

## Chapter 1

Sarah Martin brushed at the front of her blue silk blouse with a cocktail napkin as she choked. "Now look what you've made me do." She hiccuped, a giggle getting caught in the cough.

"Me?" LeeAnne batted her thick eyelashes at Sarah.

"Yes, you." Sarah threw the wadded up napkin at her friend. The tight red dress with puffed sleeves made LeeAnne's pale skin glow and her blonde hair shine. Blue eyes smiled mischievously from behind the fluttering lashes.

"You're the one who made the comment about Elvis' pants being too tight and being able to see...."

"Stop." Sarah burst into another fit of giggles and looked away from LeeAnne. She stared up at the ceiling at the shiny silver orb shooting out rays of light across the dance floor and tried to push from her mind the image of the slightly overweight Elvis impersonator jiggling on the dance floor. He wasn't even the floor show. She mopped at the laughter tears streaming down her face with the damp cocktail napkin stolen from beneath LeeAnne's drink. "I'm going to the ladies room to fix my make-up and see if I can get this drink out of my blouse."

LeeAnne chuckled. "No use. The grenadine's going to stain."

"It's your fault." Sarah wrinkled her nose and slid down from the brown bar stool, holding onto the table until her heels clattered against the bluish tile. Straightening her skirt, she stomped off towards the restroom. She held her head up, eyes forward, pretending to ignore the gauntlet of men she traversed, but inspecting every face she passed. She caught smiles out of the corner of her eye, but she couldn't tell if they smiled or smirked at the stain across her left breast.

Returning to the table, she hoisted herself up onto the stool, using the rung as a step. She glanced around for her friend and caught a glimpse of LeeAnne's red dress behind a lumbering form gyrating his arms. *Serves her right, getting stuck with Godzilla.* Sarah laughed and reached for her drink. After taking a sip, she propped her chin in her hands and leaned against the bar.

The decision to come tonight had been a good one. After hiding out at LeeAnne's for a week, she need some diversion. The flashing red and purple strobe lights made the people on the dance floor seem to jerk from spot to spot, rather like an old silent movie. A mass of humanity moved in front of her in time to the music. Off to the left the Elvis impersonator wiggled his hips and she quickly looked away, stifling another giggle. The man in front of her, dressed in tight blue jeans, twirled and spun and threw his arms out in strange gestures. His anorexic looking dance partner wore a bored expression above an extremely short and tight orange dress. Her body swayed softly, but never really moved.

"Sit up straight."

Sarah jumped, nearly spilling her drink. She looked up at LeeAnne. "Is your dance finished?"

"My feet have been trod on enough. Now get your chin out of

your hands and sit nicely. No one will come over and ask you to dance if you slouch."

"I don't care. I'm having fun watching these strange people." She didn't want to be noticed by anyone. She preferred to stay on the outside, observing.

"That's not the point. We're here to find you a boyfriend."

"You're here to find me a boyfriend. I'm quite happy on my own. Besides, as many hours as I work, who has time to start a relationship."

LeeAnne slid onto the barstool next to Sarah. "Don't worry. You won't meet anymore loonies like Jack."

A shudder ran through Sarah. She looked over her shoulder and scanned the faces around her. She adjusted the scarf wound around her neck and rubbed her left arm softly through the silk. Wincing at the pain of even that slight touch, she shook her head. "I certainly hope not! He nearly killed me!"

LeeAnne reached over and patted Sarah's hand. "The scarf hides the bruises he left around your neck with his fingers. I don't know how you can still function. If some loony tunes had stalked me, broken into my house, and tried to choke me to death, I'd still be locked in a rubber room screaming my lungs out."

Sarah's stomach twitched. "Without your support, I would be."

LeeAnne wrapped her arm around Sarah's shoulders and hugged her.

"Ouch," said Sarah.

LeeAnne jumped back. "I'm sorry. I forgot he bruised your arms when he pinned you to the couch."

Sarah shuddered and glanced over her shoulder again.

LeeAnne leaned close to be heard over the music. "Did I tell you I really like your hair short? Your high cheekbones aren't hidden by all that black hair you had falling in your face all the time."

"I'm getting used to it." A coldness settled in her bones as she remembered the steel edge of Jack's knife against the back of her neck. Death had touched her that night. "He didn't leave me much choice after he took a hunk out of the back. It truly is short."

"It's cool and easy to take care of." LeeAnne fluttered her eyelids. "And it makes your huge gray eyes stand out."

"Like an owls?" Sarah smiled.

LeeAnne smacked Sarah's hand. "No, you brat, so people can see how beautiful they are. I'm just thankful he cut only your hair."

"Me, too." Sarah sighed. Even after a week she still hadn't mustered up the courage to go to work. Only with a huge amount of persuasion on LeeAnne's part had she been persuaded to leave her sanctuary tonight. She had to get on with life. She couldn't spend the rest of her life hiding. The bruises were starting to fade, but the memories haunted her day and night. "I can't stay with you forever. I'm going back home tomorrow." She hated putting her friend in danger. She hated being afraid.

"Of course you can stay with me forever." LeeAnne sipped her drink.

"No. He might kill you if you get in his way." The hatred that gleamed in Jack's eyes haunted her dreams. She shook her head to clear the vision, trying to focus on the dancers in front of her. She didn't want to remember his eyes focused on her.

"He doesn't know where I live. Besides, he's probably found someone else and you won't see him again. Psycho stalkers are that way."

"And how would you know. If only the police would keep him locked up." Sarah shivered. "You weren't there. He said he'd see me dead before he'd let another man touch me." The look in his eyes had backed up his words. "And I don't even have a man in my life."

