. "Are you saying this other young lady is correct? She is Miss Chumley?"

“Of course I am Miss Chumley,” the real Miss Chumley said. “I showed you my papers. Why are you asking her? She’s nothing more than a criminal. You ought to have her arrested.” Mrs. Dunn stepped forward. “Who are you then?”

“My name is Mrs. Jones,” I said. “Eleanor Jones. I was on the train when Miss Chumley boarded. I overheard her talking with a young man. She said she had been hired to teach school here, but that she didn’t want to do it.”

“Hold on there,” Miss Chumley said. “I didn’t mean that.”

“And the young man convinced her to elope with him.”

“He said he wanted to marry me.” Miss Chumley sounded bewildered, and I felt some pity for her. She’d had a rough two weeks, by the looks of her. Her traveling dress, the same one she’d worn in the train, was heavily stained and wrinkled, and her hair had been stuffed into a dirty wad on her head. “But he didn’t marry me at all. He only used me, and now I’m r-r-ruined!” She burst into tears and fell back in her chair.

Ida Mae moved into the room and put a hand on Miss Chumley’s shoulder. “There there.”

Mr. Dunn reached for his handkerchief, but Miss Chumley did not wait for it. She wiped her nose on her sleeve. Mrs. Dunn looked at her with distaste and turned to me. “But how did you come to take her place, Miss, er, Mrs. Jones?”

I would stick with the truth as much as I could. “Miss Chumley said that she knew no one in Hillyard. I thought, well, if a girl like her can teach school, surely I can. I am at least as well qualified, but I have no teaching certificate. So I took her place. I’m truly sorry. I was quite desperate.”

Mrs. Dunn glanced at my cast with some understanding, I think, and asked, “Have you no family, Mrs. Jones? A home? A husband?”

“I am a widow,” I said. “Circumstances have left me quite bereft.”

“We have a strict code of ethics for our teachers,” Mr. Dunn said, exchanging a distressed look with Mrs. Dunn. “They are not to keep company with young men at all. We are somewhat relaxed about such rules here in Hillyard, but an elopement...”

“She’s certainly not suitable to teach our children,” Mrs. Dunn agreed, seeming to forget that one of her own children had run off to commit an identical sin.

Miss Chumley raised her head. “I’m not? What about her? She’s an imposter. She’s a liar!” Her tearful and accusing eyes met mine, and I felt a quiver of fear, for of course I was.

“I will have to bring this to the school board,” Mr. Dunn said. “Meanwhile—”

“Meanwhile,” Mrs. Dunn said, “don’t think you can count on me to teach again. I’ve had my fill of it. Let Mrs. Jones do it. She’s a refined lady, at least, a widow, and she’s shown she knows how to teach the children.”

“But you don’t even know who she is,” Miss Chumley protested. “She could be another Lizzie Borden, for all you know. Maybe that’s why she’s a widow. She probably killed her husband, and she doesn’t even have a teaching certificate.”

“A teaching certificate can be arranged,” Mrs. Dunn said, ignoring the first charge. “I obtained one myself in a matter of weeks. The manners of a lady, on the other hand, are not so easily assumed. Mrs. Jones, you will continue to teach, I hope, while Mr. Dunn assists you in obtaining the certificate. As for you, Miss Chumley—”

“But I have no money,” Miss Chumley wailed. “I have nowhere to go.”

“There there,” Ida Mae said again. “I won’t put you out.”

WORD OF MY deception spread quickly, and reactions to it varied. My fellow boarders seemed to think I'd impersonated Miss Chumley out a sense of civic duty.

"You're a sly puss," Grace said at dinner. "Claiming all this time to be Miss Chumley. Not that I blame you. A hussy like her should not be teaching our children. It's a good thing you came along when you did, Mabel."

"Call me Nell," I said.

The real Mabel was dining in the kitchen, and she would sleep there as well on a mattress on the floor. Ida Mae's charity only extended so far.

"Well, she's ruined now," Grace said cheerfully. "I hope the story gets out and proves a lesson for our girls. Pity Fannie Dunn didn't wait a few more days. She might have changed her mind about running off."

"I think it's romantic," Cora said. "Timothy and I eloped, you know, and I'm not ruined. You only get ruined if you don't get married after all, like Miss Chumley."

"Why do you say ruined?" Ida Mae asked. "Miss Chumley seems a perfectly healthy girl, unless of course she got herself with child."

"Do you think Fannie and Will got married then?" I asked.

"I'm sure of it, unless they couldn't get a license," Cora said. "Timothy and I got married in Idaho, where it's easy. Fannie and Will didn't want to go there, though. They wanted to go west."

"You know where they were going?" I asked.

"Oh yes, she told me all about it. When Timothy and I eloped, it was all over town. She knew I'd know how to do it."

"Cora, for shame," Ida Mae said. "You've known all this time where those children are and didn't tell? The marshal's been looking for them, and the Dunns have been half mad with worry."

"You don't tell when it's an elopement," Cora explained. "Besides, I don't know exactly where they are, only that they were taking a train to Seattle. Anyway, nobody asked me."

MY THIRD GRADE students accepted my name change without blinking an eye. I explained that I had only been taking Miss Chumley's place temporarily and so went by her name, but now that I was to be their regular teacher I would be called by my own name. After half a day of hearing "Miss Chum-Jones", they got it right nine times out of ten. The seventh graders found it a bit more unusual, but they weren't troubled by it, except for Carrie, who narrowed her eyes when she heard my explanation. I would have expected nothing less. I knew I could expect more stringent scrutiny from my fellow teachers, but fortunately an event occurred that afternoon that made my news fall away like dust.

The trolley strike was over! We heard clangs and cheers from outside before class was even finished. The boys could not contain themselves. They darted to the windows and looked out.

"There's grown men dancing, Mrs. Chones," Dewey cried out, having not quite grasped my new name.

"They are," Guy said, "and they're banging pipes and laughing."

“Mrs. Jones, may we go down and find out what’s happened?” Russell Gordon asked.

Before I could answer, the door opened, and Principal Martin poked his head in. “The trolley strike’s over, Miss Ch—er, Mrs. Jones. We’re letting school out early today. Remember to clean up first!”

The children were no more excited than I.

It was three o’clock, the time of day when travelers were more likely to be returning from Spokane than going into it, but this was no ordinary day. Anyone who did not have a horse and buggy, or a car or bicycle, I suppose, for the daring, had not been able to go into Spokane since the strike began. Practically anyone with the time and a nickel wanted to go into the city, and the line for the trolley was long. It ran every fifteen minutes, but I would still have a wait of at least a half hour before I could get on, and likely as long a wait coming home.

I took my place in line, but hesitantly. I did long to purchase some of the finer items that I could not find in Hillyard, my favorite bath oils, scented soap, and face cream, but I could wait another day.

I hesitated too long. The crowd about me jostled aside, and I saw Marshal Mitchell heading straight toward me. His eyes pinned me.

“I’d like a word with you, Mrs. Jones.” His face was stiff, his brow furrowed, his entire demeanor displeased. He gnashed at the J, sounding for all the world like Dewey with his “Mrs. Chones.” It was immediately apparent to me that, while the students and the Dunns and Ida Mae’s boarders were not troubled by my impersonation of Miss Chumley, Marshal Mitchell certainly was.

I trembled. I winced. I opened my mouth to speak, but nothing came out. I could invent stories to convince the Ida Maes and Hiram Dunns of the world that I was indeed the widow Eleanor Jones, innocent imposter of Mabel Chumley, but Marshal Mitchell would not be so easily persuaded.

Another voice called to me from behind. “Mrs. Jones, there you are. I’ve been looking everywhere for you. Why, hello Marshal. Are you heading into town? Mrs. Jones and I are not. I’m going to take a look at her arm. Did you forget, my dear?”

It was Adelaide. She gripped my elbow and pulled me from the line. “Come along now, you can go into town another time, and the marshal can wait as well.”

He glared, but he did not interfere except to say, “I will speak with you again, Mrs. Jones.”

I let Adelaide guide me away. My thoughts were in turmoil. There was nothing so bad about Widow Jones impersonating Miss Chumley to obtain a teaching position. It was a scandal, perhaps, but a minor one, nothing to interest the law. But there was more to concern the marshal than that. Mr. Stanfield had been murdered. Marshall Mitchell knew I’d met Mr. Stanfield, and now he knew I lied about it, or at least part of it. He would want to hear my story again, and he would be less inclined now to take my word. If I told him I boarded the train in Bismark, Grand Forks, or St. Paul, would he check? Would he find out I lied about that too? I didn’t dare tell him I’d boarded in New York City.

“We’ll stop in here,” Adelaide said.

We were at the door to Minthorn’s drug store. I was surprised to see how far we had walked, and surprised too that Adelaide had walked in silence and left me alone with my thoughts.

I had been to Minthorn’s before, but not for the soda fountain. A long counter, with syrup pumps and canisters of carbonation, was built beside the back wall. Behind it stood a young man wearing a collar and a red and white striped vest surrounded by shiny glasses and bowls. A row of tall stools stood in front of the counter, but they were all empty. Adelaide did not lead me

there, though, but to a small table nearby with two dainty chairs. We sat, and the man came around the counter and approached us.

“Hello Dr. Keating,” he said. “It’s good to see you here. I was beginning to think I ought to close up shop and head into Spokane myself, it’s been so slow.”

“Hello Vernon. Will you bring us two glasses of Coca-Cola please?”

He scurried off and returned a moment later with two clear glasses filled with the brown liquid. Paper straws popped out the top and bubbles raced up the inside of the glass. I took a sip and winced as the bubbles stung my throat. I sat back.

At that, as if to keep the distance between us narrow, Adelaide leaned forward, crossed her arms on the table, and said, “So you might as well have confided in me after all. The whole town knows your secret now, and it’s not so bad, is it?” I could not gauge her mood. She smiled but did not seem happy. “Tell me, Mrs. Jones, is there a Mr. Jones out there looking for you?”

“No. I am a widow.”

“Oh, I know that’s the story being told, but you and I both know you didn’t injure your arm from a fall on the train.” Her look was pointed. “To tell the truth, I find it hard to believe that you assumed Miss Chumley’s identity solely because you wanted a teaching position. You’re not the first wife to run away from an abusive husband to start a new life under an alias. You’re not even the first such woman in Hillyard. My dear, I wish you would tell me the truth.”

I lowered my head and bit my lip. Her kindness made me blink. I wanted to trust her, and she had guessed so much of my story already, but she hadn’t guessed the last part, the worst part. I couldn’t let her. It would be better to let her think she had guessed it all.

“I’m ashamed,” I whispered.

She reached over and put her hand on mine. “Don’t be. It’s not your fault. Some men are simply born cruel. You wouldn’t believe the number of wives and children I’ve had to patch up in my job.”

I turned my hand in hers and looked up.

She smiled again, and this time it reached her eyes. “I’d rather not call you Mrs. Jones, and I can’t call you Mabel anymore. What is your given name? Please don’t say Mary Bennett.”

“My name is Eleanor,” I said, “but I’ve always been called Nell.”

“Nell. I like it. It suits you better than Mabel. So, Nell, what did Marshal Mitchell want with you that had you looking so frightened?”

I made a face and tried not to look as frightened as I really was. “It’s about Mr. Stanfield. I told the marshal how I met Mr. Stanfield on the train, but I was Miss Chumley then. I told him I boarded in Minot, North Dakota. He’ll ask me again, and I can’t tell him the truth. What if he tells my h-husband? What if he sends me back?”

Adelaide frowned. “I can talk to him for you, if you like. I’ll explain the injuries you had when you arrived.”

“No! Please, Adelaide, don’t tell. I truly don’t want him to know. I’ll figure something out.”

She squeezed my fingers. “I won’t tell.” She put her lips to the straw, drew up a mouthful of Coca Cola, and squinted a smile at me. “And I won’t let him send you back, Nell.”

Chapter Seventeen

I WENT INTO Spokane the next day after school. The trolley was crowded, but it was not as busy as it had been the day before. Most of the men stood grasping poles to keep their balance and a few stood on the outside platform and smoked, which left seats enough for the women and children. I sat beside a window near the front. The conductor moved up the center row of the trolley collecting fares, and I handed him my nickel. Moments later the trolley lurched forward, and I watched through the window as Hillyard slid out of view. It didn't take long. Aside from the railroad yards, there wasn't much more to Hillyard than I had already seen.

We trundled through fields of prairie grass and small stands of scruffy pine trees, occasionally passing farmhouses along the way. As we drew closer to the city, the farmhouses gave way to clusters of houses on shiny new streets and several lots marked with string and surveyors' posts. The city was growing. We rounded a curve, headed down a hill, and crossed over a tall wooden trestle. I peered down at a turbulent river that surged into a frothing waterfall, and then we were in the city.

Spokane was small by New York standards, but it was larger than any city I'd been in since St. Paul. Sturdy brick buildings of five, six, and seven stories lined the main streets, which were busy with trolleys coming in from every direction, competing with buggies, bicycles, pedestrians, and even a few automobiles. There was nothing old. Nearly the entire city had been built in the last twenty years.

Since marrying Robert, my clothing had been made of fine material and sewn by the best seamstresses, but the colors and styles were refined to the point of invisibility and not, I might add, of my own choosing. I had always longed for a bit a dash in my dress, like the shop girls who walked about New York laughing and flirting when they got off work.

I located the Crescent Department Store and found the styles I'd always wanted. I fingered stripes and solids and plaids, fringes and ruffles and ribbons, and finally decided on a skirt of blue and green plaid with a thread of purple running through it. A matching ribbon for my neck and a pleated white shirtwaist completed the outfit. It would not be appropriate for teaching, but I loved it too much not to buy it. For school, I purchased a plain blue skirt with a severe blue necktie to match. My few purchases only made me want more, and I moved on to other departments. Soon I had new boots, perfume, and a small art square rug for my sitting room.

