

A NOVELLA COLLECTION



Jane Kirkpatrick, Amanda Cabot,  
Laurie Alice Eakes, *and* Ann Shorey



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A Moonlight  
Promise

Laurie Alice Eakes

To my high school friend Camilla S. C.

Since I was fifteen, I've thought your name,  
as lovely as you are, would be wonderful  
for a heroine.

And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

2 Corinthians 12:9

# Prologue

*New York City  
May 23, 1825*

*Dearest Camilla,*

*The London newspapers to which my husband subscribes informed me that your brother, too, has left us. My deepest sympathies. Before I chide you for this news coming from a newspaper and not your fair hand, allow me to offer you some relief for the difficulties I expect you now face.*

*In October, the 26th day to be exact, my husband and I shall depart for the Great Lakes via the Erie Canal, which will open on that day. Because we will begin this new adventure of our lives in a land that is little more than wilderness, I would love some civilized companionship. No one I know is more civilized and genteel than you, my girlhood friend.*

*Do, I beg you, join us here in New York, or, if you do not arrive in America soon enough, come up the river to Albany, from which we will depart. Dozens of steamboats leave for*

A Moonlight Promise

*the north daily. The harbor master can advise you as to which  
captains in port are reliable.*

*I do hope you will say yes and understand if you do not.*

*Sincerely yours,*

*Joanna*

# • • • ONE • • •

NEW YORK CITY  
OCTOBER 24, 1825

“Wait. Wait.” Camilla Renfrew raced down Barclay Street, waving her umbrella at the lone figure at the dockside of the last steamboat moored along that section of the East River. “Please, do not leave.”

The man who had been pointed out to her as Captain Nathaniel Black glanced toward her and said something inaudible above the chugging of the boat’s engine, the patter of the rain against Camilla’s umbrella, and the clatter of her hard leather soles on the wooden planks of the wharf. She did not need to hear what he said. His turned back and feet heading up the gangway, his dark hair lifting like mourning kerchiefs waving farewell in the icy wind blowing off the Atlantic, spoke a trumpet blast of a message—he would not wait for her. Emphasizing his rejection, a bell clanged from the upper deck.

Camilla kept running toward the solitary boat and broad, indifferent back. “Oh, no, please, just another moment.” Heedlessly sacrificing her last bonnet to the rain, she collapsed her umbrella and tucked it under her arm so she could gather up her skirt with one hand and run unimpeded by layers of fabric.

She hit the edge of the dock just as the gangway began to rise.

A bell clanged, and the paddle wheel began a languid *shug, shug, shug*.

She glanced at the growing gap between wharf and gangway, took a deep breath, and leaped onto the latter.

The gangway rocked beneath her, swaying like a tree branch in a gale. Men shouted. Two left the tarpaulin they were tying over some barrels and surged toward her. Captain Black motioned them back with a gesture so forceful he may as well have shoved them, and charged toward Camilla. “What do you think you’re doing?”

“Coming . . . aboard.” Running, sliding, gasping for breath, she closed the distance between herself and the captain.

The boat heeled beneath the onslaught of an incoming wave, and Camilla landed on the planks at his feet. She gripped his arm. Beneath her gloved fingers, his arm stiffened to something akin to an iron railing.

She glanced up at its owner and could not move. Eyes the pale green of spring grass back home in Gloucestershire pierced into hers like ivory knitting needles. For all their sharpness, those were young eyes. He could not be more than two or three years beyond her own twenty-five.

“What,” he asked in a frosty tone, “possessed you to do something so dangerous? If you’d fallen into the river, the current would have pushed you right into the wheel.”

Camilla gulped. Her stomach churned like the paddle wheel towering at the stern of the boat. Even in the gloom of the rain-soaked afternoon, the blades flashed in lethal grace. If she had gotten caught, those paddles would have pounded her like a piece of hide in the hands of a tanner.

She clutched Black’s arm more tightly, though her fingers slipped on his wet leather coat, and swallowed three times before she managed to speak. “I insist.”

In response, Black extricated his arm from her grasping fingers

and stepped away from her. His face turned stony, emphasizing every chiseled angle. "I can't help you."

Behind him, the now mostly idle crew watched with expressions varying from dismay to amusement.

Their curiosity lent Camilla some courage to press her suit. "But you must help me." She firmed her chin to keep it from quivering, and her voice emerged so sharply she feared she sounded shrewish. "All the other boats have left, and I must reach Albany before October twenty-sixth."

"You're not the only one." He turned half away. "This is not a passenger boat. There'll be more of those tomorrow."

"But I cannot—"

She could not stay in the city another night. She could not tell him that, however. Of everything else she had lost over the past six months, no one could remove her pride.

She hefted her reticule. The beaded and embroidered velvet bag hung limp with its sad complement of some English and American pennies and a five-dollar gold piece she doubted would last her another day in the city.

