

UNDER A  
COPPER  
MOON

THE ADVENTURES OF A MAIL-ORDER BRIDE  
IN  
JEROME, ARIZONA TERRITORY  
1894

ALSO BY GREG LILLY:

FINGERING THE FAMILY JEWELS — *A Derek Mason Mystery*

DEVIL'S BRIDGE

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COPPER MOON**

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JEROME, ARIZONA TERRITORY  
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**Greg Lilly**

Cherokee McGhee

Sedona, Arizona

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Jerome, Arizona, called the "Wickedest Town in America" by the *New York Post* in 1903 – thanks for the inspiration



To my grandmother Athna McGhee  
and mother Jean Lilly  
—two pure-hearted and strong women



## CHAPTER ONE

**S**he knew one thing as a solid truth: no one would love her as her mother had. Inez closed the door of the small home to the clop, clop, clop of horses on hard red clay and the rattle of wagons wallowing down the rutted road. She avoided the few mourners who still lingered in the parlor of her mother's house and crept into her bedroom. The quiet murmurs of "Ain't it pitiful" and "She got to learn things early" and "Inez is so young" combined with the sad and sorry stares of neighbors and church members clouded her mind from the events of the day, but a chilly stream of understanding woke her from the haze. Now, at sixteen, she was alone in the world.

A timid knock at her bedroom door, followed by the gray walnut-head of Mrs. Hammonds peeking through startled Inez. The slight gap Mrs. Hammonds had pushed open allowed for privacy and confidential talk without a full commitment of entering the room. "Dear," she began, "you holding up?"

Supporting herself with the help of the old cedar wardrobe, Inez considered the question; no, she was raw; no, things would never be the same; no, her mother was dead. "I'm fine." Her own voice troubled her by its steady and strong resolution.

The door creaked open a little more, but Mrs. Hammonds still did not allow her body to step into the bedroom. "When your pappy passed on all those years ago, I never thought Sara would last this long—all alone... Well, if there is anything me or Thomas can do for you, you just yell." With that, she pulled the door closed as her

little head retreated back.

Inez wanted to scream, to stretch her mouth as wide as the river and shriek like a bobcat. And cry; cry like she had when she was a baby in her mother's arms—strong arms that would never hold her again.



William Grayson, the town bachelor, stopped by her house a few days later. He held his hat in his hand, twisting it as she opened the door. "Miss Inez," he stepped back from the threshold and off the stoop, crushing a two-foot high milkweed, "would you come out to talk to me for a while?"

The sight of 28-year-old William, nervous as a rabbit because of her, intrigued Inez. He had never married and still lived with his mother, which she thought displayed a fine quality for a man. To sacrifice starting a family of his own to help his mama with her seamstress work, well that just showed fine character, at least that's what her own mother had always said when the other women whispered about William.

"William, it's awful hot out. You can come inside." She pulled the door open wide for him as the summer heat spilled into the house.

"No, no, Miss Inez. It ain't right for an unmarried man and woman to be alone inside. You can come out here in the yard. Sit over here in the shade of the woodshed with me."

Propriety didn't mean scratch to her; who cared what people thought? Maybe seeing her and William going into the house together would give the old ladies something to talk about. But, she could see sweat rolling down the side of William's flushed face either from standing there in the sun waiting for her or from his nervousness, so she stepped down to the split-log step and out across the barren yard to the shed, shooing away a couple of chickens. William followed a few tentative feet behind her.

"Yes, William? What'd you want to talk about?"

He settled a respectable distance from her on the bench. "I

wanted to tell you I was sorry about your mama's passing. She was a fine woman."

The familiar hurt rumbled in her soul as his words brought the reality to her mind again. "Thank you."

"I brung you this newspaper from Charlotte," he handed her a creased paper. "It has your mama's listing in it. Thought you might like to save it."

From the fold, she saw the simple notice that her mother had left the world. She imagined her mama reading it and being proud that she had made the city paper. Now, Inez, just a shadow of her mother's size, but with the same cornhusk-colored hair and weary blue eyes, carried on the family name. She wondered if she would be the end of the Watkins line.

William sat still, sweat lingering on his forehead.

"Thank you," she said and placed the newspaper in her apron pocket. "That's the end of us."

"And that's... I... Well, it's..." The words refused to come to him, and Inez feared she knew where those forced beginnings would lead.

"William, you don't have to—"

"Yes," he awkwardly slipped from the bench with a crack of his knee hitting the packed red-clay dirt. "Miss Inez, I know you're all alone. One day I will be too. Mama ain't as spry as she used to be. I been thinking. Well, me and you..." He inhaled deep, then let the words wash out, "You should come live with us, as my wife."