"Hell, the man's slipped a gear. You never even dated him." LeeAnne ran her finger around the edge of her glass, staring down into its contents. "See anyone out there you want to dance with?"

Sarah laughed a nervous hiccuping laugh and took a sip of her drink. "Stop changing the subject. I can't concentrate on my business at your place."

"So, take a vacation. You deserve it."

"Pete's having fits. He can't do everything on his own." She thought of her gray-haired partner chewing on the end of his index finger. He'd been patient the last few days while she hid out at LeeAnne's. But two new big accounts needed computer systems installed and employees trained to use them. Their other accounts also required attention.

"Stay a few more days. Jack'll get bored and wander off to pursue some other woman by then."

"Excuse me."

Sarah tipped her head backwards to look up at the sound of a male voice. A tall muscular man with red hair and pale green eyes smiled down at her. "Yes?"

"Would you care to join me in a waltz?"

"Of course she would." LeeAnne smiled broadly.

"I can answer for myself." Sarah swiveled around on the bar stool. Her gaze traveled over the man from his green flannel shirt and tight blue jeans down to the top of his boots. Glancing back at his face, she flashed him a smile. Red hair curled slightly at his ears. His eyes seemed to swallow her up. "Yes. That would be very nice," she stammered.

She stiffened as he placed his hand at her waist to swirl her around the dance floor. His hand warmed a spot on her back. He smiled down at her. A body jostled into her. Someone mumbled a "sorry" under his breath. A jumble of perfumes and colognes assailed her. He caught her free hand with his and tightened his grip at her waist, pulling her into him. He smelled of citrus and the soft fibers of his shirt caressed her face. She couldn't breathe. The room seemed to shrink in on her. A sudden urge to pull away and rush off the floor raced through her. He stood too close. Stepping back half a step, she took a deep breath and tried to calm her racing heart. She would not allow Jack to make her afraid of every man she met. "I'm Sarah." Her voice came as barely more than a whisper.

"Josh." He jerked her to one side. "Sorry. This place is

so crowded."

Sarah glanced over Josh's arm and saw the Elvis impersonator gyrating next to them. Giggles bubbled up from within her. Tension flowed out of her body. His embrace kept her safe from the world.

"What's so funny?" A grin that made his teeth flash and his eyes sparkle spread across his face.

"Nothing. Not that I can say here." She buried her face against his shirt and let the rhythm of the music flow over her. LeeAnne had been correct. She needed to go out more.

After the dance, Sarah took Josh and led him off the dance floor. "Come and meet my strange friend who dragged me here."

"Only if you'll tell me what you keep giggling about."

Sarah glanced over her shoulder. Not seeing Elvis anywhere, she said, "Did you see...." She launched into the story as they maneuvered their way through the crowd.

Josh was laughing loudly by the time Sarah found LeeAnne. Sarah clasped his hand tightly. Jumping up onto the bar stool, she introduced Josh to LeeAnne and reached for her drink.

"The waitress stole it while I wasn't looking." LeeAnne held her hands up and let them flop back at the wrists.

"I'll get you another one. What were you having?" Josh leaned against the high table in front of Sarah so his chest brushed against her arm.

A shiver ran through her. "That's not necessary."

LeeAnne kicked her. "A vodka Collins. Two of them." She fluttered her eyelashes at him.

"You know," Josh said, "this place is terribly crowded. I heard about another place about a mile from here that isn't quite so popular and a person can breathe. If you lovely ladies would be of a mind, I'd be glad to buy you a drink down there. We might be able to talk without screaming."

Sarah tensed and shook her head.

LeeAnne smiled at Josh. "We feel safer here in a crowd." She reached over and patted Sarah's hand.

"I meant we'd take separate vehicles and meet there. I'd never presume to ask two ladies I'd just met to ride with me." Josh's cheeks turned pink.

"You go on." Sarah leaned toward the table so he no longer touched her. "We're fine here."

"The other place is safer, Cath." His eyes pleaded with her.

"My name's Sarah. Here is perfectly safe." She gripped the edge of the table.

"We couldn't go anywhere safer." LeeAnne's smile started to fade. "I know several of the bartenders and patrons."

"It was just a thought. Two vodka Collins. Right?" Josh smiled and moved off across the room to purchase drinks.

"He's cute." LeeAnne watched him walk away.

"And very pushy. Maybe we should leave before he gets back." Sarah studied him from the back. His jeans clung to his firm buttocks and defined his long muscular legs to the top of brown leather cowboy boots. "You don't suppose he's a psycho, too?"

"Sarah! Give me a break." LeeAnne smacked Sarah on the arm. "Not all men are psychos."

"Ouch!"

"Lighten up. He seems nice. And you can't blame a guy for trying to hit on you. You are a beautiful woman. The least you can do is be nice to him. You don't have to go home and crawl in bed with him." LeeAnne gave her a smug smile. "Now aren't you glad I made you come?"

"Yes, I'm glad, but it's only been one dance and a drink. Doesn't mean I'll ever see him again."

"You'll see him again. He's got that 'I want to take her to bed' look." She held her hands, fingers intertwined, beneath her chin and smiled sweetly while she batted her eyes.

"You're incorrigible." Sarah laughed.

"I know. I work at it." LeeAnne dropped her hands into her lap. "You two would make a great couple, even if he can't remember your name."

"We'd look strange. I barely come to his arm pit." The weight which had born her down for the last week dissipated. Her soul soared.

"But his being tall could be very convenient. He could lift you up on the barstool so you don't have to jump. It would keep his muscles in shape for other things."