Her chin quivered despite her efforts. "Please."

"As soon as we can get turned back, I'll put you ashore again." He walked away from her, past a black tower belching smoke and radiating blessed heat, and up a stairway.

Camilla followed. "You do not understand, sir. It is vital I reach Albany immediately."

He paused at the top of the steps. "And it is vital I'm not delayed any longer." He strode along the upper deck to another set of steps leading to a structure that did not appear to provide much shelter from the rain beyond a roof and boards no more than a yard high on three sides.

Camilla cast a longing look at the row of cabins toward the stern and followed the man. Beneath the roof, a man stood to one side of a wheel as tall as his shoulder, a good five and a half feet.

With one hand, he gripped a pin protruding from the side of the wheel, and with the other, he reached up to pull one of several rings dangling from the ceiling. With a screech of gears from the machinery below, the boat ceased backing. Another pull on the rope, and the vessel lurched forward.

Camilla lost her balance and dropped her valise to catch hold of the wooden side.

“Sit down before you fall down.” Black gestured to a bench bolted to the floor, then turned back to the pilot. “How’s visibility?”

“All right if this don’t turn into fog.” The man pulled another lever, and a long, deep whistle blasted low and harsh.

The vessel swung into the stream, the flagpole at the center of the bow pointing the way. Camilla dropped onto the bench and hugged her arms across her middle. She gritted her teeth to keep them from chattering. Heat radiated through the floor of the wheelhouse, but not enough to combat the blast of wet wind funneling through the open front of the structure.

She glanced at the captain, pleading with her eyes for him to reconsider taking her upriver. He did not even glance her way. He and his crewman kept their faces turned toward the bow of the boat and the river beyond, an endless stretch of churning dark water with wharves and warehouses and growing cities along its banks, sailing ships and steamboats and ferries traversing its surface. Bells and whistles sounded in an endless chorus, and smoke from hundreds of boilers fogged the air.

Her heart ached for the clean, crisp air of the Cotswolds, and the home she would never see again because it belonged to someone else.

She swallowed. “How long until you can turn back?” Her voice emerged with the social lightness she had been trained to use in company. With these two hulking men in front of her, her tone sounded weak, barely above the river cacophony.

“With this traffic and rain, ten minutes, maybe twenty,” came the captain’s laconic response.

“I could perhaps perform some task to make myself useful on the journey.”

“Can you cook?” the pilot asked.

Camilla grimaced. “Ladies are not taught to cook.”

Black snorted.

The crewman glanced at her with disgust, though he sported a missing eyetooth and scarred lip above it. “You’re English, aren’t you?”

“Yes, I am. I just arrived here two days ago. I was to meet a friend here in New York, but my voyage was delayed. My friend has already gone on upriver.” She spoke quickly to get everything out before she lost the men’s attention, what of it she garnered anyway. “And if I do not reach Albany before the canal opens, she and her husband will head west without me.”

And she would be destitute in a strange land.

“I . . . must not be left behind,” she finished rather lamely.

“Other boats will be leaving early tomorrow morning,” Black said.

Camilla shook her head. “Nothing can possibly travel that far that swiftly.”

The two men gave her amused glances.

“Any riverboat captain with half a paddle wheel can get to Albany in a day or a little more,” Black said.

“It is the little more that concerns me.” Camilla stared down at her reticule.

If only she had not spent every last farthing on running, hiding, sailing across the Atlantic.

Another chill racked her body. “Please.” She gulped and fixed her gaze on Captain Black, a broad back that looked about as movable as the shaft of wood holding the giant wheel in place. “The harbor master said you were reliable and trustworthy, which does not seem to be the situation with most . . . riverboat men.”

Not a good choice of words. She was so unpracticed at begging for help she forgot to keep her opinions to herself.

Neither man responded. They spoke to one another about depths and directions, the best way to skirt an oncoming vessel, and something about the cargo and hot coffee. She preferred tea, but hot coffee sounded heavenly.

She ran her tongue over her dry lips and tried one more time. “Why do you have cabins if you do not take passengers?”

“The boat came with them.”

“What if I simply take a portion of deck rather than a cabin. It would be a rather small portion.”

“Let me explain this, Miss—”

“Ren—”

“I don’t care to know your name.” He held up one hand for emphasis before reaching for one of the ropes hanging from the roof and giving it a tug. “I am not going to have a solitary female unprotected on my boat.”

“I crossed the Atlantic unprotected and was perfectly all right.”

Black did not respond. He appeared to concentrate on his ropes and the wheel and the river traffic.

She tucked her chin into the collar of her cloak and hugged her arms across her middle. “Why are you so opposed to having one passenger for the next day?”

The man shrugged.