She had hoped a proposal of marriage would come from love, or want, or even barnyard desire, but she knew that at sixteen with no family and no dowry but the slumping house in front of her, she couldn't expect much. Although, she did expect something more than pity, and that was what he and Mrs. Grayson had for her. She wanted a husband; someone to take care of her and she could take care of him. They could be as happy as her parents had been. William searched her eyes, so she glanced at the few logs left in the wood stack. "Thank you for asking, but I can't say yes. It's too soon after Mama died."

His body had stopped shivering in the heat; she felt he must be

relieved. “But,” he sat back up on the bench, “how will you live alone?”

“I have my garden out back, these few chickens, and that old cow for milk. Besides, my aunt and cousins aren’t that far. Maybe just a couple of days travel. I’m fine,” she said. Then added, “Thank you for asking. There probably ain’t another man in town who would take in an orphan like me.”



Her letters to a cousin in Greenville, an aunt in Charleston, and another cousin in Kershaw didn’t receive replies. She considered loading up her trunk of clothes and a few of her mother’s books and quilts, packing the wagon, and arriving uninvited on her aunt’s doorstep, but the thought of traveling that far, alone, and with an uncertain reception, frightened her more than staying in the house and surviving on what she could find in the garden. Her few hens had stopped laying eggs on a regular basis; she had fried the rooster, maybe the hens protested that decision. The cow’s milk had dried up, and she had exchanged that old cow for the overdue bills at the mercantile. Using her father’s rifle, she tracked through the woods and fields searching for rabbits, but once she had one in her sights, she dropped her aim when she saw it had a mate nearby. She couldn’t bring herself to widow a rabbit.

The legend of Annie the Witch came to mind as she wandered back to her empty house and yard. Annie had lost her husband and sons to Yankee cannon fire, then living by herself, she ran out of food and roamed into the woods to scavenge. Town people later said they caught sight of Annie with tangled hair, torn clothes, and no shoes dancing in a forest clearing to the full moon’s light. They said the devil had married her to keep her from dying alone.

The summer sun warmed Inez’s back as she hummed a childhood song about Annie the Witch and scratched in the dusty rows of wilting potatoes. By her side, a skinny white chicken called Sally kept her company. “Sally,” Inez said stopping to rest under a shady sycamore, “we don’t have much left. As a matter of fact, we didn’t

have much to begin with.” Sally cocked her head then picked at a feather on her wing.

Her tears had dried up with the summer drought, but Inez remembered her mother every time she walked into the old house; the air still held her smell: warm cornbread and butter. Milk thistle, polk, and dandelions had grown up in the front yard, but she didn't have the energy to keep it cut back, and besides, she substituted polk and dandelion leaves for lettuce in her meals. None of the neighbors checked on her anymore, not that she expected them to continue; she wasn't their responsibility. Pecking the chalky dirt, Sally fished for a June bug. Inez watched, then pulled the tattered newspaper out of her apron pocket and re-read the advertisement.

Two other chickens, each a bit plumper than Sally, roamed the yard. With the advertisement safely tucked back in her pocket, Inez grabbed a startled rust-colored hen and held it down by the neck on a hickory stump, then with one swift hatchet chop, severed its head from its body. Inez turned away until she guessed the bird had stopped flopping on the stump. One last scrawny chicken and stewed weeds supper in South Carolina, she reasoned, then a new life rises with the sun.



Rattling over rough tracks, the train pitched back and forth into a steady rhythm that Inez let her body sway along with. She sat near an open window that allowed in some fresh air, but coal smoke drifted in with it every time the train twisted to the right. The women surrounding her seemed to be just the same country folk as her, except Inez knew she had to be the youngest. The other women in the passenger car had the appearance of years of working a farm in the sun, raising babies, scrubbing clothes, and gathering firewood. Maybe these women are here because their husbands died, she thought, because surely they had had husbands to look so haggard. Her hands held tight to her canvas bag containing her money, change of unmentionables, her mother's Bible, and her father's traveling pistol.

The woman sitting across from her forced a smile and asked “Are you as scared as I am?”

“Yes, I think so,” Inez smiled back at the woman with crow-black hair and a barrel of a bosom. The woman’s face held a grin, or a grimace, that Inez hoped meant she was friendly and not going to take her bag away from her with those big bear-claw hands. Face powder had settled into the creases of the woman’s jowls giving her the lines of a catfish.

“This is as far from home as I ever been,” the woman said and shifted her weight in a quick waddle on the pine bench. “What ‘bout you?”

“Yes ma’am, this is as far as I been too.” Calm settled on her as she talked to the big woman. She leaned forward, over her canvas bag, “I drove my wagon up to Charlotte this morning to meet with Mr. Dula; he took it as my payment for this ticket.”