Most glorious of all, I bought a hat. Not just any hat, but a hat of white silk, black net, and velvet with a deep blue silk velvet bow over the brim. Intricate silk roses held the bow in place, and to top it off were two giant ostrich plumes in deep blue to match the bow. At \$5.95, it was the most expensive hat in the store, but I had to have it. I wore it out of the store.

By the time I returned to the trolley stop, it had grown dark and cold, and the flood of passengers to and from Hillyard had diminished to a trickle. I had more packages than I could easily carry, especially with my bad arm. I stacked them one on top of the other, with the weight carried on my left arm, and used my right to help balance them. The hat box I carried over my fingers by its satin strings.

A trolley was supposed to leave Spokane for Hillyard every fifteen minutes, but I must have just missed one. I stood for some time, with the packages growing heavier and my arm dipping

lower, and I had just decided I regretted purchasing the rug, when the trolley rounded the corner and stopped.

The conductor was not the same man who'd taken my nickel on the way into town, but I still recognized him. He was the rough man who'd scared me away from the trolley during the strike, but he didn't seem to recognize me.

"Good evening, miss," he said. He lifted the bulk of my packages from my arms and set them on a sideways seat right behind the motorman. "Sit here, miss. It's the best seat in the car." He favored me with a bold stare, a grin, and a waggle of thick eyebrows. He was covered in freckles and seemed far less frightening than he had during the strike.

"Oh?" I settled myself in the seat. Aside from facing the aisle, it seemed much the same as any other seat.

"Yes, indeed." He kicked the wooden casing below my seat. "There's an electric heater under the seat. Feel it?"

I placed my hand on the seat and felt warmth. I noticed then that the heat had seeped through the layers of my skirt and petticoats to reach my bottom. I looked up and saw he watched me with a smart grin. He knew what I was feeling and even where I was feeling it. Good heavens, if this was the sort of behavior ostrich feathers attracted, no wonder those shop girls were sometimes called fast.

Before I could decide whether to be insulted or flattered, he moved away to collect fares. There were plenty of seats on this trip, so men joined the ladies riding inside, away from the cold. Just before the time set for departure, a swarthy man with a black mustache and whiskery cheeks boarded and sat in the sideways seat opposite me. He didn't look at me, but sat forward, his elbows on his knees, and watched the conductor make his way back to the front.

The conductor saw the dark man and stopped short. "Ferraro," he said, disgust in his voice. "What the hell are you doing?"

"Watch your language, O'Leary," the man said. "There's a lady present."

O'Leary barely glanced my way and said, "Sorry, ma'am," before turning again to the dark man. "I ought to throw you right off this train."

"Strike's over," Ferraro said. His voice was as calm as O'Leary's was agitated. "My nickel's as good as anyone else's."

"No it ain't," O'Leary said. "Not when you earned it taking food from babies' mouths. Ma'am, this guinea's a da—a dratted scab. You know what that is? He took our jobs during the strike. He made forty cents an hour when we were striking for a raise to twenty-eight."

"I got babies too," Ferraro said.

O'Leary signaled the motorman to go, his complexion florid. I looked down at my lap. It was too dark to see anything out the window, and I couldn't look at anything inside the trolley without either first looking at Mr. Ferraro, who sat directly across from me, or pointedly not looking at him, which was just as awkward. I pretended to be invisible.

"The marshal was looking for you, you know," O'Leary said.

"I don't know nothing about it."

"I never said what it was about," O'Leary said.

"A guy was killed," Ferraro said. "They always suspect me. Besides, I heard a couple of kids on the trolley talking about it a couple nights after he was shot. They said the marshal thought it was a trolley striker who did it, or a scab. I knew he'd come after me."

I peeked up. Ferraro was frowning, his black eyebrows a thick slash over his eyes.

"What are you coming back for then?" O'Leary asked.

“I told you,” Ferraro said. “I got babies.”

“In Hillyard?”

“Not for long. Did they find the killer?”

“Nope.”

“Damn,” Ferraro said, seeming to forget the lady’s presence. “I thought they would’ve by now.” He tugged an end of his mustache into his mouth and gnawed on it.

O’Leary moved off to the back of the car.

“Excuse me, sir,” I said. “What children were you talking about? On the trolley that night?”

Ferraro spit his mustache out of his mouth. “I don’t know who they were, ma’am. It was a boy and a girl.”

“On Sunday night?”

“Yes ma’am. It was late, the last trolley of the night.” He thought a moment and added, “They had a travel bag with them.”

It must have been Fannie and Will. They disappeared on Sunday night, and there couldn’t have been two runaway couples from Hillyard that night. “Do you have any idea where they were going?” I asked.

“They were in a hurry so they wouldn’t miss their train. They were the only passengers that night, so I couldn’t help overhearing. There’s only one train that time of night, and it goes to Seattle.”

The trolley reached Hillyard and ran down Diamond Street. Sitting where I was, I had the opposite view from what I’d had leaving town. I recognized the lights of Dr. Keating’s house as we passed. A single light burned beside the front door, but the entire third floor was lit up. It was Friday evening. Was Adelaide having another salon? I felt a stab of envy at not being invited, but of course my presence the week before was only because of Grace’s blunder. I wasn’t the sort of woman Adelaide invited to her salons. I wondered if Caroline was there, lounging on the divan with Adelaide.

The trolley reached the depot and stopped. Mr. Ferraro slinked off into the dark. Mr. O’Leary helped load my packages back into my arms, and I started the dark walk home. My arms ached by the time I reached it. I put away my new clothes, placed the little rug by the door and the perfume on my table. It had seemed such a lot when I was carrying it, but the rooms still seemed bare and cold despite the heat of the steam radiators.

I tried on my hat and looked at myself again in the mirror. I looked quite dashing, I thought. I wondered what Adelaide would think of it.

Chapter Eighteen

SATURDAY DAWNED SUNNY and bright. I dressed in my new plaid skirt and pinned my lovely ostrich feather hat securely atop my head. I donned my old gray coat, spared a thought for a lovely black wool I'd seen at The Crescent, and ventured out.

A breeze blew, cool but not cold, just enough to make my ostrich feathers waft. I felt jaunty as I walked the few blocks to the Dunns' house. I had no intention of talking to the marshal, but I could certainly tell the Dunns what I'd learned about Fannie's destination. I marched up their wide porch steps and rapped on the door. Mrs. Elsey opened it.

"Good morning, Mrs. Elsey. Is Mr. Dunn about?"

"No, he's down at the office. He works on Saturday mornings."

"Oh. Is Mrs. Dunn at home then?"

"Nope. She went into town. Didn't you hear? The trolley strike's over."

"Yes, I heard. I went in yesterday."

"Got a new hat, it looks like." She smirked. "Got a new name now, too, I hear."

"Oh. Yes." Some of my jauntiness fell away.

"Don't you worry about it, Mrs. Jones," she said. "What's a name, anyhow? You're a good teacher, I hear, and a nice lady. Do you want to step in for a cup of Postum? It's too cold to stand out here in the wind."

"Why yes, thank you." I followed her to the kitchen. The kettle was already on, and it didn't take long for her to prepare the coffee flavored drinks. She placed some fancy Fig Newton rolls on a plate and we settled in.

"Have they heard anything from Fannie?" I asked.

"Not that I know of," she said. "Of course I don't live in, you know. I wouldn't know if they got news in the evening."

"Do they have any idea where they went?"

"They're thinking St. Paul maybe. She has relatives back there, at least. The boy she ran off with won't have relatives of any use. I think her folks are more upset with who she ran off with than that she ran off at all. They wouldn't take it so hard if he'd been from the right side of the tracks."

"His family is poor?"

"As dirt."

"Where do you think they got the money to run away then?"

"Fannie took it from her daddy's drawer, I heard," Mrs. Elsey said. "She'd been acting real funny for a couple of days."

Guy had said much the same thing. "What do you mean, funny?"

"Crying at dinner, wouldn't talk, that sort of thing. Girls that age always act strange, though. I got a couple myself. They're fine now, but when they were fifteen, I thought I'd have to kill one of them, or both."

I nibbled my fig roll. Fannie must have been planning her elopement for a while, though it seemed strange she didn't mention it that first night. She had no difficulty sharing everything else. "How long have you worked for the Dunns, Mrs. Elsey?"

“Ever since they built this house. I started the same day they moved in. Let’s see now, Guy was barely walking, so I guess it’s been ten or eleven years.”

“So you were here when Mrs. Hennessey came with her girls?”

“Oh, you know about that? Yes. Poor thing. She was beat up bad, worse than you.”

I was stunned, but she continued speaking, matter of fact.

“She was in bed the whole first week she was here. I took care of the little girls until she was well again.”

“How long was that?”

“A couple of weeks. Then Mr. Dunn set her up with the candy store.”

“Mr. Dunn set her up? What do you mean?”

“Well, I don’t know exactly how it worked. It was a loan, I think.”

“They must have been very good friends.”

Mrs. Elsey looked doubtful. “Well, I don’t know about that. They didn’t seem too happy to see her when she showed up. Of course, they didn’t know she was coming.”

“But they’re friends now?”

“I wouldn’t say that, no. Matter of fact, I don’t think they see much of each other at all.” She seemed surprised to realize it. “Course she married that Hennessey man after only a few months, and he’s not exactly the sort Mr. and Mrs. Dunn invite to dinner.”

“No, I guess not.” I had no doubt of it, though I had still never even met the man.

I finished my Postum, thanked Mrs. Elsey, and left.

It was still before noon. Mr. Dunn must be at work at his office, but I didn’t know where that was. I should have asked Mrs. Elsey, but I didn’t like to go back, and besides, I had a general idea. He worked for the railroad, I assumed, so I would look there.

There were many large impressive buildings in the yards of the Great Pacific Railroad, but the offices weren’t among them. I passed the huge brick and steel buildings and made my way to a low, narrow wooden building with a plain black and white sign that said OFFICE. I knocked on the door, but received no answer, so I opened it and stepped inside.

Four men stood hunched over a desk. None of them was Mr. Dunn and none of them looked up at my entrance. I stepped closer to see what they were looking at.

It was a telephone, just removed from its wooden packing crate. One of the men repeatedly opened and closed the little oak door on the front of the machine, enjoying the snick! it made when it latched. Another man lifted the receiver from its hook and pretended to have a connection.

“Hello? This the White House? Let me talk to Mr. Roosevelt. I got a few things I’d like to say to him.”

Another man perused a thin instruction manual with a deep scowl on his face. “It says here to ‘place the mica insulated washers on the binding posts of the two-path carbon lightening arrester and attach it to the ground plate.’ What in hell’s the ground plate?”

“What in hell’s a two-path carbon lightening thingummy?” asked the fourth man.

“I don’t know,” said the Roosevelt man, “but you’d better attach it. I don’t want to be the one talking when lightning strikes if you don’t.”

“Here, you figure it out then.” The man with the instruction manual thrust it at the Roosevelt man, who held his hands up in surrender and refused to take it.

Finally, one of them spotted me. “Oh, I’m sorry, ma’am. Have you been there long? We’re a bit distracted here.”

“I understand,” I said. “I’m looking for Mr. Dunn.”

He looked blank, glanced over his shoulder at his comrades, who appeared puzzled as well. “Mr. Hiram Dunn,” I said. “Doesn’t he work here?”

The man shook his head. “No, ma’am.”

The Roosevelt man stepped forward. “I know who he is. He worked here quite a few years ago. He helped start up the railyards ten years ago or more. He doesn’t work here any longer, though. I think he works for the school now.”

“That’s right,” said another man. “He’s the school superintendent or something like that, I think.”

Where had I got the idea Mr. Dunn worked for the railroad? It was Guy, I think, who told me. He said they moved to Hillyard because his father worked for the railroad, but now that I thought about it, he never said his father still worked there. It made sense, really. A school superintendent was far more likely to greet a new schoolteacher at the railroad station than a railroad man.

“I’m sorry for bothering you,” I said. “I misunderstood. Good luck with your telephone.”

I backed out. As I closed the door behind me, I heard one man say, “Edgar, would you leave that door alone? You’ll have it worn out before we even get the telephone mounted.”

I didn’t know where the school superintendent’s office was, and it was nearly noon. Even if I knew where to find Mr. Dunn, he would probably be gone by the time I got there. I decided to return to the Dunns’ house that afternoon. Meanwhile, I would stop by Hennessey’s Confectionary. It was Saturday, so it would be too busy for me to talk with Mrs. Hennessey, but I was yearning for a sweet. I headed north beside the railroad shops. The main tracks into town split into several side tracks, most of which disappeared into the brick buildings. I could see through the open faces of some of the buildings. Engines and cars were parked inside, and men crawled over them like bugs.

I continued walking beyond the shops. A train lay idle on the track to my right. The town was on my left, but it was far from idle. I passed a smithy, a feed store, a restaurant, and a lumberyard. I had just reached the icehouse when I heard a voice so close it took my breath away.

“I’m going to get to the bottom of it,” Marshal Mitchell said, his voice just around the corner of the icehouse and heading my way. “When I get hold of that Jones woman I’ll—”

The rest of his words were lost in the shrill sound of a train whistle, but it was enough to spur me into action. The railroad car beside me was open. I lunged for the open rungs beside it and pulled myself up into the car. I tucked myself into the corner and tugged the hem of my skirt inside just as Marshal Mitchell rounded the corner.