“Captain Black, that is scarcely—”

The thud of boots on the steps stopped her from lecturing him like a schoolmistress. The crewman appeared with tin cups and a dented pot from whose spout coffee-scented steam spewed. “This should warm us, Nathaniel.”

“Serve her ladyship first,” Black said.

“I am not titled. I am merely the daughter of—” Camilla closed her eyes and her mouth. Her cheeks grew warm for the first time in days, as she realized the man was insulting her, not paying her a courtesy. “I would appreciate some coffee, thank you.”

“Anything for a pretty girl.” The crewman set pot and cups on

the bench beside Camilla and poured hers. “It ain’t a lady’s drink the way we make it, but it’s hot.”

Hot and thick as oil. She drank the coffee. It tasted like sludge and smelled like burned stockings, but in its heat lay comfort. In the wheelhouse lay a few moments’ respite from the tumult of the city.

She glanced ahead and saw another wharf growing closer, another unfamiliar place in this strange land where nothing seemed to matter but money. She had departed from her boardinghouse to find her friend, her new employer, and returned to discover the landlady had rented out the room.

“Couldn’t be sure you was coming back,” had been the explanation.

Camilla gripped the tankard so hard she feared she would crush the thick tin. She set the cup on the bench and tucked her hands inside her cloak before they grew cold again.

“You drank that?” Black glanced from where he was once again allowing the crewman to pilot the boat, to Camilla huddled like an old woman in the London stews. “You must be stronger than you look.”

“It was hot. I was cold.”

The boat deck rose, fell, heeled to port beneath her feet. The coffee burned her stomach and up to her throat. A lump formed in its wake, and she could scarcely breathe.

Black glanced her way again. “We dock at Washington Street. I believe there’s a woman there who rents rooms to respectable females.”

“I fear I do not look particularly respectable.”

The captain swept his gaze from her drooping hat, to her wrinkled black dress, to her muddy half boots. He shook his head, ruffling his thick, dark, and overly long hair. “You don’t.”

Nor was she now, the sister of a disgraced and deceased peer.

*Lord, you said you would provide all our needs.*

Except he hadn’t been doing that for her of late.

“Signal the engine room for less speed, Billy.” Black’s baritone voice rumbled through the wheelhouse in counterpoint to the engine. “We’ll be docking—” He broke off and muttered something that sounded rude.

Camilla followed his gaze and murmured a prayer of thanks. God had listened to her pleas. He had sent another boat. As long as it was headed upriver also and not on its way home, as long as it had enough room for her, as long as she had enough money to pay for passage . . .

She hugged herself, then crossed the wheelhouse to the steps. She need not lower herself to begging and pleading with this indifferent captain. Another boat waited at the dock as though summoned just for her.

She tossed Captain Nathaniel Black a triumphant smile. “Apparently I need not beg you to keep me aboard.”

“No,” he said through gritted teeth, “you don’t.” Then he turned to his crewman. “Let’s take her out again. I’m not getting anywhere near Riley Lancaster.”



.....  
Lessons  
in Love  
.....

Ann Shorey

For friend and fellow author, Amanda Cabot—

Thank you for suggesting me as one of the authors  
in this novella collection.

This has been the most fun I've ever had  
with a writing project.

Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.

1 Corinthians 12:4–6

• • • ONE • • •

CHICAGO  
JULY 1858

At the sound of light footsteps in the hall outside her aunt's study, Merrie Bentley paused in the act of dipping her pen into an inkwell. She groaned to herself. Another interruption. She'd promised the editor of *Kipler's Home Weekly* an article by next week, but at this rate she'd never fulfill her agreement.

"Miss Merrie." The housekeeper's voice carried into the book-lined room. In another moment, the door swung open and Mrs. Wagner dashed in, her ruffled cap askew. "Did you forget your piano lesson? Mr. Thackery has been waiting in the music room for ten minutes."

"Why didn't you tell me he'd arrived?" Merrie dropped a paperweight over her manuscript and scrambled to her feet.

"I reminded you this morning at breakfast. He's here at three every Thursday." Arms akimbo, Mrs. Wagner frowned. "You're twenty years old—I expect you to keep your own appointments."

"I apologize. You did remind me." She slipped her arm around the shoulders of her aunt's diminutive housekeeper. "I don't know what I'd do without you to look after me."

"I don't know either, and that's a fact. Once you shut yourself

away with your writing, lightning could strike and you wouldn't notice."

She opened her mouth to argue, then closed it. Nothing captured her attention as thoroughly as writing her articles. Not even Mr. Thackery's dark eyes and shy smile. She glanced down at her emerald-sprigged muslin skirt and brushed at wrinkles.

"I wish I had time to change to a better dress."

"Just go on. Your aunt pays him whether you're learning anything or not. Don't waste her money."