The big woman tipped toward her, and Inez sat back to stay a safe distance away. The woman whispered, “Honey, you didn’t need to pay for this ticket. The man out west is paying expenses.”

Anger burned her cheeks as she realized Mr. Dula had talked her out of her horse and wagon, but she didn’t have anywhere to put them... But, dang it, she could have sold a horse and wagon in the streets of Charlotte for some good money. A deep breath to settle her nerves helped, but Inez bet the woman thought she was a foolish little girl for letting Dula take her horse and wagon.

“By the way,” the woman smiled crooked teeth at her, “my name is Gertrude. Just call me Gert. What they call you, Honey?”

She thought about making up a name, to become a whole new person with a new past, a different past, a more exciting past, but her imagination failed her. “Inez,” she finally said.

Gert held out one of her big bear hands, but Inez pulled her bag closer to her. “Pleased to make your acquaintance,” Gert pretended to shake hands with Inez. “I find this quite exciting, going to a new place, but I hear stories about the West, you know about Indians snatching white women.” Something funny must have occurred to Gert because she laughed a little covering her mouth with her large hand. “I’m probably too much woman for some Indian to throw

over his saddle and ride off with.”

The image of Gert being thrown over anything brought a giggle out of Inez too. “I don’t worry none about Indians. The few around home are just as nice and polite as the preacher’s wife.”

“Well, that may be,” Gert said, “but I still heard a lot of stories.” She glanced out at the thick trees sweeping by the window. “Any idea where we might be? That looks like the Smoky Mountains coming up. Once we get over them, it’s pretty much down hill from then on.”

The question Inez yearned to ask surfaced, but she dismissed it as being too personal. But, weren’t they all going for the same reason? Why not ask? Why not talk about it? She sat her bag at her feet and leaned toward Gert. A faint scent of roses lingered around the woman. “Do you know him?”

Gert sat back, “The man I’m going to marry?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“No, Honey. Do you know yours?”

She guessed she could admit it, since Gert didn’t know either. “No, but I was told he’s a fine gentleman with wealth from mining.”

“Mr. Dula told you that?” Gert asked.

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Honey, he told me the same thing. You think we’re marrying the same man?” Gert laughed a hearty laugh and slapped Inez on the knee.

Afraid she might be going after the bag, Inez kicked it under her seat. “You don’t think so, do you? I mean I heard of Mormons out there having a whole herd of wives. You don’t think we’re heading for Mormons, do you?”

Gert sat back and crossed her arms over her vast chest. “Better not or I’ll grab me an Indian and throw him over my shoulder to be my husband. I ain’t putting up with no other wives.”

Inez ventured another of her list of questions, “Do you know exactly where you’re going? Which town?”

“All I know is I ride this train and,” she looked at her papers, “switch in Chattanooga, then Memphis, then up to Kansas City, then

I jump on the Kansas Pacific line going to Denver. Whew, that's a lot of train hopping. What about you?"

Inez pulled her bag from under the bench and dug out her own piece of paper wrapped around her tickets. "Me too, but in Kansas City, I go on the Santa Fe line to the Arizona Territory, switch in Flagstaff to a local train, then" she caught her breath, "to Ash Fork then to Jerome Junction." She looked up and smiled. "A copper mining town," she revealed to Gert as if she might be impressed.

"Honey, sounds like we're not marrying the same man." Gert rummaged through a straw bag next to her and pulled out a fried chicken leg. "Here, Honey, eat something, it's way past supper time and I don't think this train is going to stop until we hit Chattanooga in the morning."

Inez thanked her and sank her teeth into the cold chicken that tasted a hundred times better than her old, tough, skinny hens back at her mother's house in South Carolina.



After helping each other learn the ways of the different train stations and eating a lot of greasy food in the railroad establishments, Inez and Gert parted ways in Kansas City, but Gert promised to write as soon as she got settled in Denver. Back on another rattling train, Inez daydreamed about the life of luxury and romance that the gentleman in Jerome would give her. Her budgeted money allowed her one good meal a day at a whistle stop around noon, then she would snack on bread or crackers until the next day. She tracked the amount of money she spent against how much she had expected, then adjusted accordingly; her mother had always stressed the importance of money and how to keep track of it. The Santa Fe line didn't have as many single women as the Eastern trains. Families and men now out-numbered the lone women; Inez kept to herself, but always sat near a family instead of a group of men. If some man said howdy to her, she would respectfully smile and then look down at her open Bible, not that she was actually reading the Good Book, but she held it in her hands as a lucky charm.