Sarah smiled as he disappeared into the crowd. "You're terrible." Maybe it would be nice to have a man around once in awhile. But first she had to make sure Jack disappeared from her life.

"You need a man to permanently liven up your boring existence." LeeAnne's eyes twinkled.

"I didn't say I wanted to run off and marry the guy. And life has been anything but boring lately."

"Yeah, but he's a good not-boring. And, is he a looker."

"Good grief, LeeAnne. I just met the man. Give him a break." She searched the crowd to see if Josh was returning. She gasped and her hand went to her neck. Her heart caught on a beat.

"What's wrong?"

"Jack's here." Sarah watched his dark shoulder length hair bounce softly as he strode through the crowd. His brow wrinkled as his dark eyes darted from side to side. The veins in his neck popped out. For a second, she couldn't move. The room started to spin like the silver orbs above the dance floor. She could feel the cold steel edge of Jack's knife against her neck.

She had to escape.

Sliding from the stool, she edged toward the restroom.

A hand grabbed her arm roughly and spun her around. "What are you doing here?" Jack's eyes burned into her.

She backed away, but he increased the pressure on her arm and dragged her to him. "None of your business," she snapped, trying to sound more sure of herself than she felt. His fingers added new bruises to her arm. Ice filled her veins. A tremble raced through her. Searching the crowd, she sought help.

"You're hurting me," she cried, yanking and twisting to pull away.

"I told you I wouldn't let you be with anyone else. We're getting out of here." He turned and jerked her after him. She stumbled.

"Jack, let go. I'm not going with you. I told you there's nothing between us." She pulled back.

"You're mine until I say different and I don't say different." His eyes flashed fire as he looked back at her.

"Let her go, Jack. I'll call the cops." LeeAnne suddenly stood in front of Jack, her hands on her hips. She tipped her head up to glare at him.

"Get out of the way, bitch." Jack shoved her into a passing man who kept her upright.

"Chill out, fella. Leave the women alone." The man supported LeeAnne by the elbows.

"Butt out. It's none of your business," Jack snarled. He dragged Sarah toward the door as the man backed away letting LeeAnne fall into the gathering crowd.

Sarah leaned back, trying to dig her heels into the floor to slow him down. The three inch spikes snapped off her shoes and she lurched backwards. He yanked her back up nearly dislocating her arm from her body. She grabbed him to steady herself. His muscles rippled against his shirt sleeve. Fear rippled through her. "Help me. Someone help me." She tried to scream but it came out a nearly silent plea. Her lungs screamed for air. The mass of people parted like the Red Sea as he dragged her along.

LeeAnne caught up with them. "Someone call 911. He's going to kill her." Her shrieking voice drifted across the room and melted into the raucous voices and laughter that surrounded them.

Jack stopped suddenly and Sarah slammed into his back. Shaking herself, she looked around him to see Josh standing in front of him, three drinks in his hands. Was he her savior?

"Let her go. She doesn't want to leave with you." Josh's voice was even; his stance rigid.

"Get the hell out of my way. It's none of your damn business." Jack shoved Josh. The drinks flew over his head. Curses sounded from the side.

"Let the lady go." Josh rocked forward on the balls of his feet.

Jack pulled a knife. "Back away."

"He's got a knife," someone screamed.

"It's all right. Calm down." Josh held his hands in front of him, palms out. "Let the lady go."

Jack shoved Sarah in front of him, twisting her arm behind her. "Walk." He brandished the knife toward Josh.

"Help me," Sarah mouthed. She prayed someone would take the knife from Jack before he used it on her. She didn't want to die. Her entire body shook. Her legs would hardly hold her. This nightmare kept recurring, like an old late-night television movie. Lunatics didn't stalk people in real life. Did they?

Jack jerked her in front of him, keeping her between him and Josh. As he shoved her through the door she saw Jack's red pickup truck parked against the curb.

"'Bout time..." a male voice sounded next to Sarah. She turned her head to plead for help from the valet parking

attendant. His jaw dropped open. He stared at them with eyes wide. "Hey, mister. Let the lady go."

Jack turned and flashed the knife at the attendant. The man held his hands in front of him as if to ward off a blow. Sweat beaded on his sunburned forehead. "It's okay, man. Don't want to get involved in no domestic squabbles." The short man stepped backward.

Sarah tried to force air into her lungs. If she screamed, maybe someone would do something. She couldn't see Josh anymore. The mob had swallowed him up along with any hope of rescue. She was alone. She had to calm down. Her survival depended on getting out of this by herself.

Jack slammed her against the cab of the truck. The door handle cut into her back. The knife clattered against the roof. "Whore. What were you doing with that guy?"

"What guy?" She held her voice steady. *Think*, she told herself. *Think and look for a chance for escape.*

"Liar." His fingers tightened around her throat.

Black spots formed before her eyes. The air in her lungs burned as it tried to escape. She clawed at his hands. Kicking him, she forced the pointed toe of her high heel into the calf of his leg.

"Bitch. I'll teach you." His fingers tightened.

Her body sagged. Something knocked against her, then she crumpled to the ground. Air rushed from her lungs. "Sarah, run," a rough male voice commanded from behind her. Hands lifted her and pushed her toward the parking lot. Sirens shrieked in the night air. Her eyes cleared. LeeAnne sat in the driver's seat of her car, the engine running and the passenger door open. Sarah dove into the car. The door slammed closed as the car sped out of the driveway.

"You okay?" whispered LeeAnne.

"I think so." Sarah gasped for air. Her throat ached. Her body had gone numb.

"Thank goodness for Josh. If he hadn't hit Jack from the side and pushed you away, I don't know what would have happened." A sob punctuated LeeAnne's statement.