She chafed at the reminder. One of these days, she'd earn enough from her writing to take care of herself. "I'm not wasting her money. I enjoy the piano. Mr. Thackery is a good teacher." She left the study and directed her steps toward the music room off the reception hall of her aunt's spacious home.

"Wait. I forgot to give you this." Mrs. Wagner held out an envelope. "Peters brought it for you when he came back from town." She shook her head. "Don't know why they can't get your name right."

When Merrie read the address—"Mr. M. M. Bentley"—her heartbeat quickened. Payment from *Kipler's Home Weekly* for her most recent article.

"Thank you," she called after the housekeeper's retreating back.

Mrs. Wagner waved her hand and continued toward the kitchen.

As soon as she was out of sight, Merrie paused beneath a lighted sconce in the hall and used her forefinger to slit open the missive. She'd submitted a longer piece last time, with several references, and hoped for a larger sum in payment. Her conscience pricked at not correcting the editor when he assumed she was a man, but she knew she had a better chance of being published as *Mr.* M. M. Bentley.

Her eyes widened when she saw the amount of the bank draft, then narrowed with concern when she noticed a folded sheet of paper remaining in the envelope. Most unusual. Mr. Kipler seldom sent messages with her payment. She glanced toward the music room where Mr. Thackery waited, knowing she should wait to read

the letter until after her instructor departed. But another minute or two wouldn't hurt. She unfolded the page and scanned the contents, then drew a sharp breath and read the message again.



Colin Thackery paced across the Persian rug to stand in front of the grand piano that filled one corner of the music room. Miss Bentley was late again. Her hour would be over before they had time to review last week's lesson. His fingers itched to touch the keys, to stroke one of Chopin's nocturnes from the beautiful instrument.

He folded his arms and turned away. He couldn't presume to use the piano for his own enjoyment. He was hired to teach Miss Bentley the musical skills expected of a young lady of her social standing. His personal time at the keyboard would have to wait until he returned home, where he could use the upright in the church his father pastored.

The latch on the glass-paned door clicked downward, and Miss Bentley flew into the room. A few coppery-brown curls corkscrewed loose above her ears. Her cheeks were bright pink and worry lines wrinkled her forehead. She looked prettier every time he saw her.

He made a point of glancing at the ornate case clock against the rear wall. "We've lost more than fifteen minutes. I hope you're prepared to learn a new piece this week." He cringed at the sternness in his tone. She must think him a dry stick.

Instead of going to the piano bench, she sank onto a tapestry-covered settee facing the window. "I'm sorry I'm late." She folded her arms across her middle. One slipped foot tapped the floor.

"Being a few minutes late isn't that serious. Please don't be upset."

"That's not why I'm upset." She waved a sheet of paper at him. "I just received this letter, and I'm trying to think what to do."

"Bad news?"

"The very worst."

“Nothing has happened to your parents, I hope.” He knew they had left her with her aunt while they devoted their attention to business interests back East.

“No. The last I heard, they’re both well.” She rubbed one side of her head, dislodging more curls.

Seeing her in distress called forth his protective instincts. He dragged the piano bench across the room and sat facing her. “I’m a good listener. Would you care to tell me what’s happened?”

A moment of silence passed between them while she surveyed his face.

He rubbed moist palms on his trouser legs, praying she couldn’t see past his surface platonic concern to the attraction he felt toward her. If she believed him to be over-familiar, she could have him dismissed.

Apparently she decided to trust him, because she exhaled a long breath and leaned forward. “Mrs. Wagner is the only person who knows about this.” She folded the letter into a square and rubbed her fingers against the paper. “I’ve been writing articles about marriage for *Kipler’s Home Weekly* for several months now.”

“Marriage?” His amazement echoed in his voice.

She drilled him with a stern look. “You don’t actually have to be married to know what the Lord expects.”

He decided to let her statement pass. From what he’d seen of his father’s ministry, being married was a prerequisite to possessing an intelligent opinion of matrimony.

“How did you . . . why did they . . . ?”

“I read a notice in the magazine requesting submissions on the subject. So I sent a sample, and to my delight Mr. Kipler agreed to publish my thoughts. He pays me by sending a draft, which is what I thought this letter was about.”

He stared at her dumbfounded, any thoughts of a closer relationship dissolving. She was not only part of a higher social class, she was an ambitious woman.

“You want to be a writer, like Mrs. Hale?”

“She’s far more accomplished than I—look how popular *Godey’s Lady’s Book* has become. But later on, who knows?” Miss Bentley spread her hands. “For now, I’m just thankful to see my words in print.”

He rose and crossed to the piano. “Then why are you upset over the letter? Didn’t he send payment?”

“He did. But the message that accompanied the draft . . .” She unfolded the paper, then held it out to him.