She watched the women. Did she know how to act like a lady? Had her mother taught her right? These women sat quietly with their babies and young children; even a five-year-old girl had the teaching to stay calm while her brother pointed out the window with excitement at buzzards coasting circles above a field. Ladies learned the proper way to behave: no bloomers, petticoats; no slang, speak correctly; no face paint, no flouncy clothes, no exposed limbs, no imbibing alcohol. She knew what to do; she could be a good wife, as good a wife as any. With that settled in her mind, Inez pushed up the window allowing the wind to blow past her face.

The flat lands of the prairie seemed to stretch for a thousand miles as she watched bigheaded, woolly cattle, which someone called buffalo and bison, graze near the tracks the train sped over. She missed the lush green trees and grass of the Mississippi Valley; all she saw now was dirt-colored. The land, the animals, the people, the buildings, everything had settled in hues of brown. As if her prayers had been answered, the train chugged up hills, higher and greener. Shrubs of juniper and pinyon and sporadic stands of pines spotted the sharp, rugged ridges and valleys, so unlike the rolling, gentle slopes of the East. The Western landscape intrigued Inez with its raw beauty, a little dangerous looking, but definitely a refreshing change from the dusty bland plains.

Before the train stopped in Gallup, of the New Mexico Territory, the conductor walked through the car taking lunch orders for the restaurant. "Eat one of the best meals in your life," he announced. "See the world famous Harvey Girls and be served in luxury. This is a treat for the weary traveler. Gentlemen need to wear their coats in this establishment." He walked down the aisle, jotting things in his notebook, and when he came to Inez, he asked, "Lunch counter or dining room?"

"How much?" She worried that such a fancy place wouldn't fit her budget.

The conductor grinned, "35 cents for lunch counter, but for 50 cents in the dining room, you'll get your choice of steak, chicken, duck, turkey, a lot of vegetables, and plenty of dessert. All you can eat. Plus," he glanced down at her budget scrawled with numbers,

“it’ll fill you up until tomorrow morning.”

She ordered the dining room meal, and as they pulled into the Gallup restaurant. Young girls, not much older than her, in starched aprons and simple black dresses, their hair tied in back by a single white ribbon, escorted the passengers to their tables and immediately began serving food. Inez drank iced tea and ate roast sirloin, English peas au gratin, sweet potatoes, some sugar cured ham, beets, French slaw, and for dessert, she tried cantaloupe, peaches, and custard. The Harvey Girls kept bringing food, until Inez could eat no more.

“Do you like the West?” Inez asked a Harvey Girl who looked about her age as the girl refilled her iced tea.

“Yes, ma’am. We meet a lot of interesting traveling people. And,” the girl looked around as if getting ready to share a trade secret, “most of the girls find husbands. It’s rare to find a Harvey Girl that has worked for more than a year.”

“Good men?” Inez asked.

“Bankers, lawyers, company men,” she boasted and collected empty plates from Inez’s small table, “and a few cowboys and miners, but mostly impressive successful men.”

“I’m on my way to Jerome, a copper mining town,” Inez said. “I have a man waiting for me there. It’s been a long trip. I’m a bit scared.”

“Don’t worry,” the girl said. “The men here are so much better than the Eastern men. They have respect for women because there’s just so few of us.” She glanced around, “Do you want me to wrap up some ham biscuits for your traveling?”

“That would be right kind of you,” Inez said.

“I know how the trains can get,” the Harvey Girl said. “Take something with you. How many more days do you have?”

“I should be there by morning. The biscuits will make a nice supper.” She wondered if things didn’t work out if she could be a Harvey Girl. “Does Mr. Harvey hire girls with no experience serving?”

“If you can stand on your feet all day and be sociable then you can work here. Like I said, we’re always looking to replace newly wed girls.”

Back on the train, she napped a few hours then snacked on her ham biscuits and slept again until the sun rose and the conductor walked through announcing Flagstaff of the Arizona Territory. Her new life was budding.



## CHAPTER TWO

She stood on the wooden platform with her trunk and bag at her feet; cool wind whipped at her skirt and blew her hair into her eyes. Tall pines swayed in the breeze as fat clouds tumbled across a pure blue sky. The swaying sensation of the train still clung to her body, so she walked back and forth as she had learned from past stops to get her “land limbs” back. Just a few hours and she’d meet her future husband. One more leg of the trip lay in front of her: a local train to take her to Ash Fork, then down the Santa Fe, Prescott, and Phoenix line to Jerome Junction. She paced the platform in Flagstaff wondering how she had come so far on her own.

A woman in a yellow silk dress and painted lips walked by Inez and smiled. She went into the station in a rustle of petticoats. My, Inez thought, this place has some fancy women. Touching her hair, she realized how tangled it had gotten from the wind of the train. She tried to smooth it down, but finally pulled it back and tied it with a ribbon as she had seen the Harvey Girls do.