"My God, we can't leave him there to face Jack alone."

"He's safe. The cops arrived as we pulled out."

"LeeAnne, we have to go back and make sure he's okay." His soft green eyes and warm smile formed in her mind. She had to know that he was safe.

"He's fine. I'm not going back and put you in danger."

"But, LeeAnne...."

"No, but. I'm taking you home."

Three days ago Jack had tried to kill her the second time. The police officer had said if she'd press charges, they'd keep him locked up. She did. He made bail before dawn. She left town before his feet hit freedom.

LeeAnne had been right. She needed a vacation and Pete would just have to survive without her for a few weeks. Maybe by then, everything would have calmed down.

Sarah tugged her pink cotton nightie down as she stretched

out on the faded flowered bedspread covering the bed in the cheap motel. A dresser with a broken top drawer stood in the corner. It didn't matter. She would only be here a few hours. Long enough to rest and then move on. Tomorrow she'd find a better place, but at two in the morning and between cities, she'd been lucky to get any room.

For the moment she felt safe. Jack wouldn't know where to look for her. No one, not even LeeAnne would have expected her to head northeast from Los Angeles and end up in Wyoming. But, for a long time she'd wanted to see where her great-grandmother Rachel had lived. Great-grandmother with about three greats in there. And with the trouble at home, now seemed as logical a time as any. In a few weeks, Jack would have forgotten her, she hoped, and she could return to her normal life. In the meantime, she'd fulfill her fantasy of seeing the town where her great-grandmother had lived. A dream she'd had ever since she'd found her great-grandmother's diary six years ago, tucked in a trunk she'd found in her grandmother's attic. Sarah, fascinated by the life her great-grandmother described, wanted to trace her roots. The woman had been strong and independent for her time and Sarah admired her. After being widowed during the Civil War, she traveled from Boston to Wyoming as a mail-order bride. There she and Sarah's great-grandfather raised five children in the wilderness. Sarah wanted to be courageous like her great-grandmother. Maybe she would find some of that courage to take home with her so the coldness that permeated her would leave.

Tomorrow, Sarah would drive the last hundred miles to the town where her great-grandmother had lived. Maybe the church Rachel had been married in would still be standing. In three days it would be her grandparents' one hundred and twentieth wedding anniversary. She would stop and pick some wildflowers to put on the alter in their memory, if the alter still existed.

Lights flashed across the curtains of Sarah's room. She leapt to her feet and peeped out the window. A sigh rattled through her. A sub compact, not a red pick-up truck.

She snuggled back on the bed pulling the worn brown blanket over her and leafed through her great-grandmother's diary.

September 22, 1870

It has been a glorious day. After everything that happened, I am finally married. Henry is checking the store and will be upstairs directly. My stomach is all a flutter. I should be changing to the linen nightdress I had made for tonight, but I want to capture my thoughts before they fly away.

The church smelled as wonderful as a flower garden with bunches of mountain dandelions and columbine. Catherine would have loved the event. The sadness I feel at her death during the stage coach hold-up left a shadow over what should have been a perfect day. Henry says it is not my fault, but if I had not convinced her to go west with me to marry Joshua Campbell, she would still be alive. I guess I should count my blessings.

If Henry and Mr. Campbell hadn't ridden up with Mrs. Westall, I might have suffered the same fate. I wished to postpone the wedding, but Henry insisted since the minister will not return to Moose Creek for two months and I have no where to live except with him.

I transgress. The whole town turned out for the marriage. After all, a mail-order bride and a stage hold-up were more excitement than Moose Creek has ever seen. Mrs. Westall says the last happening to cause such a stir was when the stained glass window was brought in for the church.

I must admit it is the only bit of civilization in this desolate area, but I will not complain. I chose to come west.

The window is astonishing. It brightens up the church. The figure of Christ seems to reach out his hands to me, beckoning me. Just for a moment, I thought I saw him move. Just the fancifulness of a person who has undergone so much excitement in such a short time. I hear Henry's boots upon the stairs.

Sarah looked up at the single glaring light hanging from the ceiling. Would the church and the wonderful stained glass window still be in Moose Creek? More to the point, what was left of Moose Creek? She flipped to another page further on.

November 19, 1871

Such a harsh land. It takes so much. My heart is breaking. Today the graveyard claimed a new inhabitant. Mrs. Westall succumbed to the flux. I shall sorely miss her for she has been a good friend and confidant.

Good news comes with bad. We are to have another babe. I fear to carry this one with the same results as the last. The poor little boy came too early with the ardors of winter still upon us. This babe is not due until after the spring thaw. I hope he will be stronger. Tomorrow I go again to pray at the church. Maybe the Christ in the window will answer my prayers and give us a strong healthy child.

March 30, 1872

Henry found Joshua's horse wandering loose in town today after the terrible snow storm. It is strange the animal would be alone. With no sign of Joshua, we are very worried. Henry, Cookie, and several other men will go looking for him tomorrow.

April 3, 1872

It has been four days and we still cannot find Joshua. We fear the worst. Our friend may be lost in the snow. We may never know.

Sarah closed the diary and clutched it too her heart.

Joshua had never been found. Others in the Martin family had also suffered. At least she didn't have to worry about freezing to death or having babies without the aid of a hospital.

Sarah climbed out of her blue Camaro in front of the old church in Moose Creek, a town that consisted of a general store, a restaurant, and four houses. After slinging her blue canvas tote bag across her shoulder, she adjusted the red and blue flowered silk scarf she'd tied around her neck to cover Jack's finger marks. The flowers didn't match the ones on her baggy white shorts, but the colors came close.