When he read the salutation, his jaw dropped. “Dear Mr. Bentley?”  
“Read the rest.”

*I’ve heard from a number of my subscribers regarding the quality of your matrimonial advice. May I suggest a meeting in my office on Monday, the 19th, at ten o’clock in the morning, with the object of discussing your future with our publication?*

*Sincerely yours,  
Horatio Kipler*



Amanda Cabot

For everyone at Revell  
who was involved in turning this book from  
a dream into reality—

I'm absolutely delighted to be part of  
your first novella collection.

I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way  
which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with  
mine eye.

Psalm 32:8

• • • ONE • • •

NEW YORK CITY  
MAY 1892

“What else can you do?”

Lorraine Caldwell tried not to wince. It wasn't as if she hadn't asked herself the same question dozens of times.

Though it was only an hour since breakfast, Uncle Ambrose leaned forward to take another of the frosted pastries he'd had delivered when Lorraine entered his office. “I don't want to sound cruel, my dear, but you need to be realistic. You were trained to be the wife of a wealthy man. Just because you can play the piano, paint a watercolor, or arrange a party doesn't mean you could survive on your own. No one is willing to pay for those talents.” Lorraine's uncle took a bite of pastry, washing it down with a gulp of coffee before he said, “As I see it, you have no choice. You need to marry Robert Sims by the fourteenth of September unless you want your cousin to receive your inheritance.”

Neither was a palatable alternative. Robert loved the thought of her parents' estate far more than he would ever love her, and Cousin Alan would only squander the Caldwell fortune. There had to be another way. The problem was, though Lorraine had thought of little else for the past few weeks, she was no closer to a solution than she'd been a year ago.

*Show me the path you have prepared for me, Lord. Please.* It was the same prayer she'd offered dozens of times. There'd been no answers before. There would be none today.

But less than an hour later, a maid knocked on the door to Lorraine's sitting room.

"You have a letter, Miss Lorraine."



Where was he? Lorraine stared out the window as the train screeched to a stop. The small station bearing the name Plato Falls was the correct one. Mike's letter had been clear about that. The two years without a message, wondering where he was and if he was still alive, were over. The brother she loved so dearly was alive, he was happy, and soon they'd be reunited. That was why Lorraine had been counting the hours, then the minutes until the train would reach its destination. Now the train had arrived, but he wasn't there.

The excitement that had buoyed her on the journey from New York dissipated as she descended from the train. Following Mike's instructions, she had sent him a telegram, announcing her schedule. But as the porter unloaded her trunk and set it next to her traveling bag, Lorraine scanned the platform for the tenth time. Not only was Mike not there, but no one was. With a resigned sigh, she headed for the station. Surely the attendant could arrange transportation to Lilac Hall. Her hand on the station door, Lorraine turned for one last look, and as she did, she noticed a wagon approaching from the east.

It was an ordinary wagon, the type she'd seen farmers use to transport goods to and from town. The only thing that distinguished it from those wagons was its color. This one was painted purple. Not simply purple, but lilac. That could not be a coincidence. Admittedly, it was not the kind of conveyance she had expected, but at least Mike was on his way.

Lorraine's heart soared before plummeting a second later when it became obvious that the driver was not Mike. This man's hair was darker than Mike's, and he appeared to be a few inches taller, a bit leaner than Mike. Whoever he was, this man was not her brother.

Though the driver was not her brother, there was no question that the wagon belonged to the inn where Mike was staying, for its sides proclaimed Lilac Hall in large black letters. The man climbed down, and as he did, Lorraine blinked. What kind of resort sent someone dressed like that? Instead of a tailored uniform, this man wore a paint-spattered jacket that hung loosely from surprisingly broad shoulders, and paint smears decorated one side of his pants. Instead of a cap, his brown hair was uncovered. And though gloves covered his hands, they were a mismatched pair. *Oh, Mike, what have you gotten into?*

"You must be Miss Caldwell." The driver's voice, oddly cultured for a laborer, bore a strong English accent.

"Yes, I am," she replied, her voice the cool, impersonal tone Mother had taught her to use when addressing servants. Lorraine swallowed deeply, trying to tamp back the realization that this crudely dressed man was the most handsome creature she had ever seen, with perfectly sculpted features and a face that appeared almost aristocratic. Even Robert Sims, with generations of breeding and the finest of schools behind him, didn't exude the same sense of entitlement. "I was expecting my brother."

The driver shrugged. "Mike asked me to come in his stead."

"You mean Mr. Caldwell." There were some things no lady overlooked, and impertinence was one of them.

The man appeared amused. "Mike," he said, emphasizing the name, "is busy right now. But you needn't worry, Miss Caldwell. I'm perfectly capable of driving you back to Lilac Hall."

"I'm certain you are, Mr. . . ." She let her voice trail off, inviting him to tell her his name.