When her train arrived, the fancy woman boarded it too. She sat a few rows behind Inez. Worry crept into Inez’s mind that the woman might be a miner’s bride too and that her future husband might see them both and feel he’d been slighted. She knew her travels hadn’t allowed her to look her best, but hopefully, she could clean up before she met him.

The train whipped around mountain curves as it headed south toward Prescott causing Inez to have to hold on to the bench to keep from sliding. Smoke from the engine poured in the open window as they hooked around a knoll, and Inez actually saw the engine pass

her window as it headed back down a switchback pulling its cars like a snake descending a rock wall.

Finally, the conductor announced Jerome Junction. Inez looked out the window to see a small cluster of buildings around the station. After collecting her trunk and bag, she stretched and walked around on the platform to shake the rickety train sensation from her body, except this time she knew she wouldn't be boarding a train again, this time, she was done with riding noisy, hot, smoky trains.

Several wagons waited near the station with steady horses or mules harnessed to guide travelers on to their final destinations. Inez hooked her bag over one shoulder and pulled her heavy trunk behind her, across the platform, to the ticket window.

A white-haired, stoop-shouldered man looked up and smiled at her, "Help you?"

"I was wondering if a ride for Inez Watkins was waiting for me."

"You Inez Watkins?" he asked, checking a list held down from the breeze with railroad spikes laid at the top and bottom of the paper.

"Yes, sir." Inez peeked through the window to scan the list, but his finger had traced to the bottom before she could make out any names. "You must be here early." He reached for a book packed with loose sheets and strummed through them shaking his head. "No, I don't see no one coming for no Inez Watkins."

Disappointment shook her tired body. Had she traveled for so long and for so far to be abandoned, left at the station like unclaimed luggage? Her mind raced with alternatives: did she have money to find a place to stay for the night, should she try to go back to South Carolina, could she get to Denver to stay with Gert?

"Hold on," the man laughed and tapped a paper with his finger. "You aren't early; you're late. A man looking for you came in yesterday. That train of yours was a day late."

"Did he leave? Is he coming back?" she asked leaning forward, nose against the wooden bars of the window.

"I need to send my boy to fetch him from the hotel. You just take a seat in the waiting area, and he'll be here directly." The man

turned to an open door behind him and hollered, "Charlie, go get that Mr. Caldwell from the hotel. Tell him his bride is here."

Inez's cheeks burned from the old man knowing why she had come to his town. She grabbed her bag and trunk, pushing them toward the door of the station, and she almost forgot her manners in her embarrassment, but said over her shoulder, "Thank you kindly."

Settled inside on a long bench, she wondered what this Mr. Caldwell was like and what he would think of her. A long mirror hung by a door to the street, so she walked over to see what Mr. Caldwell would find when he came to get her. Dust and dirt smudged her face; her cream-colored hair was loose in places and hanging free like a wild woman. Licking her sleeve, she rubbed her face clean, then re-tied the ribbon in her hair. Pinching her cheeks for color, she then tried to straighten her wrinkled dress.

She caught the reflection of the fancy woman watching her preen. This woman, in her beautiful corn-yellow silk dress, smiled at her and walked toward Inez. "Dear, you look good enough for whatever farmer or miner is coming to get you."

Did everyone in town know she was waiting for an unseen husband? Did this Mr. Caldwell tell all of the Arizona Territory he was collecting his new wife from the train? The woman was so close that Inez could see the paint on her face and smell the flowery perfume hovering around her. That pretty yellow dress wasn't as respectable as her own pale blue calico, in fact, Inez could see the top of the woman's breasts, all squeezed together and popping out of the low neckline. She knew this was what the women back home called a "fallen woman." The fine clothes and hair the color of sunsets might look glamorous, but Satan himself dwelled in that woman. Inez excused herself, then a gentle touch to Inez's arm, stopped her.

"Dear," the woman said, "I have some sweet smelling cologne to help hide the traveler's grime that won't rub off without a bath. You do want to smell good for him, don't you?" she produced a small violet bottle out of her silk purse.

Inez considered the length of time since she had bathed and the

man on his way to meet her. “Thank you. I appreciate it.” She took the bottle and unstopped it; a quick sniff of the lavender scent brought back thoughts of the romance she hoped for. Dabbing the stopper on her wrists and behind her ears transformed her image of herself. Maybe Mr. Caldwell would like her, even if she wasn’t as pretty as the woman in yellow. But, a thought struck her, she couldn’t be seen standing next to this woman because people might think... Well, forget what other people would think, her original concern surfaced: she couldn’t be compared to this fancy woman when Mr. Caldwell came in. She would look scrawny and plain next to this pretty lady—fallen or not. “Thank you,” she handed the bottle back to the woman.