“—knows something more than she’s saying. If you hear anything about that fellow who—”

Again the whistle blew and blocked the rest of his words.

The floor lurched. I nearly fell, but grabbed the edge of the open car door to keep myself upright. The train was moving!

I pulled myself to the opening and looked down. The train gained speed rapidly. Already the ground moved below me at an appallingly fast rate. I braced myself and prepared to jump.

“No!”

I looked up.

Marshal Mitchell ran toward me. “Don’t jump,” he shouted and waved his arms at me as if trying to push me back. He said something else, but I couldn’t hear, as the train picked up speed and moved farther away. Marshal Mitchell stopped and stared at me, his form growing smaller

and smaller until it disappeared altogether. I watched Hillyard as it also shrunk until we rounded a curve, and I stared at nothing but flat, uninhabited prairie.

The spring sunshine did not penetrate into the car, but frigid air blew in easily. I shuddered. I grasped a bar attached to the inside of the door. It slid easily on small wheels. I pulled it shut, and the car turned black. I pulled it open again, just a sliver, so that I had enough light to see.

Wooden crates were stacked against one end of the car. A drawing of a red apple was painted on the side beneath the words "Applesauce, made fresh from Washington apples." One stack was lower than the others, only two crates high, so I sat on it, my back against another stack, and wondered where I was headed.

Canada was north of Hillyard, but that was the extent of my knowledge. I wasn't sure how far Canada was, but I thought it was at least a hundred miles. Surely we would stop before then.

Just in case, I opened my purse to see if I had anything that might be of use in a foreign country. I carried a handkerchief, comb, and mirror, a coin purse, the key to my room, a pencil nub, and a small tin of Colgan's mint chips. I opened the tin and slipped a mint wafer into my mouth. I was hungry. It had been a long time since breakfast.

I emptied the coin purse into my hand and counted. One silver dollar, three half dollars, four dimes, and four nickels. Three dollars and ten cents. I thought with longing of the wad of bills I had stashed in my satchel at home.

The train slowed. I shoved the money back into my purse, slid from my perch, and pulled the door to make a larger opening. We approached a depot. The sign above it said "Colbert." I prepared to leap from the car as soon as we stopped, but the train did not stop. The platform was empty. A canvas bag dangled from a post beside it. As I watched, a metal hook emerged from the train, snagged the bag, and pulled it inside. The train sped up again.

I closed the door and slumped to my crates. My stomach rumbled. I wondered if there was a way to open some of that applesauce. I tugged at the top of the crate with the fingers of my left hand, but it wouldn't budge. I sat again, huddled into myself, and tried not to think of the cold.

The train passed through four more towns, Chattaroy, Milan, Elk, Scotia. The tiny towns were busy, but the depot platforms were bare of passengers. Each time I opened the door and prepared to jump, and each time, the train slowed but did not stop. If I didn't already have one arm in a cast, I might have risked a jump from the moving train. I would have to catch myself with my arms, though, and I didn't have the nerve to put my broken arm through such a test.

Finally the train slowed and slowed some more and gradually lurched to a shuddering stop. I saw the depot sign, Newport, printed above the depot door. I had my purse over my arm and my hand on the bar, ready to climb down, when I saw two men standing on the platform waiting. They were passengers, I thought, and I had them to thank for making the train finally stop so that I could climb down. They didn't board, though, but hopped down from the platform and approached my car with quick, purposeful steps. "Here she is," I heard one say, and they stopped right in front of me, one man tall and thin, the other short and squat. They wore badges on their coats.

I stared, unable to move.

A large pair of hands reached for me. "Come on down from there, lady," the tall man said. "Your ride's over."

He hauled me to the ground, not gently. I would have fallen, but the short man wrapped his thick hands around my left arm in a painful grip.

"What are you doing?" I tried to pull my arm from his grasp, but he only tightened his hold. "Let me go."

“I don’t think so. You’re coming with us.” The tall man took hold of my right arm above the cast, and both men began walking me rapidly away from the depot toward to the well-lit center of Newport.

“Where?” I asked. “Where are you taking me?”

“Jail.”

I stopped walking, but they did not. My new boots dragged in the dirt. I stumbled to my feet again and scrambled to keep up.

“Jail?” My voice was a squeak. “Why? For riding that train? I didn’t mean to. It was a mistake. I’ll pay for my ticket.”

“Shut up,” the tall man said.

“But I haven’t done anything wrong. You’re making a mistake!”

“Shut up.” It was the short man this time. He shook my arm. “It’s no mistake. You think there’s another woman on that train wearing blue ostrich feathers on her hat and a cast on her arm?”

I nearly panicked before I realized that the woman they described was not Robert’s wife. They weren’t arresting me for murder, after all.

“Oh.” I let myself give a little laugh. “You’ve heard from Marshal Mitchell. Did he telephone you that I was on that train?”

“Telegram,” the tall man said.

“You misunderstood,” I explained. “He didn’t want me arrested. He knows I was caught on that train by accident. You can ask him. Send him a telegram.”

They said nothing but continued to march me toward the jail. Citizens of the town stared at me as we passed, and I burned with shame.

Finally we reached the jail. They thrust me into a chair and released their grips on my arms. The tall man sat behind a desk, and the short one rummaged through a bookshelf. I rubbed the bruises left by their fingers and tried to be grateful that they didn’t handcuff me.

“You really have made a mistake,” I said. “I’m certain Marshal Mitchell is expecting you to send me back to Hillyard.”

“I’m sure he is,” the tall man said. He sat forward as the other man walked around me and placed a thick book on the desk. It was an expandable book with leather covers held together with steel bolts on the side. “But I don’t see why we should let Mitchell get the credit for bringing you in.” He turned pages of the book as he spoke, and both men scanned them closely, looking up to examine me now and then as they turned a page. I craned my neck to see what they were looking at and felt the blood drain from my face. Wanted posters. They were looking for me among the wanted posters.

“What do you mean?” I tried to breathe normally, pretending innocence. “Bring me in where? Marshal Mitchell wasn’t bringing me anywhere.” My panic grew as they continued to turn pages. Any moment now they might find my likeness. “Why are you looking in that book? I’m not in there. I’m not a criminal. I’m a schoolteacher.”

“Well, if that’s so,” the tall man said, “you don’t got nothing to worry about.” But he turned another page.

“This is unfair.” I stood up indignantly. “You have no right to keep me here.”

“Sit down,” the short man said. He started around the desk.

“Wait, look at this,” the tall man said. Both men stared at the open book, then looked up and examined my face.

The short man fingered the handcuffs that hung from his belt. “It’s her, isn’t it?”

“Eleanor Caldwell,” the tall man read from the poster. He looked up with a smirk. “Didn’t like your husband much, did you Mrs. Caldwell?”

I didn’t wait to hear anything more. I had the door open before they knew what I was doing.

“Hey! Hey, stop there!”

“Get back here. Stop her!”

I heard chairs crash to the floor as the men rushed after me. There was no way I could outrun them, but I had a start on them and no other choice. I wasn’t about to give myself up to the hangman’s noose. There were narrow passageways between the jail and the buildings on each side of it. A restaurant on my left was well lit and busy. I turned right and dashed down the corridor between the jail and its darker neighbor. It was black as night in the passage. I couldn’t see in front of me, but I didn’t dare slow down. I ran blindly, stumbling once but moving on. After only a few steps I was spotted.

“She’s down here!” The squat man yelled. I heard the brush of his coat against the walls as he tried to catch up with me, but the walls were too close to allow him to run freely as I did. Something caught at the plumes of my hat and tore it from my head. As I bolted out of the tunnel, I heard generous swearing from the constricted man as he stumbled over the hat. “Down here,” he yelled again, and the other lawman’s answering call came from the passageway on the other side of the jail.

There was no time to think. I ran east, for no reason except that it was the direction I already faced. I ran quickly and recklessly through mud and shadows, past buildings and wagons and horses and people. No one tried to stop me. The people I passed seemed more amused than anything else at my flight from the marshals. Jeering remarks made to my pursuers let me know the distance between us was narrowing.

I was not used to running. My lungs burned for oxygen, my skirts were too heavy, and my corset would not let me catch my breath. I could not outrun the marshals.

I dodged behind a tall building, doubled back quickly, and ducked behind a barrel. I pressed my arm over my mouth to try to muffle my gasping breaths. My pulse beat heavily, especially in my sore arm, and sweat trickled down the sides of my face. I closed my eyes and prayed that the marshals would pass me by.

They did not. The boot steps slowed, then stopped, no more than three feet from my hiding place.

“She’s crossed over,” one said. “This is Oldtown.”

“So? I bet she doesn’t know she’s in Idaho.”

“How much was the reward on her?”

“Five hundred dollars.”

“That much? She didn’t look worth it to me. Still, it’s not worth losing our jobs over. Let’s go back.”

“We could get Spence. He could arrest her and split the money with us.”

“Why would he? He’d just get us fired for meddling in his jurisdiction and keep the money for himself. Let her go.”

“At least Mitchell didn’t get her.”

Their voices faded as they walked back on the Washington side of the border. I let my breath come more easily and rested my head on my bent knees. I had no idea I was even near Idaho, but I thanked whoever had placed the border between the two states right at the town of Newport. I hunched behind my barrel for quite some time. Exertion from running kept me warm at first.

Eventually, though, the sweat cooled on my body and I shivered. A rumble from my stomach reminded me that I'd not eaten since breakfast.

I rose, smoothed out my skirt, and tidied my hair, which had fallen loose during my flight. I had no hat—my poor hat!—but there was nothing I could do about that. The sun had set. I looked about and tried to plan my next step.

Oldtown and Newport seemed to be just one town spread across the border between Idaho and Washington. I didn't know when I had crossed the line into Idaho, but I knew Washington was behind me in the west. If I stayed on the Idaho side of the line, I would be safe from my pursuers, so I walked east.

A cold wind blew the smell of water toward me. Soon I saw a wide river, black except for the reflected lights of a steamboat idling at a dock and a few lantern-lit barges loaded with timber. A string of lights along the bank beckoned me north. Before long I passed more docks and boat landings. I found a narrow two-story building with "Davey's Restaurant and Hotel" painted on the front. I opened the door. The restaurant consisted of one long table with wooden benches on each side. A lone bearded man sat at the end of one bench shoveling stew into his mouth. A fire blazed in a large fireplace, and a dark wooden bar reflected the flames from the opposite wall. I moved toward the fire, ignoring the curious looks of the men who leaned against the bar.

"Dinner's over, ma'am," called a large woman from a doorway at the end of the room. "But I can get you a bowl of stew for two bits."

"Thank you," I said.

"Sit yourself down."

I sat at the end of the bench far from the bearded man. The woman returned with a steaming bowl of beef stew and a fat slice of bread. "Coffee? It'll be a nickel more." I nodded and she brought it to me. The stew was delicious, and I ate it rapidly, soaking up the gravy with the bread. With the fire at my back and hot food in my stomach, I was soon warm again. I pushed the bowl away with a satisfied sigh and pulled the coffee toward me.

The men at the bar had resumed talking and paid no attention to me. The man at the other table sipped his own coffee. I glanced at him and caught his eyes sliding away from me.

The large woman came to take my bowl. "You be needing a room tonight? Two dollars."

I yearned for a bed, but two dollars would leave me with only eighty cents. I had no idea how much a ticket back to Hillyard would cost, and I didn't dare leave myself without enough money. While I hesitated, the woman turned to the bearded man.

"More coffee, Spence?"

Spence? He was the man with Idaho jurisdiction.

"How about that room, ma'am?"

"No thank you." I stood up and took three dimes from my purse. "The stew was delicious. Thank you."

I pulled the collar of my coat about me and slipped out into the night. I wandered, but stayed in the shadows by the river, worried that Spence or one of the Newport lawmen might see me. Aside from Davey's Restaurant and two saloons, it appeared the buildings along the river were devoted to transport, primarily lumber, by wagon and rail and steamship, and I thought of my students' essays. There was no refuge for me there, but I was afraid to leave the river lest I accidentally cross over into Washington. Finally, I entered a stable in an attempt to get warm. I only meant to lie in the hay for a moment, but hours later I was awakened by an ancient man demanding payment for my slumbers. I gave him fifty cents, and he loaned me a blanket. I didn't

sleep much the rest of the night, but I didn't freeze and I was not apprehended by the law. I felt it was a bargain.

I was up with the first light. I hoped the lawmen were not. Surely they slept better than I had and would not be so eager to leave their beds. I kept a careful watch as I followed the railroad tracks back to the depot. It was in Newport, on the Washington side of the border. It was a risk, but I had no choice. I stepped up to the depot window.

“When is your next train to Hillyard?”

“Let's see, we got one going south at ten to seven. Sixty-five cents. You want a ticket?”

I looked at the clock. It was twenty after six. I smiled. “Yes, thank you.”

Thirty minutes later the train steamed out of Newport. I sat by a window, my bare head leaning against the glass pane, and watched our progress back through Scotia, Elk, Milan, Chattaroy. Soon I would be home. It was Sunday. I could go to my room, curl up in my bed, and sleep the entire day away. I closed my eyes and dozed, dreaming about sleep.

Chapter Nineteen

MARSHAL MITCHELL MET my train. I didn't expect that. I stopped at the top of the steps, blocking the passengers behind me. He grabbed me about my waist and hauled me down.

"I thought you might be stupid enough to come back here," he said.

"What do you mean?" I was befuddled with weariness and thought I must not have heard correctly. He took my arm and drew me away from the depot. "Wait." I stopped my boots.

"Where are you going? I want to go home."

"No." He didn't spare me a glance, but tightened his grip and pulled me with him.