"Mann, but you might as well call me Jonah. Everyone else does."

“Certainly, Jonah.” Lorraine gestured toward the two satchels at her feet. “These bags and the trunk are mine.”

With what seemed a mere flick, he loaded the trunk into the back of the wagon before helping Lorraine onto the seat. It wasn’t the first time a man had placed his hands on her waist. It wasn’t the first time a man had lifted her off the ground. But it was the first time that simple gesture had sent waves of heat rushing through her veins. Robert, the man her uncle expected her to marry, hadn’t caused that flutter of excitement.

“How far is it to Lilac Hall?” Lorraine asked, trying to mask her discomfort with an ordinary question.

Jonah’s look said he had noticed the flush in her cheeks. How embarrassing! “It’s about a ten-minute ride. The countryside between here and there is pretty. Unfortunately, the lilacs aren’t in bloom yet, but if you stay another three or four weeks, you’ll see them in their glory.” There was nothing exceptional about the words he’d pronounced. It was only the tone and the glance he gave her that were inappropriate. Jonah Mann was treating her as if she were an equal, when it was clear that he was a servant.

“I don’t expect to be here that long.” Lorraine kept her voice clipped and cool, refusing to expand her explanation. The truth was, she planned to remain in Plato Falls just long enough to convince Mike to return to New York.

Jonah’s lips curved into a smile. “You might change your mind. Mike did. He saw the place, thought he’d spend a week or so, but weeks turned into months. He’s been there for a year and a half now.”

And no one knew. All the while Lorraine had been worrying about her brother, wondering where he was and how he was faring, he’d been only a few hours from home. “I don’t understand why he’d stay at a hotel for so long.” She hadn’t meant to speak her thoughts, but somehow they slipped out.

“Perhaps he found what he was looking for here.”

That made no sense. “Mike had everything he needed at home.”  
“Are you sure about that, Lorraine?”

She turned, planning to rebuke Jonah Mann for his informality, but his cocky grin told her he would slough off the reprimand as easily as he’d lifted her trunk, and so she said nothing, merely stared straight ahead, as if the scenery were fascinating. In the meantime, she would ignore this impertinent man who had obviously missed the classes that taught servants proper deportment.

It was perhaps ten minutes later when he turned off the main road onto a long, curving drive. Though the countryside had been more intriguing than she had expected, with gently rolling hills and trees that were just now leafing out, Lorraine found herself staring at the row of shrubs lining the driveway. Their heart-shaped leaves left no doubt that these were lilacs, and it took little imagination to picture them in full bloom. She inhaled deeply, wishing she could savor their fragrance. It was foolish, of course, for she would not be here when they bloomed. Instead, she’d have Jenkins purchase a bouquet at the flower market.

The road curved, then formed a Y, with a narrower lane on the left. Jonah continued on the main road, guiding the horse around a final corner. And there it was. After seeing the shabby condition of Jonah’s clothing, Lorraine had expected a ramshackle building, not this magnificent Greek Revival mansion. Constructed of what appeared to be white marble, it was one of the most beautiful buildings she had ever seen. Six two-story-high ionic columns supported the massive pediment and framed the long windows that looked out onto a broad porch. It would have been beautiful in any setting, but surrounded as it was by expansive lawns and still more lilac hedges, it could only be described as glorious.

And standing on the front steps, waving his hand, was her brother. Lorraine’s eyes widened as the details registered. Mike was a bit thinner than she recalled, his hair a bit longer. But what surprised her most was the fact that her normally impeccably dressed

brother wore clothing that resembled her family's chef's uniform and that he had his arm around a tall blonde dressed like Lorraine's laundress. What on earth had Mike done with his inheritance that he had to work as a chef, and what was he doing with a laundress?

"Lorraine!" Her brother grabbed the woman's hand, dragging her with him as he sprinted toward the wagon. "I'm so glad you came." He reached up and pulled Lorraine from the wagon, holding her close for a second, and in that second Lorraine knew that, no matter what had brought him here, no matter what changes his absence had wrought, Mike was still her brother, the man she'd adored her whole life.

She tilted her head so she could look into his eyes and laughed. "How could you think I wouldn't come? You made sure I would when you wrote that last word, didn't you?" She had carried Mike's letter in her reticule, and even though she had memorized the few sentences, she had withdrawn it several times on the train ride, savoring the sight of his careful script.

"I hoped you would," he admitted. Slinging his arm around the blonde, he drew her to his side. "Let me introduce you to the reason I wanted you to come to Lilac Hall." His smile was radiant as he looked at the woman. "This is Betty Freeman. We're getting married tomorrow afternoon."



Jane Kirkpatrick

Dedicated to Jerry,  
one more time

They shall not hunger nor thirst; . . . for he  
that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even  
by the springs of water shall he guide them.