She picked up her bouquet of flowers and started across the asphalt parking lot toward the small wood framed building. The sun peeked over the horizon giving a soft hue to surroundings. A riot of pinks covered the walls to each side of the wide wooden steps as wild roses climbed trellises reaching for the eaves. Staring up the steps, a small wooden whitewashed door greeted her. A shiny brass door knob beckoned to her. She wondered if it looked any different than it had in her grandmother's day. She imagined her grandmother climbing those stairs, walking to the waiting arms of her grandfather.

Trancelike, she retraced the steps she knew Grandmother Rachel had taken imagining her grandfather waiting on the other side of the door. Sarah's stomach fluttered in anticipation. Her hand reached out slowly for the doorknob. Letting the door swing backwards, she stepped across the threshold.

A floor to ceiling wooden partition blocked her view of the church. She ran her hand down the edge of the wood. It probably kept the wind and snow from pouring down the center aisle during the winter. The paint showed faint signs of finger prints left by the congregation and continuously scrubbed clean.

She slowly stepped around the wall, holding her breath. The clacking of her sandals against the highly polished hardwood floor silenced as her feet stepped onto a rust colored carpet. Minimal signs of wear showed on the runner up the center of the tiny church. She touched the edge of one of the pews. The wood felt like satin as she let her hand drift across it from one pew to the next.

She sighed deeply. Her great-grandmother's church. The place where she'd married. Her grandmother's church, but not the same. Modern and polished. She could no longer imagine her grandmother standing in this building.

Her gaze floated up to the small stained glass window behind the altar. The bright morning sun shone through it. It was glorious, just as her great-grandmother had described it in her diary. That had not changed. Jesus still ascended to heaven with his arms outstretched. No wonder her great-grandmother had been so fascinated with the window. It gave Sarah a sense of awe as she stared at it.

She drifted slowly toward the altar. A simple wooden podium stood to the left with a white linen drape down the front. The altar itself wasn't more than four feet long and had been hewn from a tree. Years of polish made it shine where the embroidered linen drape, which hung over the edges, didn't cover it. The sun

glinted off a simple brass cross standing in the center of the altar.

Sarah let her eyes follow the shaft of sunlight back up from the cross to the figure of Jesus. The sun streamed in around his head giving him a natural halo. He appeared to look down at her and beckon to her with outstretched arms. She took a step forward. The light blinded her. Her head spun. She seemed to float off the floor. Swaying, she grabbed a pew to support herself. Rough wood greeted her hand. She looked down and stood on unpolished wood. She shook her head. Her desire to see the church Grandmother Rachel had been married in and the sunlight in her eyes must be distorting her senses.

"My gracious child, what happened to you?"

Sarah spun to answer the woman, her hands going to cover the bruises on her arms. Behind her stood a well endowed woman wearing a brown dress which hung to the floor. A tiny edging of lace showed at her neck. The long sleeves had tiny petal-like decorations at the cuffs. Sarah stopped, her mouth open. She blinked furiously. If she cleared her sight, everything would return to normal. She glanced back at the altar. The linen cloth had disappeared. A rough wooden cross stood where the brass one had been moments before. The world started to swirl. She tightened her grip on the edge of the pew, the wood digging into her palm.

She forced her eyes to focus on the woman standing in front of her. A large white apron was tied around her middle. The woman's hair was tucked up under a yellow calico bonnet which didn't match the dress. The town must be holding some type of pageant today. The woman had to be sweltering in that outfit. Sarah watched as the woman tucked errant strands of gray hair back under the bonnet.

"Charlie." The woman's voice became a loud shrill call. "Charlie. Run tell Mr. Martin and Mr. Campbell something's amiss. One of the brides is here and hurt. Don't you be peeking in here. And run home and get me my cape. You hurry yourself up now." The woman moved closer to Sarah, clucking under her breath. "Poor child. You been through a terrible ordeal by the looks of it. We'll take you right over to my parlor just as soon as I get something to cover you with. How ever did you come to be in the church?"

Sarah shook her head. If she took a deep breath and shut her eyes, when she opened them, the woman would be gone and the carpet would be back. She held her breath and leaned against the edge of the pew. She waited for the satiny feel of the wood to return to her fingers. Then everything would be fine.

The slamming of the door sounded and the stomping of boots. She wouldn't look. If she didn't look, it would go away. All of it.

"Joshua Campbell, take yourself right out of here. The poor child's half scared to death and ready to swoon. I don't know which one of the ladies she is, but she's not dressed proper to be greeting either of you fine gentlemen."

The woman's voice swirled around Sarah. Fainting seemed a logical solution. Maybe she had fainted. Or Jack had caused her

brain damage when he'd cut off her oxygen with his hands at her throat. Or, she'd just plain had a nervous breakdown. Slowly, she peeked out of one half-opened eye.

Peering around the partition in the back stood a large man. He clutched his hat to the edge of the wall, staring at her. Red tousled hair stood on end. Fury steamed from sparkling green eyes as his gaze rested on her bruised arms.

## Chapter 2

The woman in brown planted herself squarely in front of Sarah. "Mr. Campbell, I will ask you to kindly remove yourself until the child has a chance to put on more than underclothes." She whispered to Sarah, "Are these the new fashion in underthings from back East. Most unusual and don't seem right practical."

Sarah blinked at her.

"I'll kill the bastard that did this to my bride." His knuckles protruded as white bumps that matched the paint on the edge of the partition.

"Bride?!" Sarah gasped. She looked back at the stained glass window. Jesus had turned his eyes toward heaven. She plunked down heavily on one of the pews. No padded cushion to soften her descent. A dream. That was all there was to it. She could think of no other explanation as to why Mr. Campbell so much resembled the man who'd saved her at the club the other night. She'd fallen asleep reading her great-grandmother's diary. Any moment she'd wake up in the dreary hotel room and start her trek to find Moose Creek.