I was now wide awake. My skin prickled and my face grew slack with fear. Something was terribly wrong. I stumbled along and said nothing more.

Within minutes we were at the jail. He opened the door and practically shoved me inside before letting go of my arm. The room was dim until the marshal turned up an oil lamp on the desk. The jail had not been electrified. It was a wide open room. There was another desk in the corner and four chairs. Several rifles hung in a rack behind the marshal's desk. A door on the side of the room was closed. A wood stove in the corner added warmth, but its heat battled with cold drafts that came in from under the door and around the windows, creating warm and cold breezes about my ankles.

I rubbed my elbow where he had gripped me and frowned to hide my fear. "I would have come peacefully," I said.

He only glared and snatched a paper from his desk and thrust it at me. I took it from him and found myself staring at a photograph of myself. It was the same wanted poster I'd seen in the Newport jail. I stared at it without blinking until spots formed before my eyes. My blood felt sluggish and frozen. I was going to be arrested. I was going to hang. How could I not have foreseen this? How could I not have realized that, once recognized in Newport, the game was up?

"Not Mrs. Jones after all, are you? Nor Miss Chumley either." He rested a hip against his desk, crossed his arms, and asked, "What's your story, Mrs. Robert Caldwell?"

"I—" No sound came out. I tried again. "I don't know...I don't know what—" A weakness came over me. The black spots before my eyes grew larger, the room swayed. Whether it was hunger and fatigue or a too tight corset or because I feared for my life, for whatever reason, I fainted dead away.

When I regained consciousness, I was lying on a bed with a blanket over me, and I felt a tremendous relief. It was all a dream. Then I opened my eyes and saw bars on the window above me. I was in jail.

I turned my head, which pounded as if a rubber ball bounced inside it, and saw that I wasn't alone.

"Drink this, Nell," Adelaide said.

I stared at her, puzzled. Whether it was a dream or a nightmare, Adelaide had no business being in jail with me.

“Here, I’ll help you.” She put a hand behind my head and helped me sip from the cup. It was a nasty medicine, but it cleared my head. I realized I was not dreaming and that Adelaide was, indeed, sitting in the jail cell beside me.

I sat up. “What are you doing here?”

“Careful there.” Adelaide grabbed the collar of my shirtwaist which was about to fall off. It had been loosened, as had my corset. “Let me help you.” She helped me button up without tightening the corset. The clothing fit oddly, but I could breathe freely.

Marshal Mitchell appeared in the doorway between the jail cells and his office. “She awake?”

“Yes,” Adelaide said. “She’ll be ready in a minute.”

“Good. Bring her out. I have some questions for her.”

“Can you stand?” Adelaide asked, offering me her arm.

“Yes. Why are you here?”

“The marshal came to get me. He’s not used to ladies fainting in his office. I’m glad he did,” she said quietly. “Are you in trouble, Nell? Can I help?”

I gave a shaky laugh. “I’m in trouble all right, but I don’t think there’s anything you can do for me.”

I held her arm and we walked to the door. There were two cells in the room. As we walked past the second one, I noticed a man sleeping on the bunk, undisturbed by our presence.

“Sit down, Mrs. Jones,” Marshal Mitchell said. “If you are able, I still have some questions for you. Thank you for coming, Dr. Keating. You know where to send the bill.”

“No, don’t make her go. I want you to stay, Adelaide. Can’t she stay?” I gripped her hand. It might be my last opportunity to touch her.

“I don’t care if she stays,” the marshal said, “but she’ll hear it all. Is that what you want?”

“Yes.” I was resigned to that fate. “She’ll know it all soon enough.”

We sat in the two chairs facing the marshal’s desk. He stood in front of it, leaning against it and looming above us.

“All right then, let’s start with this.” He snatched a paper from his desk and thrust it at her. “What do you think of that, Dr. Keating?”

I glanced at it. It was my wanted poster. Adelaide read it quickly, and I watched as her expressions changed from bewilderment to understanding to sadness and finally, when she looked up at me, fear.

“I’m sorry,” I said.

She just shook her head as if she couldn’t believe it.

“So, Mrs. Caldwell.”

I grimaced at the name.

“Tell me, first, about Talbot Stanfield, if you please. The truth this time.”

So I told him. I no longer had anything to hide. Well, hardly anything. I left out the bit about running into Mr. Stanfield again at Hennessey’s Confectionary. There was no need for two Hillyard women to hang, after all. Adelaide listened in silence.

“He was a kind man, Marshal,” I said at the end of my story. “His wife and daughters have lost a dear husband and father.”

He had listened with his jaw on his fist, but at my words he dropped his fist on his desk. “We’re no further along then. I’d hoped—well, no matter. You haven’t helped at all, but I’ll find out who killed him. I’ve sent wires to St. Paul. There may be a connection there.”

He rose and poured three cups of coffee from the pot on the stove. Adelaide took one, but I didn't want to let go of Adelaide's hand. He set the cup on the desk where I could reach it if I chose and said, "Now, Mrs. Caldwell, it's time to tell me your story."

"How I shot Robert, you mean." I felt Adelaide's fingers tighten on mine. "I married him four years ago. I didn't know him well, but he was well thought of in our church. He was a deacon, and a successful businessman. He had a large house and servants. I envied the servants. Robert wasn't kind to them, but at least they got time off, which was more than I got. The first time he beat me was our wedding night. After that..." I shook my head. "Oh, none of that matters, really. He beat me. You both know that."

"Why didn't you get a divorce?" Adelaide asked.

"I wanted to, but the only ground for divorce in New York is adultery. Robert would never commit adultery. He was too good for that. I thought about just running away. That's what I should have done, just run away and changed my name. It's what I did in the end anyway. But I decided that first I should try for a real divorce. Even though I couldn't divorce him, I thought maybe I could get him to divorce me, if he thought I was the one who was unfaithful. So I wrote some letters and left them where I knew Robert would find them. They implied that I had taken a lover."

"Oh no," Adelaide murmured.

I nodded. "I knew he would be angry. I knew he would hit me. I was prepared for that, but I thought it would be worth it because it would be the last time. I could endure a beating if I got a divorce out of it. But he was more than angry. I'd never seen him like that. It was as if he'd gone mad. I'd been frightened of him before, but this was different. I thought he was going to kill me. I still think it. I've thought of it over and over again, and I still think it. He was going to kill me that night." I cleared my throat. The next part would not be easy.

"Go on," Marshal Mitchell said.

"Robert kept a small gun in the pocket of his coat. He had hold of my arm, but I managed to twist away. I got away from him and I got the gun. He reached for it and I shot him." I'd never said it out loud before. The enormity of what I'd done hit me, and I said it again, "I shot him." Tears spurted from my eyes. "I'm sorry. I'm so very sorry. It was wrong, and I shouldn't have done it. I wish I never did. I'm sorry I killed him."

"You didn't kill him," the marshal said.

"Yes, I did. I shot him."

"No, you didn't kill him." He took the poster from his desk and handed it to me.

"Yes, that's me."

"Look at it again."

I looked. It certainly was me. The photograph was taken shortly after our marriage. My hair was elaborately styled, and I wore the magnificent gown Robert had insisted upon, as well as his mother's diamond and amber necklace, which I'd never seen again. I did not admire the likeness, but there was no doubt it was me.

"Read it, Nell," Adelaide said.

Seeing my face on the wanted poster was a bit jarring, I suppose, which may have been why, though I'd seen the poster

twice now, I had never actually read what it said. I did so now.

\$500 Reward

**MRS. ELEANOR CALDWELL
WANTED BY THE STATE OF NEW YORK FOR
ATTEMPTED MURDER AND ROBBERY**

Reward of \$500 will be paid by Robert Caldwell for the recovery or information leading to the recovery of Mrs. Eleanor Caldwell, who disappeared from New York City on February 17, 1902, after shooting her husband, robbing him of \$3200, and abandoning him to bleed nearly to death on the floor of their home. Mrs. Caldwell is 5 feet 1 inches in height, 110 pounds, blonde hair, gray eyes. Contact authorities with information or write to ROBERT CALDWELL, BOX 1757, NEW YORK, NY.

I felt the blood drain from my face. Only moments before I wished that I'd never killed Robert. As if in answer to a prayer, that wish was granted. I ought to have been grateful, but I was not. Instead, more than anything else, I felt paralyzing fear.

Robert was alive. "You see?" Marshal Mitchell said. "You didn't kill him, Mrs. Caldwell. He survived."

"No. No, he can't be alive. He can't be!" I leaped to my feet and crossed my arms at my breast. "Oh, what should I do? What can I do?"

"Nell, stop!" Adelaide jumped up and grabbed me by the shoulders. "It's all right. He can't hurt you here. You don't have to be afraid anymore. He doesn't know where you are. Nobody in this town even knows who you are except for me and the marshal here, and we're not going to tell. Right marshal?"

I clutched Adelaide's arm, and we both turned to look at the marshal.

He stared at her, met my eyes briefly, and snatched the crumpled paper from my clenched fingers. He moved to his desk and opened a thick book much like the one the lawmen in Newport had looked at. Marshal Mitchell's was not so neatly kept. Instead of punching holes in the sides of the papers and filing them on the metal rods, the posters were simply shoved between the covers of the book, many of them still folded from their journeys through the mail. He lifted a handful off the top and shoved my poster down beneath them. He let the cover drop and said, "I'm not in the habit of arresting runaway wives."

Adelaide let out a heavy breath, wrapped her arm over my shoulders, and squeezed. "See?" she said, though her voice shook. "I told you it would be all right."

I looked from her grinning face to the marshal's cool smile to the thick messy book of wanted posters, and the knot in my chest loosened. Was it possible that Adelaide was right? Would he truly let me go free?

I gave a shaky laugh. "I'm not surprised you never found the poster about me before now, if that's how you file those things."

"It's organized," he said, "sort of. I place the newest on top, so the old notices are at the bottom. And I hang the important ones." He nodded at the wanted posters on the wall. "This book is just for petty criminals and runaway wives."

"So she's free to go now?" Adelaide asked.

"She's not under arrest. But I wish you'd hold up a minute, Doc. I'd like you to take a look at my other prisoner. He's been out all night and didn't even wake up when I took Mrs. Jones in there."

"Certainly." Adelaide turned to. "Will you be all right, Nell? Do you want to come with us?"

“No, I’ll just sit here,” I said.

They went into the jail. As soon as the door closed behind them, I got up and went to the marshal’s desk and the book of wanted posters. I’d noted where the marshal had stuffed my poster. I opened to the exact spot, pulled it out, and shoved it into my purse. I could hear them conversing with the man in the cell, so I flipped farther back in the book. The posters were in rough chronological order, as the marshal had said. The oldest were from five years ago. I flipped forward and thumbed quickly. I found what I was looking for within minutes.

\$100 REWARD FOR RUNAWAY WIFE!

HESTER BLODGETT, twenty-six years old, five feet six inches, 140 pounds, brown hair, brown eyes. Ran away October 12, 1898. Took two little girls with her, Carrie and Jenny Blodgett, ages 8 and 6. Warren Blodgett, loving husband and father, desperately seeks information regarding their whereabouts. Reward will be paid for any information that leads to their recovery. Contact WARREN BLODGETT, St. Paul, Minnesota.

I removed the poster and slipped it into my bag as well.

When the jail door opened again, I sat demurely, with my hands folded over my purse and my eyes closed with fatigue.

“If you promise to vote for women’s suffrage, I’ll guarantee you a vote for a new jail,” Adelaide was saying. “This place is falling down around your ears.”

“I’ll take that bargain,” Marshal Mitchell said. “I’ve only got one cell that’s any good. The other one’s only fit for drunks and idiots. Anyone with half a brain could break out of it in ten minutes.”

I felt Adelaide’s hand on my shoulder. “Wake up, Nell. I’m going to take you home now.”

ADELAIDE HAD RIDDEN her bicycle to the jail. “It’ll take me just as long to go back for Uncle’s buggy as it will to walk you home from here,” she said. “Are you up for it?”

I nodded. There was nothing wrong with me, after all, though I felt as if I’d survived a battle. She pushed her bicycle, and we walked side by side.

“What happened to you to bring you to the marshal’s office?” she asked. “You always look charming, of course, but right now you look a bit as if you slept in a barn.”

“I did, actually,” I said. There was no point in denying it. My skirt was soiled, mud caked my new boots, my hat was gone, and my hair hung loose and tangled down my back. So I told her my overnight adventure.

“Holy smoke,” she said when I’d finished. “You’ve had a pretty rough time, haven’t you? No wonder you keeled over in the marshal’s office.”

“I thought my corset was to blame.”

“Well, it was, of course, but the night you had couldn’t have helped. If you ever find yourself in a pinch like that again, please let me know. You can reach me by telephone at my uncle’s. The operators put calls through to us any time of the day or night. Even if the operators from Newport have to call. Will you?”

“Yes.”

“Good.”

We walked in silence for a moment. I was so tired, I closed my eyes and walked blind.

“I wish you would have told me,” Adelaide said. Her voice was more solemn than before.

I opened my eyes. I didn’t pretend not to know what she meant. “How could I? I thought I was a murderer. When was I supposed to tell you that?”

“At any time,” she said. “You would have been safe with me. You’ve always been safe with me. Didn’t you know that?”

I thought about it and realized that she was right. From the moment I first met her in the Dunns’ parlor, I’d felt safe with her. Whether she was dressing in men’s clothing or drilling holes in my cast or catching me in an elaborate lie, even when she almost kissed me, I’d felt safe.

“I know it,” I said.