Isaiah 49:10

• • • ONE • • •

*. . . My mama won't leave that place. Please make her come home, Aunt Grace. I already lost my Papa.*

*Sincerely yours,  
Caroline, age 8*

Grace Hathaway opened the letter while sitting on the wide, covered porch of Oregon's Roaring Springs Ranch. She rocked back and forth listening to the wind chimes and the low *awk-awk* of chickens as they pecked on the lawn. She twisted a curl of her chestnut hair as she read. Caroline's plea had not been what she expected when the missive arrived at the remote Oregon ranch just after breakfast. A second letter, signed by a lawyer, in the same envelope explained that Grace's friend, Rebecca, mother of Caroline, was hospitalized in a sanatorium-like facility in a town called Olalla in Washington on Puget Sound.

*Following the drowning death of her husband, Caroline's mother became quite despondent and felt she needed a place of respite. She arranged for eight-year-old Caroline to be left in the care of a friend in The Dalles, Oregon.*

The friend had visited Mrs. Holmes, the lawyer continued, and was alarmed by her condition.

*Mrs. Holmes appears to be wasting away with the full support of the female doctor, Dr. Linda Hazzard, and her husband who operate the facility. It comes highly recommended for an unusual though apparently successful nutritional care approach involving fasting. The friend was unable to convince Caroline's mother to leave. Caroline is listed as your godchild and Caroline and the family friend asked that I send her letter along with my explanation. Please advise if you can come and offer comfort to Caroline, if not to her mother.*

*Very truly yours*

. . . and it was signed by an attorney in The Dalles and dated in March, 1911.

Grace nibbled on a sugar cookie the cook had put out on the sideboard. She rested the letters on her linen skirt. *Little Caroline*. The child was her godchild and she was hurting deeply. Grace could afford to not teach piano on the circuit of ranches for a few weeks, though she didn't like renegeing on an agreement with the ranching families. And a buckaroo she fancied might well find someone else to picnic with if she were out of the picture. Still, a child worried and her mother—an old friend of Grace's—suffered in her grief. She wasn't certain what she could do, but she was being asked to help and a Hathaway never turned aside a genuine request for such. Grace hoped the ranchers would permit her to leave her contract, knowing it was for the sake of a child.

Olalla. The name of the town rolled off her tongue like a lullaby, but what was happening to her friend there didn't sound like a soothing song; it rang a dissonant chord.



The stage ride north to The Dalles took three days through the mud and spring rains. Her small frame struck passengers on either side of her as they hit rocks and ruts, causing her to resettle the hatpins holding her straw hat. Nights at the stage stops, Grace longed for the feather mattress and hearty breakfasts of the Roaring Springs Ranch. Her employers had been kind about letting her go, and even her students acted like they'd miss her. The buckaroo tipped his hat but didn't seem the least bit chagrined that they wouldn't be meeting for cold meats and cheeses beneath the spreading cottonwood tree. Maybe the ease of saying goodbye was a good sign that going to help a friend was exactly what God wanted her to do and that her attraction for a cowboy was just a fleeting fancy.

With her arrival in the bustling town of The Dalles beside the Columbia River, Grace conferred first with the lawyer, then found the address where Caroline stayed. The child's small arms reached around Grace's neck as she lowered herself to the round tearstained face. She listened to the tale of Caroline missing her mother and her papa and rocked the child, the smell of lavender soap from Caroline's hair sweet to her nose.

"I was quite alarmed," the caretaker for Caroline told Grace after putting Caroline to bed. Jenny spoke frankly with Grace as the two women sat at Jenny's oak table. "First of all, Olalla itself is so isolated. Just a timber town. You have to take ferries and boats to get there and the sanatorium is even more remote, up on this hill in a rambling building where no one smiles and they look at a visitor as though they're someone bringing guns or knives inside." She took a long drink of cold milk. "What they check for is food: had I brought anything with me to eat or drink?" She leaned in to whisper to Grace. "They didn't even remove the pistol I carry in my reticule, just the piece of beef jerky I had left that helped sustain me on the dreadful trip." Jenny had a biscuit in her hand and she took a bite.

"What did Rebecca say? How did she look?"

Jenny brushed crumbs from her ample chest. "She said they were

treating her very well, that she felt happier there than she'd been since Bertrand's death. Such a tragedy." Jenny shook her head. "You know he left her a handsome estate." Grace nodded. Jenny returned to her story. "But she's positively emaciated. She must have lost twenty pounds. I know she was stretching her corsets for a time. We all have a tendency to do that after a birth, and Rebecca never lost her baby weight."

Rebecca had always been a bit portly, so Grace hoped Jenny was exaggerating about looking emaciated. She watched the woman spread thick huckleberry jam over a glob of sweet butter on her second biscuit.