“Linda,” the woman said.

“Thank you, Miss Linda.” Inez smiled. “I’m Inez. I need to get back. My ride is coming to fetch me.”

“Good luck, Inez,” Linda said as she sashayed out the side door of the station.

Watching the oak-panel door swing shut behind her, Inez wondered exactly what a fallen woman did to be called that. She knew from the whispers of the women back home that they did favors for men without expecting anything but payment, but was that so different than what a wife was expected to do? Was that any different than what she had traveled so far for? The difference, she was sure from her church lessons, was that those women took pleasure in the act. Pleasure for pleasure’s sake—that’s no way to go about life.

The boy, Charlie, came into the lobby with a lanky man about the age of William Grayson, but she could tell this man didn’t work with his seamstress mother. His hand, as big as Gert’s, smoothed his black, unruly hair, while his other hand held a bouquet of daisies. The smile spread across his thin face showed pearly straight teeth; his green eyes sparkled in the sunlight streaming through the dusty windows of the station. Broad, straight shoulders bent a little as he nodded his head toward Charlie to thank him. He walked in wide strides across the plank floor to Inez.

“You must be Miss Inez Watkins,” he bowed a little and held out

the daisies.

She liked his look; she liked his manners. “Yes, sir. That would be me. Are you Mr. Caldwell?”

“Yes, ma’am.” He smiled, then motioned for her to take a seat on the bench. He sat next to her, still grinning.

“You are the one I’m supposed to go to Jerome with? Are you the man who asked for me to come out here?” She wanted to make sure that this handsome man wasn’t just driving her to meet some old grouchy man.

“Yes, ma’am.” He said again. Then, he laughed and shook his head, “You sure are prettier than I thought you’d be.”

“So are you,” she confessed. “What should I call you?”

“Oh, pardon me,” then added with a slow drawl like he was trying on her name, “Inezzzz.” He straightened up on the bench and said, “I’m Josiah Benjamin Caldwell.”

“Pleased to meet you, Josiah,” Inez smiled and tipped her head toward him. So, this was her man. His manner was sociable, and she didn’t smell spirits, a prize, that’s what she thought of him.

“Can I get you anything before we start our trip to Jerome?” he asked, then apologized. “I would say we could stay here for a little bit, let you rest up from the trip, but I got to be at work tomorrow.”

“That’s alright,” she said. “I ain’t done nothing but stare out the train window for days. I’m ready to get this traveling over with.”

“Okay,” Josiah slapped his knees and stood. “Let’s get your trunk in the wagon and head down the mountain. It’s a pretty ride,” then he added, “and will be all the prettier with you sitting beside me.”

She smiled at the compliment and took his extended hand to help her up from the bench. The touch of his strong, rough hand comforted her; she knew she had made the right decision.



Inez sneaked another peek at Josiah and clinched her fists tight with excitement, yes, she had made a good choice, yes, she would have a happy life in these green hills, yes, Josiah handled the wagon with

a steady grip and strong command to the horse, he would be a good husband.

Maneuvering the wagon and horse around a deep rut, but sliding into it anyway, Josiah glanced at Inez, "Sorry 'bout that. We had some gully-washers yesterday that left the roads a bit rough."

A tall pine forest surrounded the trail, layering it with soft yellow needles. "Is your house in the woods?" Inez asked.

"My house?" He almost laughed, leaving Inez taut with worry that she had asked something she shouldn't have. Josiah corrected her question, "Our house."

Relief spread through her like dropped reins on a mule. "Our house," she repeated. "Is our house in the woods?"

"No ma'am. In fact, we don't have a house—not yet." He raised his eyebrows and took a slow look at her.

Trying to disguise her confusion and not reveal her disappointment, she managed a smile. "Where are we heading?"

"Miss Inez," he said, "we ain't married yet, so you are going to stay with my friend, Samuel, and his wife, Lottie, in a family community down the mountain and I go back up to Jerome to work. Besides, you got some planning to do."

"Like what?" Inez asked. The wagon rolled over smoother, winding roads, sloping down the mountain. A mother deer and two fawns leaped through the underbrush. "You mean wedding planning?"

A smile spread across his face, "Well, some, 'course no wedding is too fancy around here; I was thinking about the house. I have some land staked out just down the mountain, near the river. The land I got has room for a garden and a few cottonwood trees to build a house under."

"But," Inez started, then stopped, wondering just how to phrase it without making herself look bad compared to all the other frontier women. "I don't know how to build a house."

"Ha," he laughed and slapped his knee, startling the horse that picked up her pace to a gallop. "Inez, you don't have to build the house, just make sure it's what you want. Some of the miners will help me build it."