"Mr. Campbell, really. Such language. And you don't rightly know who's bride she is. Calm yourself. I'm taking her to my house for a spot of tea and a change of clothes. Then you may talk with her." The woman's voice turned to a soft coo.

"We must talk with her now, Mrs. Westall. We have to find the other woman." Joshua's voice boomed through the church as he glared at Sarah. "Why aren't you waiting at the stage stop?"

Of course, thought Sarah. This woman could be no one but Mrs. Westall, her grandmother's best friend in Moose Creek. No dream would be complete without her.

"What's wrong? What are the ladies doing here?" A deep male voice sounded behind Joshua.

Joshua swung his arm and hat sideways to stop the voice. "There's just one inside, Henry, and I don't know for certain which one. I don't even know what's happened."

"Mr. Martin, you stay outside." Mrs. Westall's voice rose sharply.

"Why?" An arm clad in a green shirt pushed against the bare arm of Joshua.

"Cause the child's not dressed proper." Mrs. Westall's reply came sharply.

"Then Joshua best be hoping he's staring at his bride and not mine."

A deep red flushed Joshua's face so his skin matched his hair. "I was staring at the bruises on her arms."

His eyes locked with Sarah's as she peeked around Mrs. Westall. She could sense the anger emanating from him, tinged with concern. What she didn't know was why. Or for that matter, where or when. She shook her head. She wanted to wake up now.

"Bruises?" Henry pushed past Joshua.

"You can't see a thing. Mrs. Westall's hiding her." Joshua crammed his hat back on his head. "Let's git so she can tend to her. Then maybe she can tell us where the other bride is."

Sarah gasped. Henry Martin. Her great-grandfather. No

doubt about that. He had the same black hair she did and the same soft gray eyes. Her father had always told her she took after the Martins. But if this was her great-grandfather, where was her great-grandmother? Brides? The diary told nothing about them disappearing. She gasped. "The stage hold-up. Where's Rachel?" She tried to stand, but her legs wobbled. She felt as if someone had punched her in the stomach. Henry and Joshua weren't supposed to be standing in the church. They should be riding out to meet the stage with Mrs. Westall. They should be rescuing Rachel.

"Oh, my God, a hold-up." Henry's face blanched as he slumped slightly. "It appears your bride is safe, Joshua." He gripped Joshua's arm as he wobbled.

Joshua clasped the smaller man's shoulder. "We'll find yours. We'll get the men to search around the town while Mrs. Westall takes care of Miss Hodges. Mrs. Stedman can't be far away. If mine is alive, yours must be."

Miss Hodges. Catherine. Great-grandmother's best friend. For the moment it would do. Until they found the real Catherine was dead. But was she? Could more have changed than the men not rescuing Rachel? Had she saved Catherine and killed Rachel?

They had to find Rachel. Her head started to spin. What would happen to her if Rachel wasn't found? She pushed past Mrs. Westall. "Wait. You have to find gr...Rachel. Henry, Joshua, please."

Sarah shrugged off the heavy wool cape Mrs. Westall had wrapped her in for the trip across the town of half a dozen buildings. She laid the brown cape across the sturdy four poster bed and moved to the windows, parting the lace curtains to stare out of the many paned window. Leaning her head against the cool glass, she sighed. She could see nothing but trees and bushes. She turned as the door behind her opened.

"Here, dear. Some hot water to wash up." Mrs. Westall moved across the small room to set a white ceramic pitcher with tiny pink flowers on it next to a matching basin. She laid a clean white towel down. "The men dragged your trunks in for you. They found the coach and horses a couple of miles from town. The driver was dead, but no sign of Mrs. Stedman could be found. I'm so sorry. I'll leave you to get changed, unless you'd like to take a rest. Dinner won't be served until noon, but I could fix you a little something if you're hungry."

"No, thank you. I'm fine." Sarah turned her attention to the two large trunks which took up most of the room between the bed and one wall. "I'll just take a nap, if you don't mind."

"Of course not, dear. Those gentlemen should have waited 'til you'd had time to wash off the dust from the road and change into proper clothing before they insisted on questioning you." Mrs. Westall patted her on the shoulder. "Your lovely hair. Under a proper bonnet it won't be so noticeable. It'll grow back soon enough." Mrs. Westall turned to leave the room, tsking under her breath.

Sarah laughed softly. This definitely had to be a dream. No other explanation made sense. But everything seemed so real.

It couldn't be 1870. It had to be the stress of the last few weeks and her fascination with her great-grandmother's diary. It was the only possible explanation.

Washing her face would make her feel better. She looked in the small hand mirror that lay on the dresser to find her hair standing on end. Reaching for her tote bag, she pulled out a hair brush and some cleansing cream. Dipping the brush in the water, she combed it through her tightly permed curls and patted them back into place. After washing her face, she turned her attention to the trunks.

She dragged one away from the bed with some effort. "Damn these things are heavy," she muttered. Clothes couldn't weigh that much? She flipped up the top to find the most beautiful dress she had ever seen. She ran her fingers lightly across the cream colored silk. Not very practical for this part of the country. Laying the dress carefully on the bed, she found dresses made of wool and other fabrics she couldn't identify. Sarah smiled to herself. This was more fun than rummaging through her great-grandmother's trunk when she'd found it a few months ago. These clothes were new and smelled slightly of some kind of flower.