She stopped her bike, wrapped an arm around me, and pulled me to her. She dropped her chin to my hair. I let my face rest against her neck, closed my eyes, and made no move to pull away. The thudding of her heart was loud and it reverberated through me. She held me a long time, and I drew strength and comfort from the feel and the smell and the sound of her. When she finally raised her head and let me go, I felt almost healed from the trials of the last twenty-four hours.

We smiled at each other and continued walking.

By the time we reached the boarding house, everyone had already left for church except for Grace and Trissie, who were just leaving.

“Well, well, well,” Grace said. “See who’s finally come dragging in, Trissie? Was that Adelaide bringing you home? Sly Miss Chumley-Jones.”

“Hush, Grace,” Trissie said.

“We were surprised not to see you at Adelaide’s on Friday,” Grace said. “Guess you went over last night instead, eh? All by yourself?” She winked.

“Stop, Grace. Can’t you tell she’s been crying?” Trissie turned her back on Grace and asked me softly, “Are you all right? Did you and Adelaide have a falling out?”

“No. I wasn’t anywhere last night. Why would you think that?”

“Oh ho!” Grace laughed. “Why indeed, when you’re wearing the same outfit you wore at breakfast yesterday, and all rumpled too?”

“No, you’re mistaken. I wouldn’t. I’m not—”

“It’s all right, you can tell us. Nobody else is here,” Grace said.

“Leave her alone,” Trissie said. She put her arm around my shoulder and turned me toward the stairs. “You’ll have the house to yourself now, Nell. Take a nice bath and rest. You’ll feel better.”

Chapter Twenty

I GAVE MRS. Hennessey her wanted poster after school the next day.

“Where did you get this?” she asked after staring at it for a moment.

“Marshal Mitchell has a book,” I said. “He doesn’t know I took it. I don’t think he even knew it was there. If he did, he didn’t care. He says runaway wives aren’t his business.”

“How did you know about it?”

“He had one on me too.”

She glanced at me with a tiny smile. “Did you take that one too?”

“Yes. But it doesn’t matter. He already knows about mine.”

“And he’s not turning you in?”

“Not yet.”

Mrs. Hennessey studied her poster again. “Huh. Loving husband my eye.” She opened the stove door and tossed the poster into the flames. We both watched it disintegrate.

She closed the door and picked up her spoon. We stood in the kitchen while the two girls worked the counter in the front room selling candy to the after school crowd. She stirred a pot of a grainy yellowish liquid that bubbled, while Teddy sat on the floor babbling and playing with mounds of dirty flour.

“You couldn’t have divorced him,” I said. “Not without his knowing.”

“I didn’t, of course. I am a bigamist, Mrs. Widow Jones.” Her tone made it clear she had no fear I would tell. She didn’t know all my secrets, but she knew I was no widow. “I would rather Glenn not find out, if you don’t mind.”

“I won’t tell,” I said. “But I think you should know the marshal’s been sending wires to St. Paul. He’s trying to find out more about Mr. Stanfield.”

“Why would I care about that? I told you before, Mr. Stanfield was no friend of mine.”

“I know, but the marshal might uncover your connection with him.”

“I don’t think that’s likely. We weren’t close. My husband worked for him, that’s all. I was friendly with his wife. Besides, if the marshal doesn’t care about runaway wives, why would he care about a bigamist?”

I didn’t know if he would, but he would care if she was a murderer. If Mr. Stanfield worked with Mrs. Hennessey’s husband, her first husband that is, then he knew she married Mr. Hennessey without getting a divorce. Marshal Keating might not care about bigamy, but it was still a crime that could land Mrs. Hennessey in a woman’s prison. Worse, it could return her to her first husband. I knew better than most that a woman would kill to avoid that fate.

But I didn’t answer and only said, “I spoke with Mrs. Elsey the other day.”

“Mrs. Elsey?”

“The Dunns’ housekeeper.”

“I know who she is.”

“She told me Mr. Dunn loaned you the money to start this store.”

“She did?” She looked startled. “I didn’t think she knew.”

“So he did? Why?”

Mrs. Hennessey looked uneasy. “He’s a good man.”

“Were you friends with him in St. Paul?”

“No, not friends, but my husband worked with Mr. Dunn too, and I had met Emily a few times.” She bit her lip and then seemed to decide to share her story. “She’s a bit stiff, but she was always kind to me. She was the only one who seemed to see my bruises and understand what they meant. She took me aside one time and told me she would help me if I ever needed a safe place to get away from Warren. But Carrie was just a baby, and Jennie was on the way. Besides, I still thought Warren would change. I thought I could change him if I were just a better wife. I tried to be. For the next six years, I tried to be good enough, but I never could.”

I nodded and wondered, if I’d had a child, would I have stayed with Robert?

“I never forgot what Emily said, though. I knew she and Mr. Dunn had moved to Hillyard, so when I finally ran away, this is where I came. I always thought Emily must have experienced the same thing you and I have, but when I met Mr. Dunn I knew I was wrong. He’s different. He’s not the sort who would harm a woman.”

I nodded again. With some men, you just knew. “I didn’t realize the Dunns knew Mr. Stanfield too.”

“Did they?”

“Well, if your husband worked with both Mr. Stanfield and Mr. Dunn, wouldn’t they have known each other?”

Mrs. Hennessey lifted the spoon and let the amber goo drip back into the pot. “I never thought of that.”

“Strange that they never said anything about him.”

We exchanged an uneasy look. Why wouldn’t the Dunns have acknowledged knowing Mr. Stanfield unless they had something to hide?

“Wait,” I said. “Now that I think of it, they couldn’t have known him. Mr. Stanfield got off the train through the same door I did, and Mr. Dunn was right there on the platform waiting. Surely they would have recognized each other if they’d met before.”

“Well, it was ten years ago or more the Dunns moved here. People change.” She grabbed oven mittens, lifted the pot from the stove, and set it on the table. “All I know is they were kind to me when I arrived. I don’t think Emily was happy to see me, to tell the truth, but I was very ill, and my girls were still so little. She couldn’t turn me out, though I think she was tempted to. Then Mr. Dunn walked in, and he was so nice. He sent for the doctor and told me I could stay as long as I needed to. Mrs. Elsey looked after the girls until I was well again, and then they loaned me the money for the store. They only asked that I not let on to people that we knew each other back in St. Paul.”

“What a strange thing to ask.”

“Not so strange. I’d left my husband, after all, and taken the girls with me. That’s a crime, you know. They wouldn’t want to be caught giving me a lending hand. You won’t tell, will you?”

“Of course not.”

ON WEDNESDAY THE seventh graders filed out of the classroom, and I gathered my books to follow them. When I turned to leave, I saw Guy hovering by the door.

“Guy?” I moved toward him.

“Hello Mrs. Jones,” he said, as if we hadn’t just spent the last hour together.

“Do you need something?”

“No.” He jammed his hands into the pockets of his coat. “I just thought you’d want to know, we got a letter from Fannie. She’s married.”

“Really? Who did they find to marry them?”

“I don’t know. Dad says they could probably get the marriage annulled, but Mother said not to bother.”

“Where are they? Did the letter say?”

“It came from Seattle, but Mother says they could be anywhere by now. Mother doesn’t really want her to come back now.” Guy watched me carefully. “I think I know why.”

“You do?”

He bit his lip and his cheeks turned pink. “I think she’s going to have a baby. That’s what Mother said. That means I’ll be an uncle.”

“Congratulations, if it’s true. Is that what the letter said?”

“No.” He pulled an envelope from his pocket. “But what good is it being an uncle if I don’t even get to see the baby? Here’s the letter. You can read it if you want.”

I took the envelope. I shouldn’t read it. It was addressed to Mr. and Mrs. Dunn and was not Guy’s to share, but I couldn’t resist. I opened the envelope and read.

March 4, 1902

Dear Mother and Dad,

I suppose you will be relieved to know that Will and I are married. Don’t blame me for disgracing the family, it’s not as bad as it could have been. No, I’m not having a baby, not yet anyway, that’s not why Will and I ran away. If you know why I ran away (and I think you do!) you should be relieved and grateful, not angry with me. I just wish you had been more honest with me. I know how to keep a secret.

Does what you did have anything to do with my real father? Yes, Dad, I know you’re not my real father. I’ve known for years, but I love you anyway. Why didn’t you tell me?

Will and I are not quite settled yet, but when we are I’ll send our address and you can write to me. Tell Guy I love him.

Love, Your Daughter,

Mrs. William Sims

I read the letter twice, then folded it and gave it back to Guy. “The letter says she’s not having a baby.”

“I know, but Mother says she’s lying.” His eyes were wide and solemn. “Do you think Dad is my real father?”

I looked at him. He was small for his age, where Fannie was tall, but both had the blond hair and blue eyes of their mother. Neither had the darker eyes and complexion of Mr. Dunn. “I don’t know, Guy, but I’m certain that he loves you very much.”

He nodded glumly.

I WALKED HOME the back way, avoiding downtown. It was still light out, and the air had warmed and melted the most recent snow, though the road remained damp and muddy. I walked with my head down to avoid stepping in puddles and pondered Fannie’s letter. I regretted more

than ever that I hadn't let her talk to me before she left town. I had a feeling she held the missing piece of a puzzle.

I didn't hear the wheels behind me until the bicycle stopped so close beside me that water splattered from the tires and landed on the hem of my last clean skirt.

"Goodness gracious, Adelaide! You startled me. Why didn't you ring your bell?"

"I did." Adelaide laughed. "You were so lost in thought you didn't hear me." Her cheeks were pink and her eyes sparkled from exertion. She stepped off the bicycle and pulled her skirt clear of it. "I'll walk with you, all right?"

"Certainly."

"I hope you've recovered from Sunday. You looked so tired, poor thing. You were practically sleeping as you walked."

"I'm fine now. A good night's sleep cures all."

"I'm glad to hear it. So what were you thinking of so deeply when I rode up?"

"The Dunns. Guy told me they heard from Fannie. She and Will are married."

"Excellent news!"

"Do you really think so? She's not quite fifteen."

"Yes, they're young, but he's a good boy. I've seen worse matches made by people much older. So have you, Nell."

I bowed my head in acknowledgment.

"Say, do you ride?" she asked.

"A bicycle? No. I did try it once when I was younger, but I never quite got it going."

"I'll teach you later this spring, after you get your cast off."

I looked up. Riding a bicycle in the spring with Adelaide sounded delightful. "I'd like that."

She smiled at me. Her lips were red, her cheeks pink, and her face open and engaging. I eyed the gap between her two front teeth and decided I liked it. I looked away before my stare grew too long.

"I saw that you had another salon last Friday night," I said.

"You saw?"

"Yes, I was on the trolley. I saw the lights upstairs. Grace mentioned it too."

"Oh, Grace," she said as if she understood what I was getting at. "Listen, don't pay any heed to what Grace says. She got a wild notion about you at the start, and she won't change her mind about it no matter what I tell her."

"What do you tell her?"

Her answer came slowly. "Ah, I tell her that you're not the sort of lady who, ah, only enjoys the company of other ladies. Isn't that right?"

I dropped my eyes and studied the handlebar of her bicycle.

"Nell? Is that right?"

"I think so," I said.

She opened her mouth to speak, but apparently didn't know what to say. She stood frozen for a moment with her mouth open in a half smile, staring at me.

"But I'm not sure," I said, and her mouth closed again. "I think I need..."

"What, Nell?" We resumed walking. "What do you need?"

"I think I need to think about it some more."

She sighed. We'd reached the boarding house, and Adelaide mounted her bicycle and rode away, ringing her bell goodbye until she turned the corner.

Chapter Twenty-one

FOR THE REST of the week, two questions consumed my thoughts. What did Mr. and Mrs. Dunn do that caused Fannie to run away, and why did Adelaide think I wasn't the sort of lady to enjoy her salons?

I couldn't help wondering if the Dunns had something to do with Mr. Stanfield's death. Mr. Dunn very likely knew him in St. Paul, or at least worked in the same circles, but he said nothing about it when Stanfield died. Fannie had a secret she wanted to tell me, but I wouldn't listen, and it wasn't the one I'd thought. She was not pregnant. The secret had something to do with her parents, and the fact that Mr. Dunn was not her real father. Perhaps Mr. Stanfield was her real father, and Guy's too?

Perhaps Mrs. Dunn was a runaway wife too! She could have run away with Fannie and Guy when they were young, and Mr. Stanfield, their real father, showed up and discovered them. They say a mother will kill to protect her children. Did Mrs. Dunn kill Mr. Stanfield to prevent him from taking back his children?

But Mr. Stanfield was married and had two daughters of his own, one older than Fannie and the other younger. That didn't mean he couldn't be Fannie and Guy's father, of course. I was college educated enough to understand that. But if he was married to someone else when they were conceived, he would have no right to take them away from Mrs. Dunn, so why would she kill him? He could have lied about being married, but why would he lie to me, a stranger on a train? He had no idea I would be getting off the train in Hillyard. I didn't know it myself.

Besides, Mr. Stanfield struck me as a good and decent man, and the Dunns were kind and good people. The story I created in my mind was a better fit for Mrs. Hennessey than Mrs. Dunn. It was a better fit for me.

I wrestled with the puzzle all week, but I could make nothing of it. I created bizarre stories to explain Fannie's letter, grew frustrated, and let my mind wander to the other question that pestered me.

Why did Adelaide think I did not enjoy her salon? I enjoyed it very much.

Oh, I knew what she meant. She thought I was not the sort of woman to enter into a romantic friendship with another woman.

When she almost kissed me and I turned away, it must have convinced her of that. But that was when I was playing Mabel. I was Nell now, myself at last, and I was troubled beyond measure at the thought of Adelaide paying directed attention, the sort of attention she sometimes gave me, to another woman. Caroline, for instance. And when I bought the colorful skirt and elaborate hat at the Crescent department store, it was Adelaide I had envisioned seeing me in them, not a man.