“Well, thank the Lord,” she dug through her canvas bag and pulled out her bonnet. “I was scared you wanted me to build the thing.” The forest canopy thinned, allowing sunlight to streak through and the temperature to rise a few degrees. Inez tied the bonnet under her chin and adjusted the wooden slats in the bill to shade her eyes.

“Nothing too fancy,” she said watching the horse’s black tail swing back and forth, losing rhythm momentarily to swat a fly from its rump. “Just a small house to raise a few young’uns and some livestock.” She studied Josiah’s thick, muscled forearms as he guided the horse down a steep part of the road. What would it be like to couple with this man? As schoolgirls, she and her friends had talked about such things, wondering about what went on behind bedroom doors. The physical acts she knew from growing up on their small farm, but the leading-up-to, the courtship, the wooing, she wasn’t sure about. Then, she wondered, what do you say to each other after it’s done? Her mother had never given her the rules of courting; no one had ever come to suit Inez except William Grayson and his clumsy attempt. She had read a book once that a girl in school had hidden in her lunch pail and passed to Inez in the school yard behind a tree. According to the woman in the story, she should expect to be pursued, while rebuffing all advances, but then reluctantly give in to the man. The scandalous part of the story was how the woman took pleasure in the amorous dalliance. Would Josiah give her tenderness and attention? Would he talk her through things she didn’t know? Her cheeks burned from her thoughts, so she fanned her face under her bonnet.

“You doing alright?” he asked. “Look up ahead,” he pointed to where the road seemed to drop off the end of the earth. Clear blue sky hovered above the disappearing road, but even as the wagon approached, Inez couldn’t see past the crest. They wobbled over rocks and pulled up to the ridge where her astonishment caused her to stand up in the wagon to get a better look. Spread before her like a feast at a banquet, the Arizona landscape reached for miles in the valley before them with streaks of amber, rust, crimson, pale white, speckled with a scattering of evergreen shrubs. The steep, rock

walls of the valley appeared to have been carved into faces, church spires, and lavish columns of scarlet limestone. In the distance as if standing guard, two mountain peaks towered in the north. To the east, she saw more of the rusty red rocks that hemmed in the valley and a glittering river running from the west toward the foot of the ridge they were perched on.

Pulling off her bonnet for a better look, she laughed. “It’s beautiful. Is this Jerome?” The wind whipped up the canyon walls whirling her skirt around her ankles. She tucked her bonnet in her bag and tugged the ribbon out of her hair, shaking her head to let the breeze flow through her almond locks.

The wagon shook, and she found Josiah standing with her; he draped one arm casually around her shoulders. “There,” he pointed to down the ridge, “that is Cleopatra Hill. Half-way up is Jerome; there at the bottom, those few houses, that’s where Sam and Lottie live.”

“It’s not what I expected,” she smiled and leaned into him.

“What did you expect?”

She sighed, “I guess to look more like home: lots of trees, rolling green hills...” her words left her as he held her shoulders in a firm grasp turning her to face him.

“This is home.” He bowed in and brushed her lips with his.

The sensation of his mouth touching hers, the scratch of his beard stubble against her lip, she wanted more. She pressed harder back against him, but he pulled away slightly, and she moved in closer to regain what he had taken back. Without realizing it, her arms had wrapped around his shoulders and tugged him toward her; she knew this didn’t qualify as lady-like behavior, but she was to be his wife, still the appearance of being too free with yourself could cast the wrong impression. She relinquished her hold on him, and flashed a coy smile before turning away to breathe in the view from the ridge again. “I think this will be a heavenly home.”

The wide grin on Josiah’s face seemed to attest to the shared expectation they had of their life together, a life of first kisses, of first embraces, of a home, and of children.



Lottie, with her squat face and rolled body, informed Inez every time she made a misstep; her righteousness, when compared to the whispering, judging women of Inez's childhood, made them seem like hurdy-gurdy girls. And another downfall pointed out to Inez was her slang, "Where did you hear, I hate to say it out loud," Lottie paced the kitchen, tapping the table in front of Inez with her palm each time she passed, "the term 'hurdy-gurdy'?"

Avoiding her accusing eyes, Inez decided not to tell her the truth that it came from Lottie's husband, Sam. "I don't know, probably from someone on the train."

"Well, young lady, to be treated with respect, you must show respect in the way you," her staccato tone bounced off her list, "talk, walk, dress, eat, clean, stand, sit, laugh, smile," her voice rose with the excitement of teaching, "think, and obey." She stopped her pacing and sat in the chair opposite Inez. "Your slangy speech will reflect badly on Josiah."

"But, I learned good back home. I'm not free with my speech. Hearing new words out here, I'm just not sure when to use them and when not to." Inez sat up straighter to imitate Lottie's posture.