At the bottom of the trunk she found two frying pans and a large pot. Cast iron. *No wonder the trunk weighed so much.* Inside the pot, on top of several towels, lay a brown leather bound book. Sarah picked it up. Staring at the cover she recognized it. Her great-grandmother's diary. She clutched it to her chest. This trunk belonged to Rachel, not Catherine. Tears welled in her eyes. Her heart raced. This might not be a dream. She must have really stepped back in time somehow and changed history. Somewhere out there her great-grandmother was lost. She had to be found.

She had to go after the men. In a dream, it didn't matter on way or another. She could enjoy the adventure. But, if this was reality, she had to rescue Grandmother Rachel or her own life would be in jeopardy.

Going back to her tote bag, she yanked out a pair of blue jeans and slipped into them. She wished she had a warmer blouse to wear. Turning to the dresser, Sarah pulled open several drawers, rummaging through the contents. Nightgowns and under garments. In the bottom drawer she found a man's shirt. Pulling it on over her tank top, she looked around for something to wear on her feet. None of the shoes in the trunk were going to work and her sandals and running shoes seemed a little out of place.

She glanced at the one remaining piece of furniture in the room, a tall wooden piece with intricate carvings down the front. Flinging open the doors, she found a pair of boots on the bottom. A little too big for her, she found some socks in the dresser to stuff in the toes. She went to the second trunk to see if she could find a coat of some type, not wanting to take Mrs. Westall's cape. Near the bottom lay a blue wool cape. Draping it over her shoulders, it fell below her knees. It would do. She hoped no one minded her borrowing the clothes. And she'd have to borrow a horse also. *Was that a hanging offense?* She shrugged her shoulders. If she didn't find Grandmother Rachel,

it wouldn't matter anyway. She wouldn't exist to be hanged.

She scribbled a note for Mrs. Westall on a piece of paper she found in her purse. Hopefully she wouldn't notice it was a cash register receipt from the grocery store, but she couldn't allow the poor woman to worry. Fastening her watch on her wrist, she shoved her belongings back in her tote bag and crawled out the window.

Sarah gripped the horse's mane as the saddle slipped slightly to the left. Horses tied up in front of the store should have a properly attached saddle. Riding this beast was difficult enough without doing it from an angle.

She knew the men had headed east in search of the spot where the stage coach robbery had occurred. And the town only had one street, so she had to be traveling in the right direction. They couldn't be too far ahead of her. They would have to travel slowly to track the outlaws. On TV someone always dismounted often to study the tracks on the ground.

She glanced at her watch. It wasn't quite noon. At least she had hours of daylight before she found herself lost in the woods. She glanced to the side of the road at the brush which threatened to retake it. She definitely didn't want to spend the night alone out here. Something rustled in the bushes next to her. All kinds of wild animals lived out here. She glanced quickly to the right and urged the horse on a little faster.

After what seemed forever, she finally heard voices ahead of her, just beyond where the road bent. Hopefully, Joshua and Henry waited around the curve. The saddle shifted again. She groaned and tried to right herself, accidentally kicking the horse in the ribs. He bolted forward. "Whoa, Nellie," she yelled. They thundered around the curve, the saddle sliding to the side. Sarah clutched the horse's mane. Hitting the ground at this speed would have to hurt immensely. She wondered if she could push herself off without landing under the horse's hooves.

Strong hands grabbed her as she and the saddle slipped to the horse's side and she started to fall. She grasped at muscular shoulders. "Thank you," she gasped and looked up into deep green eyes. A red mustache hung only inches from her face. "Joshua. Thank goodness."

He held her tightly, staring down into her face. After several seconds, he finally spoke in a deep warm voice. "Miss Hodges, what are you doing?"

"Falling off that stupid beast, but you saved me just in time. I'm grateful, but you can put me down now." She smiled sheepishly up at him. His eyes resembled a green meadow in the mid afternoon with the sun shining on it. For a moment, she wished she were Catherine.

"What are you doing out here?" His voice became gruff as he continued holding her crushed against his chest with strong arms.

He smelled of the woods. Warmth seeped through her making her giddy. "Following you."

"Why?"

"To find my gr...best friend. Rachel has to be found. I couldn't just sit around and wait." She tried to push herself

away from his chest. He had to understand how imperative finding Rachel was.

Henry's voice came from behind her. "She belongs in town. She will only get in our way. Besides, isn't that Jake's horse she's riding?"

"One of us will have to take her back." Joshua shifted her slightly in his arms. She smelled wonderful. He had never encountered such a fragrance before, but he liked it. It smelled nothing like the lavender which most women wore. And she was such a delicate woman. She fit in his arms as a child would.

"You take her back. She's your bride." Henry turned and walked to retrieve Jake's stallion from where he stood a few feet farther on munching grass.

"I won't go back. Not until Rachel's found." She struggled in Joshua's arms.

"Miss Hodges, you have no alternative but to go back. It isn't safe out here." Joshua looked down at the upturned nose and had an overwhelming urge to kiss it. He looked away at Henry. Later, after they were married, he could find out if she tasted as good as she smelled.

"Put me down. I can't argue like this." Sarah kicked her feet. "I won't be treated like a child. I might be able to help."

Joshua set Miss Hodges on her feet and watched her brush her shirt down so that it covered her bottom. Levi's, the like of which he'd never seen before, molded her legs to the top of her oversized boots. Tight curly hair framed her face. She made a most unusual sight. Laughter threatened to escape him. No wonder she was a spinster lady of six and twenty years. No man would have her. She seemed to have no ladylike inclinations nor any delicacies about being seen undressed or in trousers. But, then, in the wilderness, such attitudes might be better. "And how do you intend to help, Miss Hodges? You can't seem to remember anything that's happened." He rubbed the side of his face.