Not that I had ever dressed to please a man, or been jealous of a man's attentions either, now that I thought of it. I'd attempted to please Robert because I was obligated to do so, not because I wanted to. On the few occasions when he paid heed to other women, I felt only relief because his attentions were not directed at me. Looking back, I realized that even in college, when men from nearby schools joined our occasional teas or dances, I gave little thought to pleasing them with my dress or dance. I thought only of my female schoolmates, and one or two in particular. I had

never been as forward as I'd been with Adelaide, tucking my feet beneath her to keep them warm. My behavior that night embarrassed me, but not enough to stop me from wanting to do it again.

It was Friday evening, and I was certain Adelaide had another salon planned that night. Grace and Trissie had mentioned vague plans. They did not invite me to go with them, and when I knocked on their door after dinner, they did not answer. I'd missed them. I despaired, but only briefly. It was dark outside, but the weather was fair, and the walk to Adelaide's home was less than a mile. I would go. Adelaide would be surprised, but she would welcome me, and she would understand then that I was indeed the sort of woman to enjoy her salons.

I dressed with care. My peacock hat was trampled in Newport, but it wouldn't have done for an evening salon anyway. I dressed in the best clothes I had, pinched my cheeks, and gnawed on my lips to make them red. I slipped out of the house and made my way through the dark to Adelaide's salon.

I crept around to the back door, put my hand on the knob, and froze. Did I have the nerve? What if I was unwelcome? Perhaps what I thought was romantic interest was really just Adelaide's normal friendliness, which she would show to any of her patients. She might look at me with horror if I showed up at her door, like she had the last time I'd arrived unannounced. I couldn't bear that.

I still stood undecided with my hand on the knob when I heard quiet steps and the rustle of clothing approach from the side of the house. More guests. I scurried off the stoop and dropped into the cellar alcove just as they rounded the corner. I squatted on my heels. I was in the shadows where they could not see me, if they had any reason to look my way. I turned my head away nonetheless, like a small child, hoping that if I couldn't see them, they couldn't see me either.

Curiosity overcame me. I had to know who else would be attending Adelaide's salon. I turned my head back and looked.

Mr. and Mrs. Dunn!

I sucked in a breath. It was silent, but Mrs. Dunn turned her head in my direction as if she had heard me. She did not meet my eyes, but looked vaguely above me, then back at the door. I relaxed. She hadn't seen me. But why were they there? Was someone sick? Guy? They must be coming to fetch the doctor, though I could not fathom why they didn't ring at the front door or why Mrs. Dunn didn't remain with him at home. They didn't knock at all. Mr. Dunn opened the door and they slipped quietly inside.

It occurred to me how awful it would be if Mr. and Mrs. Dunn discovered the nature of Adelaide's salons. Someone should warn Adelaide! There was no one who could do it but me. I hurried to the back door and turned the knob without hesitation.

It was as I remembered it, a darkened kitchen and a narrow staircase lit by a single bulb. I saw nothing of Mr. or Mrs. Dunn. I crept as quickly as I could to the landing. I still saw nothing of the Dunns until I turned up the next staircase. They were already at the door. They knocked, and the door opened. I leaned back into the shadows. I expected to hear sounds of surprise or dismay, or perhaps Adelaide would step out and usher them quickly down the stairs. None of that happened.

Light and laughter fell through the open doorway. Adelaide stood there. She smiled, and so did the Dunns. She stepped back, they entered, and the door closed again.

I slinked back down the stairs, my heart pounding at my narrow escape. Adelaide wasn't having a women only salon. She was having some other sort of party where men were welcome.

Grace and Trissie weren't evading me after all. They truly must have had other plans. How horrible it would have been if I had knocked on that door and found myself uninvited at a perfectly respectable party.

My face burned with shame and confusion. I let myself out of the house and crept home in the dark.

THE NEXT DAY was Saturday. I spent the morning tidying my rooms, laundering my underclothes, and planning lessons for the next week. When I took myself downstairs for lunch, I learned that Grace and Trissie had gone into Spokane for the day. Fred was at work at the drugstore, which left only me, Ida Mae, Cora, and Jane at the table.

"What are your plans for the afternoon, Nell?" Ida Mae asked.

"I'm not sure," I said.

"You'll be here all afternoon?" Cora asked.

"I, uh..."

"Don't forget we have the suffrage group meeting right after lunch," Ida Mae said.

"Oh, that's right," I said. "I'll be at the suffrage group."

Cora looked disappointed for a moment, then suggested, "I wonder if your group would mind watching—"

"We've got a lot to do today, Cora," Ida Mae said. "We can't spare the time to look after Jane for you."

Cora sighed.

The same members of the suffrage group arrived shortly after lunch, and I was able to match the faces to the names, Hattie Noonan, Maude Reed, Mrs. Steele, and Josie Franklin.

"Will Dr. Keating be joining us today?" Josie asked.

"I saw you walking with her the other day, Nell," Ida Mae said. "Did she say anything about it?"

"She didn't mention it," I said, and Josie gave me a sharp look.

"I'm not surprised," Hattie said. "She's too busy for this kind of work."

"I wrote thirty-six letters this week," Maude said. "One to each senator in the state."

"I wrote to the representatives," Josie said. "That's seventy-four letters."

"You have more time, of course," Hattie said, "unmarried as you are."

"Nell is unmarried too," Josie said.

"Nell is a career woman," Maude said, "like Dr. Keating."

"She's only a teacher," Josie said.

"I would help if I could," I said. "But what can I do?"

"I've been thinking about that," Ida Mae said. "Writing letters is all well and good, but we need to do something to reach the youngsters, especially the high school students. Some of those boys will be voting in two or three years. If we can get them on our side now, before they've made up their minds about suffrage, so much the better."

"But I don't teach high school," I said.

"I was thinking of a contest," Ida Mae said. "An essay contest for the whole school, open to boys and girls both, of course. We can give a cash prize. All the boys will try to win it, so they'll all write essays on why women should get the vote. They'll talk themselves into suffrage without even knowing it."

“Brilliant!” Maude said.

“That’s why you’re our leader, Ida Mae,” Hattie said.

“How much of a cash prize?” Josie asked. “And where will we get the money?”

“I was thinking of ten dollars. And we’ll have to raise the money, of course. It’s been a while since we’ve had a baking sale.”

“We can sell my tatting,” Mrs. Steele said, holding up her needle.

“And I’m finishing up a quilt,” Maude said.

I thought about the thousands of dollars I had rolled away upstairs. It was a pity I couldn’t just give them the money, but it would raise too many questions, of course.

“I don’t know if the principal will approve of the contest,” I said, “but I’ll certainly try.”

I excused myself from the meeting soon after and went upstairs to my sitting room. I sat at my desk and pulled a piece of paper in front of me. I jotted across the top of the page, “Why Women in Washington Should Be Given the Vote.” Below it I listed the requirements of the essay. It should include the benefits for the state, the community, and the home as well as for women. It should be no fewer than five hundred words and no more than one thousand. Essays would be judged on the quality of the writing as well as the thoughts expressed.

I was so absorbed in my work that I barely noticed the sound of steps coming upstairs, or the muffled voices. It wasn’t until I heard a rap at the door that I realized someone was there.

I pressed blotting paper to my words and rose to answer it. It was one of the suffragists, no doubt, with another thought about the essays. I opened the door and stared into the smiling, devilish face of my husband.

His fist crashed into my face.

I flew back and landed on my little table. It toppled sideways, and I landed on top of it. I heard Ida Mae’s scream from behind Robert.

“Stop it! Oh no, no, dear God, leave her alone!”

Robert ignored her. Before I could stand again, I felt his hand on my head. He grabbed a handful of my hair and yanked me to my feet. I screamed. My scalp felt on fire.

“Josie! Maude! Get the marshal! Let her go, you villain. The marshal is on his way.”

Robert twisted his hand in my hair, and I whimpered. He held my hair in such a way that I couldn’t move except where he put me. Even screaming was impossible.

“Where’s my money, Eleanor?” He gave my head a shake, and black spots formed before my eyes.

I waved my fingers toward the bedroom. “There.”

He dragged me through the doorway. “Where?”

“There.” I pointed to the dresser, and he shoved me toward it, never letting go of my hair. I fumbled blindly with the drawer and pulled it open.

Robert reached in, threw my stockings on the floor, and pulled out the roll of bills. He shoved the money into his pocket without counting it and pulled me back toward the sitting room.

I didn’t see Ida Mae. She was behind the door. When Robert came through, she brought a chair down on his back. Robert was a tall man, Ida Mae a tiny woman. She didn’t strike him hard enough to make him fall, but he did release my hair.

I sprang away from him and backed toward the window, massaging my throbbing scalp.

Robert spun toward Ida Mae.

“Get back,” she warned, bringing the chair up again.

“Look out, Ida Mae!” I moved toward her, but too late.

She swung the chair at him, and he grabbed it from her and tossed it aside as if she were a child. He raised his hand to strike her.

“Hit her and I’ll kill you, mister.” Maude Reed, plump and powdered, stood in the doorway with a shotgun pointed at Robert. “I’ll kill you.”

Robert lowered his fist, but he didn’t look scared. Ida Mae backed away from him and joined me at the window. We both trembled.

“Just stay right there,” Maude said. “The marshal’s on the way.”

Robert perched casually on the edge of the table and crossed his arms. “The law is on my side, ma’am. She’s my wife.”

“She may be, but I’m not,” Ida Mae said. “There’s no law on your side there.”

“You’re a liar,” Maude said. “Nell is a widow.”

“Oh, she tried to be.” Robert spoke pleasantly, as if he were at church. “First Corinthians, 7:39. ‘The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth.’ My sweet wife Eleanor tried to shorten that time considerably. She tried to kill me.”

“Well, I don’t blame her,” Ida Mae said.

Maude did not look away and her aim did not waver, but she frowned and thought a moment before saying, “We’ll still just wait for the marshal.”

“Certainly,” Robert said. He moved to the chair closest to us and sat, as relaxed as if at home. Ida Mae and I shuffled back.

Minutes passed. From the edge of my vision, I could see my left cheek swell. My hair fell loose and heavy down my back. The sharp pain in my scalp had been replaced by a general throbbing ache. My trembling did not subside, and my legs grew so weary I thought I might fall.

Finally, I heard the door open downstairs, and heavy feet tramped up the steps. Maude moved aside, and Marshal Mitchell entered the room. His eyes darted from one face to another and returned to mine.

Robert rose and tugged the corners of his vest. “I’m glad you’re here, constable. I’ve come all the way from New York City to fetch my runaway wife, here, and this little old lady hit me over the head with a chair. Arrest her, if you please.”

“No.” I grabbed onto Ida Mae’s arm. “She was only trying to help me. She didn’t know.”

“She’s a termagant, anyway,” Robert said. “Keep her off me, and I’ll take my wife and go.”

“No! Don’t let him take me, Marshal Mitchell, please. He hit me, you can see. He’ll do it again. He’ll kill me. Don’t let him!”

“I don’t know how much you know about the law, constable,” Robert said, “but you have no power to stop me. She’s my wife.”

Marshal Mitchell glanced again from me to Robert, and I despaired. He might not go out of his way to return runaway wives, but that didn’t mean he would thwart the law on my behalf. He was a man, after all, and a lawman at that.

“Wait!” I let go of Ida Mae’s arm and reached for my handbag. “You can arrest me. Put me in jail, Marshal. I don’t mind. Just don’t let Robert take me.”

I thrust my wanted poster at the marshal. He’d already seen it, of course, but he read it again and handed it to Robert.

“That’s unimportant,” Robert said. “I’m the one she shot and robbed. I drop the charges. You can’t arrest her now.”

“Doesn’t it say I’m wanted by the State of New York? You can’t drop the charges, Robert, not unless you’ve been appointed governor since I last saw you.”

Robert had remained calm until then, but now he flushed dark red. “You see what I’ve had to put up with, constable? A wicked, spiteful wife!” He clenched his fists, and I knew if he were allowed to be alone with me, I would suffer for my words.

“Perhaps,” Marshal Mitchell said. “I don’t know how much you know about the law, mister, but I’m not a constable and you’re not in New York City. I’m a marshal and I’m bound to enforce this wanted poster until I’m told otherwise by the State of New York.” He turned to me. “Eleanor Caldwell, I’m placing you under arrest for attempted murder and robbery. Please get your coat, ma’am, and come with me.”

Chapter Twenty-two

I WAS ALONE in the jail. The other cell was empty. The door to the office was open. I could only see part of a wall, a corner of the gun cabinet, a wedge of the marshal's desk, but it was enough to let me know I was alone in the building.

I'd been sleeping. The trauma of the afternoon's events worked on me like a drug, and I fell asleep on the jail cot almost as soon as the door locked behind me. I didn't know how long I slept, but it was now dark outside. The only light came from the old oil lantern turned low on a table beside the door between the office and cell. It was kind of Marshal Mitchell to leave it for me, I supposed, so that I wouldn't awake in pitch darkness in unfamiliar surroundings.

I wondered if I would be left alone in the jail all night. My cell door was locked, nothing could hurt me where I was, but I was frightened. I had never been alone in a building in my life.

I found a bucket in the corner of the cell, kicked it, then used it for its intended purpose, grateful for that moment, at least, that there was no one nearby to see or hear me. The room was cold. I still wore my coat, but I pulled the wool blanket from the cot and wrapped it around my shoulders as I paced from wall to bars to window to wall. It occurred to me that I might be imprisoned for days or weeks or months. Even years. How could I bear it?