"I know what words to use," Lottie assured. "You ask me if you don't know. There is a social order I read about called The Cult of True Womanhood. All the ladies of the day follow the guide. A 'True Woman' should be pure, pious, domestic, and submissive. Your man will take care of you."

"That sounds fine for a city woman," Inez said. "But, what about here? I just thought man and wife would have to work side-by-side to get things accomplished."

"That's the domestic part. You will need to manage the household and children. Now, that would include cutting firewood, tending the garden, drawing water. In fact Missy, you need to put on some weight. Josiah will have plenty of work for you, and you need to be strong." She held up a beefy arm and made a fist.

Lottie appeared to be the model frontier woman with her stout, strong, no-nonsense body. Inez often thought of her as a horse turd

come-to-life: something you see everyday, but don't mess with unless you have to. Sam, by contrast, laughed and teased everyone without one smidgen of seriousness, a cheerful butterfly, gravity not corralling him long to one subject or person. How those two got hitched together, the horse turd and the butterfly, Inez couldn't figure, but she confessed their marriage did work. Lottie called Sam 'husband' and he called her 'wife' as if those roles defined their existence. Inez called Josiah by his name, like she was his friend and an equal; every once in a while, Josiah would call her 'Honey' or 'Sweetheart' which made her insides melt like butter left in the desert sun. Lottie had to have been Sam's 'Honey' at some point, maybe in private she still was. Inez chewed those thoughts as Lottie reiterated, "As to your language, you just ask me if you don't know a word."

Lottie stood and smoothed her apron, "Now, let's start the laundry so we can get it on the line before noon."

"I wanted to take the horse up to Jerome and meet Josiah for lunch." A thought hit Inez to help soothe Lottie's opinion of her, "Why don't you come too? Sam would be glad to have lunch with you."

"No, respectable women don't roam the streets of Jerome. Families stay down here. Jerome is for the single men with all its saloons and such. Best not for a young lady to go by herself."

"That's why I wanted you to go with me."

"You can wait for Josiah to come back after his shift." Lottie clanged a bucket out the back door, "Inez, bring the laundry basket out."

By mid-morning, the chill in the air had lifted along with Lottie's temperament, and Inez knew both had to do with the whiskey Lottie sipped from a coffee cup. She conceded that Inez could take the horse up the mountain to deliver lunch to Josiah and Sam, but she needed to stay home to nurse a headache caused by her monthly condition. "Inez," she yelled from the front porch, "you ride side-saddle and keep your hair pinned under your bonnet."

The winding trail allowed Inez to study the valley she had first seen a month before. Beautiful, she thought, with the scattering of red buttes and mesas in the distance and the wide open valley below her where herds of white-faced cattle grazed on clumps of rough grasses. She shifted her focus on the town clinging to the hills above her. The road wrapped up the mountain like a slithering rattlesnake; crooked, wood-framed buildings, partly on sloped dirt, partly on stilts, burred to the side of the mountain and fed off the town's mine like ticks. In that copper mine, Josiah worked in the dark, damp, heat to chip the coppery veins from the limestone bones of Cleopatra Hill and haul it out to the smelting pots. Over and over, in and out of the mine, he breathed harsh vapors until the shift ended at five o'clock.

Then, he would come down the same road each evening to have supper with Inez and discuss plans for the wedding and house, never complaining about her cooking, although she watched Lottie watch him to catch his reaction which always consisted of his wide grin and a pat to his belly and "Fine cooking, Inez, mighty fine."

She spotted a clump of buttercups along the road and wondered if he saw them as he passed the same way. At that moment, she wanted to climb into the flowers like a bee and wait for him to pass, so she could ride with him, spend more time with him than the few hours each evening they had, seldom any alone time, always with Lottie and Sam, at the very least, in the next room.

She didn't think she would love so quickly, in all honesty to herself, if love would come at all, but it had. She loved Josiah. She marveled at his chin, the cleft where his razor missed the whiskers; she wanted his calloused hands holding hers while he smiled his wide smile at the words she spoke; she longed for his strong arms embracing her shoulders and how that simple gesture settled such a sense of comfort around her. She wanted to set him down on the porch to trim his thick, dark hair and let her fingers smooth it against his sturdy neck.

Plans for the simple wedding would conclude that coming Sunday in the Methodist church in Cottonwood. Sam would give her away; Lottie would stand in for her as matron-of-honor. Few others would

be there except for the preacher and his wife. Then, they would live in a tent on Josiah's land until the emerging house was rainproof. These thoughts so engaged her mind, she didn't notice the nervous prance of the horse or the low rumble building in the ground until the mountain swayed with the force of the explosion.