"What is the treatment, exactly? Did she tell you?"

"Some sort of special diet. Would you like some tea? Sugar?" Grace shook her head no. Jenny sighed. "The doctor wrote this book. I have it somewhere. It was all so . . . astonishing. Mostly female patients. And I would venture to say none that needed charity. The furnishings were quite lovely and the grounds well kept. Little cabins sort of off by themselves stuck beneath massive trees. I didn't see the inside of those. The husband is quite handsome. Sam Hazzard is his name. But the doctor . . ." Jenny said the word like she'd eaten cold mutton that had stuck to the roof of her mouth. "The doctor is the wife, and when she enters a room . . . well, she consumes it even though she's thin as chive. With a name like Hazzard . . . she *is* a hazard, but Rebecca wouldn't hear anything against her or Wilderness Heights, as the sanatorium is called." Jenny used what was left of her biscuit to point at Grace. "I didn't really describe all this to Caroline, of course. The child feels bereft. Who wouldn't with their mother choosing some wild place to lie in bed all day. Well, I think Rebecca's too weak to do much else, but to do that instead of be with her child? Surely her brain has been punctured like a pincushion and her mind is seeping out."



Grace slipped into Caroline's bedroom. She'd be sharing the child's bed, but she didn't want to wake her. She lit a candle and began pulling combs from her chestnut bun, the light flickering in the oval mirror, her blue eyes looking dark in the candlelight. She really wondered whether she might be able to do more than what Jenny had attempted in rescuing her friend. She wasn't a great persuader. She didn't "consume" a room when she entered it. She was more shadow than light when it came to convincing someone of an action. Rebecca had always taken the lead in their friendship. Rebecca had married an Oregonian, and Grace had come to Oregon from Chicago because Rebecca insisted that Grace's life would be much more interesting in the West. She'd made her first trip when Caroline was baptized and returned six years later to find herself a traveling music teacher, an occupation she thoroughly loved and would never have found without Rebecca's invitation and her many contacts. When she learned of Rebecca's husband's death, Grace had rushed to be with her friend who, after a month, had seemed to be negotiating widowhood as well as could be expected. Grace returned to her work. Now, six months later, her friend was in real trouble and it concerned her that she hadn't reached out to Grace before isolating herself in a strange place called Olalla. *Give me guidance, Lord. I am apparently a flat note when it comes to helping grieving widows sing again.*

"I heard what she said."

"What?" Grace turned to Caroline's voice. "I thought you were asleep."

"I'm not. I evens-dropped."

Grace smiled at the child's creative word. "Did you? I'm sure it's not as bad as what Jenny described. I'm going to go there and—"

"Take me too!" Caroline sat up in bed, the candlelight reflecting against the satin blue ribbon of her nightdress. "Please, please, take me."

"Is Jenny good to you?"

“Yes, but I miss Mama. I miss Papa.”

Grace sat beside her. “I know you do and she misses you too—and your papa, he’d be here if he could. But God loves you and looks after you.” Caroline nodded, accepted the handkerchief Grace pulled from her pocket. “Hospitals don’t usually allow children to visit and we’d both worry about you being left at a hotel all alone. It’ll be better if you wait here with Jenny and pray, wouldn’t it?”

“I guess. But she’s not a pincushion. She’s a good mama.” Caroline began sobbing, the ache of separation a slice to Grace’s own heart.

“No, no, she’s not a pincushion.” She stroked the child’s arm. “Your mamma has had a terrible blow. I’ll do my best to tend her wounds and bring her back.”

“Promise? You promise you’ll bring her back.”

“I . . . I promise.”

Caroline grabbed for Grace now as she sat on the side of the bed, hung on as though her little arms were ropes surrounding Grace’s heart.

“How about if I sing you a lullaby, would you like that? It’s time you got some sleep.”

“Like Mamma used to?”

“Just like that.” She held Caroline and began to sing “Rock-a-bye Baby,” then “Hush, Little Baby.” Her contralto voice soothed, and by the time Grace finished “All Through the Night,” she could hear the child’s even heartbeat against her own, watched as the eyelids fluttered shut, settling the child into sleep. Caroline’s hair was soft as a flower petal, and Grace tucked the curls around her ear, then laid her gently onto the pillow. She cupped the candle flame and blew it out, then undressed in the dark and donned her nightdress before slipping beneath the quilt on her side of the bed. A breeze through the window blew across her face.

What had she gotten herself into, promising to bring Rebecca back? If it was true that Jenny had told Rebecca how much Caroline

missed her and that still hadn't convinced Rebecca to come home, Grace wasn't at all sure she'd have any better luck. "This will have to be your doing, Lord." She finished her prayers, the words of the lullaby ringing in her ears: "Guardian angels God will send thee, all through the night."

She would count on that for the night and the light of day.