A noise from the outer office made me freeze. Someone came in and closed the door. Steps crossed the floor. As frightened as I had been at being alone, I was more frightened now that I was not. Robert? I searched for a place to hide, but there was nothing in the room but the bucket and the cot, which was too low to the ground to hide under.

A figure appeared in the doorway. Humiliation replaced my fear. I was aware of the picture I must make. Hair mussed and loose, swollen cheek, odorous bucket, and the bars, of course. He would not allow a criminal to teach his children.

"Hello, Mr. Dunn." I clutched the blanket at my neck. "I'm sorry to have you see me like this."

He strode forward and yanked at my cell door. "Is this locked?" He turned and went back to the office, rummaged about, and returned with a large key. He stuck it into the lock, opened my cell door, and beckoned with his fingers. "Come," he said.

I stepped back.

As desperate as I had been to get out of my cell a moment ago, now I was terrified to leave it.

Mr. Dunn's face was white as paste, except for his eyes, which were red and swollen as if he had been crying. "Come with me," he said more forcefully and stretched out his hand.

I shook my head and pressed back against the wall. "I don't want to."

He took a quick step forward. "You don't understand. You don't know who I am, do you?"

Had he gone mad? "I do," I said. "You're Hiram Dunn, the school superintendent."

"You don't," he said. "Of course you don't. I knew it, but she doesn't believe it. She saw you at Adelaide's salon. She thinks you know."

My mind scrambled. He could only mean Mrs. Dunn. She saw me watch them go to Adelaide's back door. She thought I knew...what?

When I saw the Dunns at Adelaide's, I'd assumed that Adelaide was not having a women's salon after all, that she was having a salon for genteel guests, men and women. But as I pictured

her there at the top of the stairs, smiling and inviting them in, I realized I was wrong. She wore men's clothing! It was a salon for women only, and she'd welcomed the Dunns.

I thought of what Adelaide had told me once before, about women living as men, and examined Mr. Dunn more closely. He was clean shaven, as always, narrow about the shoulders and paunchy in the front. But it was in meeting his eyes I read the truth.

"You're not really Mr. Dunn, are you?"

Tears flooded his eyes, and he shook his head. Her head, that is.

For Mr. Dunn, I'd just realized, was a woman.

"It's all right," I assured her. "It doesn't matter to me. Adelaide explained it to me. I know some women prefer it, living as men. What harm is there in visiting with others who understand?"

She wiped her cheeks and said, "That's what I thought. You're as innocent as a baby. But she doesn't believe that. She thinks..."

"Who?" But I knew who. "Mrs. Dunn? She thinks what?"

"It doesn't matter."

"Maybe it didn't, but it does now, unfortunately," Mrs. Dunn said from the doorway. We'd been so engrossed we didn't hear the door open. "It's too bad you didn't trust me, my dear Angel. You're so clumsy. If you'd left it to me, perhaps she would still be the innocent babe." She took the key from Mr. Dunn's fingers, closed my cell door, and locked it. "Now you really do know. You shouldn't have spied on us, Mrs. Jones."

"I didn't." I felt a strong need to reassure her, for she moved with an air of intention that frightened me. "I mean, I didn't mean to, and it doesn't matter anyway. I don't care if you go to Adelaide's salon. I've gone myself. I never said a word to anyone, and I wouldn't. I won't."

She shook her head. "We might have trusted you if it was only that. We've trusted others. Adelaide, of course. She knows about Angela and she never told. But you know a bit more than that, don't you?"

I did, all at once. Mr. Stanfield knew Mr. Dunn in St. Paul. He told me he hoped to see an old friend. I thought he meant Mrs. Hennessey, but he was surprised when he saw her. I should have realized. It was Mr. Dunn he hoped to see, and when he did, he had to know at once that he was seeing an imposter.

Mrs. Dunn nodded. "I thought so."

"The real Mr. Dunn," I said. "What happened to him?"

She made no answer. She lifted the oil lantern from the table.

Mr. Dunn—Angela—watched Mrs. Dunn, her expression fearful. "But Mrs. Jones won't tell." She turned to me. "You won't, will you? We had to do it. He found out Emily was leaving. He didn't care about that, but he was going to keep the children. We couldn't let him do that. Especially Fannie. You have to understand. He was indecent with her, and she was just a little girl. We aren't killers, but we had to stop him. Please, tell her you won't tell."

"I won't tell," I said quickly. Angela's fear increased my own. "Why would I? You know I tried to kill my own husband, don't you? That's why I'm in this cell."

Mrs. Dunn slid the glass globe up on the oil lantern, tilted it, and let oil drip into the floor. "I don't want to do this."

"Then don't do it," I said.

"Stop, Emily," Angela said. "Killing Hiram was necessary, and perhaps Mr. Stanfield too. He was a stranger to us. How could we trust him to keep silent? But we know Mrs. Jones. She's

a friend of ours, a friend of Adelaide's. She's Guy's teacher! We can trust her. You don't have to do this."

"I don't want to," Emily said, continuing to drip oil. "We have to. I'm not in this alone, remember?"

Angela reached for the lantern. "Give it to me, Emily."

Emily swung the lantern away. More oil splashed, some on the floor and some onto her skirt. "No, Angela. Think about what would happen if we were caught. I'd be sent to a women's prison, which would be bad enough, but you? After the life you've led for the last ten years? They would be brutal with you, you know it. You'd be lucky if you were only hanged."

"I'm willing to risk it," Angela said.

"You won't be caught," I said. "I won't tell, I swear it. I'm your friend!"

Emily paused and looked at me with a sad expression. "I like you, Mrs. Jones. I miss having friends, but it's impossible to have that sort of intimacy with a secret life like ours. We live alone, Angela and I."

"But we have each other," Angela said. "And we have Guy." She grasped the handle of the lantern. "I won't let you do this, my love."

I saw what happened next as if time itself had slowed. Angela tugged at the handle as if she thought Mrs. Dunn would fight her, but Mrs. Dunn let her fingers go slack. Angela pulled and the lantern flew too quickly and slipped from Angela's fingers. They both grabbed for it, but they missed. The lantern spun in the air and more oil splashed from it. All three of us screamed as the lantern crashed and the flame ignited on the spilled oil. Flames darted across the oil streaked floor and reached Emily's skirt before she had time to move.

"Emily!" Angela lunged and beat at Emily's skirt while the fire spread on the floor around them and in front of my cell.

"Let me out!" I screamed. "Mr. Dunn, throw me the key. Angela, throw me the key! Mrs. Dunn!"

I was ignored. Angela pushed Mrs. Dunn back into the outer office away from the flames, both of them screaming and beating at the flames that engulfed Mrs. Dunn's skirt. Smoke blackened the air between me and them. I was alone.

I fled to the window. Four steel bars spanned it, and glass covered it on the far side. There was nothing in the cell that could reach through the bars except my bare hands. But one of my hands, of course, was not bare. I swung my right arm between the bars and shattered the glass with my cast. Cold blew in. I heard the flames behind me roar as they battled the fresh air.

"Help! Fire!"

The jail was at the edge of town. I saw nothing but blackness beyond and had no idea if anyone could hear me. I grabbed a bar and pulled. It was secure and did not move. I saw a gap between the bottom of the windowsill and the wall where the cement had fallen away. Marshal Mitchell's words returned to me. One cell was fit only for drunks or idiots. Anyone with half a brain could break out of it in ten minutes. I was neither drunk nor an idiot, but I was a woman, and Marshal Mitchell would not be the first man to find the distinction unclear. This had to be the cell for idiots!

But I didn't have ten minutes. Smoke was blowing over me now, and the heat from behind me grew as the flames leapt higher. I wedged my fingers into the gap beneath the sill and tried to work it back and forth. It loosened, but not enough. I pressed my face to the bars, sucked in lungs full of air, and screamed again. "Help!"

I used my cast like a hammer and battered at the crumbling cement that held the window in place. A thimbleful of cement tumbled down. The heat singed my back, and I pondered an arithmetic question. If a fire grows three yards per minute, and it takes two minutes to dislodge one thimbleful of cement, how many schoolteachers will burn to death before the window pops free?

I was afraid I knew the answer. I smashed my arm harder against the wall and more cement crumbled, but it was too slow. In frustration, I gave the window a strong shove. The sill popped out half an inch. Choking for air, I shoved again and found myself half out the window before I realized I was free. I let myself fall the rest of the way to the ground.

I lay on the ground and stared at the sky, sucking in the night air. Billows of smoke blocked a swath of stars, and a tongue of flame licked out the window above me. I ought to move.

Dragging myself to my feet was more difficult than it should have been. My arms and shoulders trembled, my legs were weak, but the heat coming from the little building was now tremendous, which spurred me. I made it to the corner of the building. I heard voices as people noticed the fire, but smoke and flames blocked them from my view.

“Was anyone inside?”

“Dear God, I hope not.”

“Oh no, look, there is someone.”

I raised my arm in a wave, but they were not looking at me. A figure emerged from the front of the building, smoke billowing from its arms and legs. Then I saw it was not one figure, but two.

The Dunns embraced and circled in a macabre dance until they crumpled in a heap before the horrified townspeople. The crowd rushed to them and blocked them from my view.

I felt a touch on my arm and cried out.

“Come away, Nell.” It was Helen Hennessey. “Come away from the fire. You’ll be burned.”

“It’s the Dunns.” I was surprised at the hoarseness of my voice.

“Come away.” Her own voice was choked. She was crying too. “Come away, now.”

Chapter Twenty-three

WE SAT IN Helen's kitchen. She handed me a damp cloth. I scrubbed the worst of the grime from my eyes and face while she chipped ice into a towel. She handed the bundle of ice to me and I pressed it to my throbbing wrist.

"It won't do much good there," Helen said. She moved the ice to my swollen cheek.

"Oh. I forgot. My wrist is what hurts." I showed her the broken plaster.

"Might as well get that off." She filled a large pan with water, added some warm water from a kettle, and placed it on the table before me. I pushed up my sleeve and put my arm in the water to soak.

"Do you think they're dead?" I asked.

"I hope so. I would hate to think of their suffering if they're not."

I agreed, but I wasn't thinking about their burns. Emily would never have to worry about Angela's safety again, nor Angela about Emily's.

A sharp knock at the door made us jump. Helen opened the door. Adelaide Keating stood in the opening, her hand raised to knock again. Her eyes slid past Helen's to meet mine. Her face crumpled. She slapped a hand to her mouth and slumped against the door jam. "Thank God. Oh thank God."

"Come in, Dr. Keating." Helen took her arm and pulled her in.

Adelaide wiped her face with her sleeve and stood before me. "They said you were dead. They said...there were two bodies. There were two—"

"It wasn't me," I said.

"It was Mr. and Mrs. Dunn," Helen said.

"Yes, but Uncle said—" Adelaide bit her lip and glanced at Helen. "Uncle examined the bodies. He said they were both women."

"That's impossible," Helen said. "Nell saw them. It was Mr. and Mrs. Dunn."

Adelaide's eyes met mine. I tried to convey to her that I knew about Mr. Dunn. She nodded slowly.

"It's good you came, Dr. Keating," Helen said. "Her arm needs looking at."

"Yes." Adelaide knelt before me. "Her face too, it looks like." She took my chin in her hands and turned my face to examine my cheek. She glanced at my soaking arm. Her freckles stood out like mud spatters, and her eyes were as dark as licorice. She pulled herself into the chair beside me and tugged a stethoscope from her pocket. "May I listen to your lungs?" She placed the horn of the stethoscope against my chest, and I breathed in and out as she directed. Her hands were black with soot, I noticed, and her fingers trembled.

"Cough for me."

I coughed. It caught in my throat and I coughed some more. I took a drink from my tepid tea and breathed slightly better.

"You have some damage from the smoke. We'll need to keep an eye on that. Now let's look at this arm." She prodded the soggy plaster. "This is a mess, isn't it? It'll have to be plastered again, poor thing, but I don't have any plaster with me. Mrs. Hennessey, do you have some linen or thin cotton you can spare?"

"Yes. I'll be right back."

“Quickly, tell me what happened,” Adelaide said as soon as Helen was gone. “How did the fire start?”

“It was an oil lantern,” I said. “Mrs. Dunn dropped it.”

“Dropped it? So it was an accident?”

“I think so. That is, in the end it was an accident, but at first...she meant to kill me.”

“Why?” Adelaide asked, but almost as if she knew the answer.

“She was afraid I would tell someone that she killed Talbot Stanfield. He’d told me he hoped to visit an old friend here. I thought he meant Helen, since it turns out he knew her too. But it was actually Mr. Dunn he meant to visit.”

“Hiram.”

“Yes When Mr. Stanfield met the current Mr. Dunn, he knew he—I mean, she—was an imposter. He figured out that they must have killed the real Mr. Dunn, or maybe Emily was just afraid that he would figure it out, so she killed him, or they both did. I don’t know, but she was afraid I was going to tell, so she was going to burn the jail up with me in it.”

Adelaide put a hand on my hair. “I’m so sorry, Nell. I’ve known about Angela for a long time. She and Emily visited me shortly after I returned from medical school. Angela had a medical problem that she couldn’t take to another doctor. They trusted me with that secret, but I didn’t know about the real Mr. Dunn.”

“I wouldn’t have told anyone about it,” I said, “but she didn’t believe me. She was so scared. I think in the end she believed me. I think she did. But that’s when she dropped the lantern.”

Adelaide ran the back of her fingers against my bruised cheek. “I heard your husband arrived in town today. He did this?”

“Yes. He wanted to take me back home, and I couldn’t let him. He’ll kill me. I know he will. So I asked Marshal Mitchell to arrest me. I don’t want to go to prison, but I can’t go back with him.”

“No, you can’t go to prison,” Adelaide said. “And I won’t let you go back with him.”

I wanted to believe her. “How can you stop it?”

“I have an idea, but we’ll need Mrs. Hennessey’s cooperation. Do you trust her?”

“I do, but what’s your idea?”

“Here she is. I’ll tell you both at the same time.”

We sat upright, for as we talked I’d leaned against her, and she put her arm around my waist. When Helen entered, she found us sitting primly. Adelaide’s grimy hands still worked the damp plaster on my cast, and she stared at them as if she’d never seen anything so interesting. For the first time in the long dreary night, I smiled.

“Thank you for the linen, Mrs. Hennessey,” Adelaide said. “Sit down a moment, please. I’m going to tell you a story that might shock you.”

“I’m not easily shocked, but go ahead. And call me Helen, please.”

“Very well, Helen. It’s a very short story. My uncle says that both of the bodies out there are women, and Nell says that they are Mr. and Mrs. Dunn. Both of them are correct.”

Helen was surprised, but only for a moment. I could see it in her eyes when she understood. “So that’s why Emily was so upset when I showed up at her door, and she didn’t want me there when Hiram came home.”

The last of my cast came free. Helen handed Adelaide a towel. She wiped my arm gently, dried her own hands, and wrapped my arm in a temporary bandage.

“Emily thought you knew the real Mr. Dunn,” I said. “She thought you’d recognize her husband as an imposter.”

“She was practically a bigamist, then.” Helen gave a soft laugh. “Except with a woman. I never thought of that.”

“Nobody else has either,” Adelaide said. “I’d like to keep it that way. When Uncle said two women died in that fire, everyone assumed it was Emily Dunn and Nell. The three of us sitting at this table are the only ones who know the truth.”

I began to see what Adelaide was getting at. “If Robert thinks I died in the fire, he won’t look for me anymore.”

“That’s right,” Adelaide said. “And Marshal Mitchell can’t send you back east for trial if he thinks you’re dead.”

“So we just let everyone think you’re dead.” Helen nodded. “It could work. But what about Mr. Dunn? Hiram, I mean, or whatever her name is.”

“They’ll wonder what happened to him,” Adelaide said, “but it’s a mystery they’ll never solve.”

Another knock at the door startled us.

“Hide, Nell,” Adelaide whispered. She swept the remains of the cast into the bowl and slid it into the oven, while Helen ushered me out of the kitchen, through the living room, and into the darkened confectionary. She hurried back and opened the door.

“Evening Mrs. Hennessey.” It was Marshal Mitchell’s voice. “I understand you’re a friend of the family.”

“Oh Guy, you poor thing, come with me. I’ll find a place for you to sleep.” The door of the kitchen opened. I peeked out and saw Helen take Guy upstairs. His head was bowed, his shoulders slumped, and my heart broke for him. Except for his sister, a young bride in Seattle, he was all alone in the world now, though he didn’t know it yet.

I heard Marshal Mitchell’s voice again. “I’m sorry about Mrs. Jones.”

“Sorry?” Adelaide asked, her voice hard as rocks.

“I only put her there because she asked me to, you know. Her husband...well, that jail’s been kindling for years, you know that.”

Adelaide said nothing.

“Anyway, I’m sorry. I know she was your friend. It’s too bad she had to die like that.”

Chapter Twenty-four

I SLEPT IN Adelaide's bed that night. She loaned me a nightshirt that fit me like a gown and handed me a bottle of Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup.

"This will ease your cough," she said, "and the pain in your arm and head."

I swallowed deeply, crawled under the covers, and closed my eyes. Moments later I felt her slip into bed from the other side. I reached out and touched softness and heat. I rolled over, curled into her warmth, and fell sound asleep.

I awoke to find sun streaming through the curtains and my head pillowed on Adelaide's breast. I breathed deeply for a long moment, savoring the feel of it, until I felt a touch on my hair. I turned my head without raising it and saw Adelaide watching me. Her eyes were shadowed, her lids heavy.

She gave a tired smile. I watched her tongue play back and forth along the gap in her front teeth. She licked her lips, and I thought of the evening when she almost kissed me. I had secrets from her then, and couldn't let her, but I had no secrets now.

I wriggled my hips and elbows to scoot myself higher in the bed until my face reached hers. I could count on one hand the times I'd been kissed on the lips, and all were by Robert. The first was the night he proposed. The second was our wedding kiss. Both were chaste and dry. Three other times during the night he had kissed me while pushing himself into me. I'd never felt pleasure, only the panic of suffocation as he covered me with his body. I'd never wanted to kiss anyone, until now.

"Nell," she said. It was a whisper, a warning. Be careful.

I ignored it. I leaned in and pressed my lips to hers. They were soft and giving. It was like tasting fruit. I wanted more. I kissed her again. Her lips opened, and I ran my own tongue against the space in her teeth, touching her gums and her tongue.

She groaned, wrapped her arms around me, and rolled me so that I was flat on the bed with her above me. She covered me, but it was not like when Robert did it. Her breasts hung down inside her sleepshirt and fell heavy against my chest. One of her legs lay between mine, and I felt heat inside me.

"Do you know what you're doing to me?" she asked.

"I think so." I pressed myself against her thigh until I shook.

"Oh, Nell." She kissed me, rough and soft at the same time. She ran her hands along my body, outside the sleep shirt at first, then inside. Her fingers touched my bare skin. She stroked and pressed her fingers against me. I pulled her shirt up and touched her the way she touched me. We rubbed our bodies together until we shuddered deep and long.

Afterward we rearranged our clothes and lay against each other, resting and catching our breaths. I watched the dust swirling in the beam of sunlight and wished that I could lay in Adelaide's arms forever.

Grace and Trissie were the lucky ones. They still got to live together in their pretty rooms, masquerading as roommates, and sleeping in each other's arms every night. That's all I wanted to do. That's all Mr. and Mrs. Dunn — Angela and Emily — wanted too, but they'd had to risk so much to be able to do it, and in the end, they lost everything.

“I wish I could stay here forever,” I said.

Adelaide’s arm tightened around me. “You’re welcome to.”

I sat up, pulled my knees to my chest, and rested my chin on them. “What am I going to do? I can’t stay here. I can’t teach.” My eyes filled with tears at the enormity of my loss. “I can’t even go back to the boarding house and get my clothes. I have no money. I have n-n-nothing.”

“Shh.” Adelaide sat up and put her arms around me. “Hush, don’t cry, my love. I’ll take care of you. You’re not alone.”

“How can you?” I asked. “You can’t very well hide me in the cellar.”

“We don’t have to stay here. We’ll leave. We’ll go away somewhere and start new lives together. Doctors are needed everywhere.”

I raised my head. Her cinnamon eyes were so kind and full of feeling—for me. She’d called me her love, and my heart raced at the thought that it might be true. Could we really live together, love each other every day, the way Grace and Trissie did?

“What about your uncle? He needs you.”

“He doesn’t need me as much as you do. He can find another young doctor to take over his practice. Or he can come with us, if he likes. You wouldn’t mind that, I think. He’s a good man.”

“I wouldn’t mind that at all.” I turned and grasped her shoulders. “Do you really mean it, Adelaide? You’ll come away with me? We’ll be together?”

“I mean it, my love. I’m not letting you go. I love you, Nell.”

I sighed, wrapped my arms around neck, and kissed her ear.

“I love you, Adelaide.” I’d never said those words to Robert, never even thought them, but they came so easily now. It didn’t matter that I had no money, no clothes, not even a name I could safely use. I had Adelaide, and I loved her. I had everything I needed.

The End

About the Author

Kate McLachlan is an award-winning author of lesbian fiction. Two of her time-travel novels—*Rip Van Dyke* and *Return of an Impetuous Pilot*—have won Goldie Awards. She's been a finalist for a Lambda Literary Award (2015 for *Christmas Crush*), for two Rainbow Awards (2014 for *Murder and the Hurdy Gurdy Girl* and for *Return of an Impetuous Pilot*), and for another Goldie (2013 for *Murder and the Hurdy Gurdy Girl*.) Kate lives in the Pacific Northwest with her wife, Tonie Chacon, who is also a writer. They have 2 dogs and 2 cats, but no parrot (yet).

Kate welcomes visits to her website at www.katemclachlan.com and e-mails from readers at: kate@katemclachlan.com.

More Books by Kate McLachlan

RIP Van Dyke

When Van is suddenly transported twenty years into the future, she is dumfounded—and furious. Jill’s silly time-travel experiment wasn’t supposed to actually work. But it did, and now Van is stuck in the future. 2008, that is. A future in which Van’s friends and lover have all aged twenty years, but Van has not. Jill, an old woman now, promises to recreate her time-travel machine and send Van back, but Van is skeptical and decides instead to try to make a life for herself in 2008.

It isn’t easy. Patsy, her lover, never recovered from Van’s sudden disappearance in 1988 and is now a deeply troubled old woman, in no condition to offer Van any help. Van has no home, no job, no money, not even a driver’s license. But help and hope arrive in the form of Bennie, the steamy young woman whose intriguing overtures were off limits in the past. Van wrestles with herself. Does she remain faithful to Patsy despite the sudden chasm between their ages, or does she let herself accept the life, love and laughter that Bennie offers?

But when secret agents learn of Van’s leap through time, Van faces an even tougher decision. This time one of life or death.

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Rescue At Inspiration Point

Rescue at Inspiration Point is the second book in the *Rip Van Dyke* time-travel series. Van is taken hostage at a local prison, and Patsy is stuck in the role of hostage negotiator. Jill sends Bennie back to 1974 to learn more about the hostage taker and his crime. “Do nothing,” Jill warns. “Just observe and report back.” But the instant Bennie lands, she breaks Jill’s #1 rule. As Bennie pursues her own agenda in 1974, the hostage crisis in 1988 escalates. Can Bennie rescue Van from fourteen years away? Or will her actions only make things worse?

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When Jill's latest time-travel experiment goes awry, no one but Jill is surprised. But when Amelia Earhart suddenly pops out of RIP, everyone is stunned—and delighted! Everyone except Jill, that is, especially when Amelia decides she likes the future too much to return to her own time. History without Amelia Earhart? Unthinkable! But how do you return an impetuous pilot who doesn't want to go home?

It's Bennie and Van to the rescue! Together with Kendra and Jill, they try to return Amelia to the right side of history. Their motives might be mixed, but their hearts are in the right place...or are they?

Reunite with the RIP gang in *Return of an Impetuous Pilot*, the third book in the RIP Van Dyke Time Travel series, and find out where their hearts are leading them now.

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Hearts Dead and Alive

When fifth grade teacher Kimberly Wayland finds a human heart in the middle school dumpster, she has some explaining to do. Like why she was in the dumpster in the first place, and why she didn't tell the police about her gruesome find. But after giving the police a fake alibi, explaining is the last thing Kim wants to do. Instead, with the help of her friends—hot “best friend” Becca, coworker “lesbian wanna-be” Annie, and lawyer “stickler-for-rules” Lucy—Kim sets out to solve the mystery of the missing heart. Along the way, she unexpectedly solves another mystery, the mystery of her own heart.

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Murder and the Hurdy Gurdy Girl

It's 1897, and Susan Bantry is on the run from the law. She ends up in Needles Eye, Idaho, where she works in a hurdy gurdy as a dancing girl.

Jo Erin, Susan's childhood friend, is the cross-dressing Pinker-ton agent sent to track Susan down. Before she can complete the job, a mining war breaks out and interferes with Jo Erin's plans. Complicating matters even further are the feelings that resurface between Susan and Jo Erin, as events from their past come back to haunt them.

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Christmas Crush

Jazzy's Fresh Christmas Trees is Jasmine Oliver's last ditch attempt to rescue the family finances and send her little sister to college. She did some research, selected a prime location, and bought the very best Christmas trees available. What she didn't do, though, was check out the competition.

SleepSafe Youth is Darcy Gabriel's baby, her way of paying back the help she received as a homeless teen. The charity she established gives homeless kids a safe place to sleep, and SleepSafe's annual Christmas tree sale is the organization's biggest fund-raising event of the year.

When Jasmine learns that SleepSafe's Christmas tree lot is only a block away from her own, she turns her dismay and anger into determination and vows to give SleepSafe a run for its money. Sparks fly between Jasmine and Darcy as they compete for the Christmas tree business. Before long, sparks of a different sort fly, and they find themselves experiencing a Christmas they'll never forget.

ISBN: 978-1-61929-196-6

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Ten Little Lesbians

Ten women, guests at the lesbian-owned Adelheid Inn, are stranded in the Cascade Mountains after a mudslide closes the only road out. One goes missing. One is killed. More than one is not who she pretends to be, and every one of them has a secret. When another woman is attacked, it becomes clear there's a killer in their midst, and it has to be one of them.

Is it Beatrice, the judge, surly and sad after the death of her long-term partner? Or her niece, Tish, angry and sullen at being kept under Beatrice's thumb? Or is it Carmen, Beatrice's childhood friend who lured her to the Inn under false pretenses?

It couldn't be the Mormon girls, Amy and Dakota. Or could it? Perhaps it's Paula, the gallant butch, or her date, the lovely and silent Veronica. A blind woman couldn't do it, but is Jess really blind? And what about Holly, the hotel manager who is just a bit too perky, or Lila, the mysterious owner of the hotel?

One thing quickly becomes clear. They'd better find out, before there are none.

ISBN: 978-1-61929-236-9

eISBN: 978-1-61929-237-6

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