She bent her head back to stare up at him. "For one thing, when you find my gr...Rachel, the two of you will scare her to death. She's already been kidnapped and will think you're doing the same."

"Miss Hodges can't be out at night alone with two men. Think of her reputation," Henry said. "Besides, Jake's gonna want his horse."

"We have more important things to think about. We should be looking for Rachel and Jake'll live without the beast until we get finished with our business." Sarah glared at them. Men. So often they were useless in an emergency. And this could turn into a dire emergency if they didn't find Rachel and get her married to Henry.

Joshua laughed. "We're damned no matter what we do and I don't think you need to worry overly about her reputation or Jake. I plan on marrying Miss Hodges as soon as the itinerant preacher comes to town in two days. And I'll make it up to Jake. If we split up and I take her back to town, you may have more than you can handle when you catch up with the bandits. We can't

waste anymore time by both of us going back. I could try to catch up with you, but it'll be hours."

"Oh, hell." Sarah looked up into Joshua's eyes. "We are all going because I'll be a nervous wreck until I know Rachel's okay. Now, you fix that damned saddle on that stupid beast, so we can get started." She tapped her foot while she watched Joshua straighten the saddle, tighten the cinch, and shorten the stirrups, then she moved to mount the horse again, taking a deep breath. She definitely didn't want them to figure out she'd never ridden a horse before today. It looked easy, in the movies, and this one seemed to go where she pointed it. So far. "I'll only follow you again if you try to take be back, so you damn well better mount up." She gritted her teeth as she held onto the saddle horn.

Joshua shook his head. "What have you gotten me into, Henry Martin?"

"And what does that crack mean?" asked Sarah.

"He came up with the idea to get mail-order brides." Joshua threw his head back and laughed loudly as he lifted himself on top of his large gray stallion.

Henry muttered, "Mail-order brides--don't know what you'll get. I just pray Mrs. Stedman isn't cut from the same cloth as Miss Hodges. I may have done both of us a disservice."

Sarah glared at the two men.

Sarah's stomach growled. She'd had a late breakfast this morning, about a hundred and twenty years from now, and hours ago. The men seemed in no hurry to stop and eat. She sneaked a peek at her watch. Nearly nine. Didn't the sun ever set in this country. Her legs ached from trying to stay in the saddle and her rear had probably been flattened forever from bouncing on the saddle. Never would she admit defeat, however. Besides, neither man would take her back after all the miles they'd gone. She'd never figured those damned robbers could have gotten so far so fast dragging two women along.

"I don't think we'll be able to go much farther tonight." Joshua looked back at Sarah.

*Thank goodness.* She shifted for the millionth time on the horse trying to ease the pain in her backside. "Please don't stop on my account." She tried to smile at him.

"Don't worry, we're not. The horses need a rest and I could use some food." Joshua reined in his horse and swung his leg over the animal's rump as he lowered himself to the ground. "Henry, you get the fire started. I'll get some water." He reached up and lifted Sarah down.

She leaned against him for a moment while her legs decided they would hold her after all. Heat seared from his chest into her body. Where his hands touched her waist, a charge of electricity shot through her. She pulled away from him.

Following the men had been a really stupid idea. She wanted a shower and a bed. She wanted to wake up from this dream so she could find a cafe where she could get a bagel and cream cheese for breakfast. She wanted to be home even if Jack still stalked her. The great outdoors looked much better on the television

than up close and personal.

She heaved a big sigh. But, if this turned out not to be a dream and they didn't find Rachel soon, nothing would matter. No great-grandmother, no Martin family, no Sarah. A shiver ran up her spine.

"Cold?" Joshua held her by the shoulders.

"A little." His hands were warm even through her shirt.

He pulled her cape from her horse and wrapped it around her. "At least you have *some* of your own clothing on. We'll get a fire started and you'll feel better."

"What do you mean? I only borrowed the shirt." And technically the cape and the shoes, but she didn't think she'd better mention that. She wasn't even sure whose cape she'd borrowed.

He looked down her legs. "Those pants don't belong to some young boy?"

"No."

"I've never seen anything quite like 'em."

"Stop jawing and get the water. I want coffee." Henry's voice interrupted their discussion.

Sarah pulled the cape around her and went to sit on a rock next to the fire. "What's for dinner?"

"Got some venison. Got some flour. Want to make some biscuits?" Henry fed the fire with twigs.

"Here's your water." Joshua set the coffee pot next to the fire. "You cooking, Henry?"

"Thought Miss Hodges might." Henry grinned.

"I don't do barbecue."

"Huh?" Joshua sat down next to her, holding his hands toward the flames.

"I've never cooked over an open fire. I'm sure I'd make charcoal." A fire under the stars would be romantic, if she had a hotel room to go back to. She looked up at Joshua. A perfect evening would be sitting and roasting hot dogs and marshmallows then laying back in his arms and counting the stars. The heavens were filled with them. More than she'd ever seen in the skies over Los Angeles.

"What are you talking about?" Henry dropped coffee grounds into the pot and set it in the fire.

"Never mind." Sarah smiled. "One of you better cook if we're going to eat."

"Cooking is woman's work." Joshua poked at the fire with a stick.

"Says who?" Sarah glared at him.

He laughed softly. "Most people do."

"This woman doesn't cook over an open fire." She folded her arms across her breasts and stared at the two men defiantly.

"We can sit here all night and argue, or we can cook ourselves." Henry took out his knife and sharpened a stick.

"I'll go make sure the stock is secure and get our bedrolls. You cook." Joshua pulled a blade of grass from next to him and stuck it between his teeth before he unfolded and strolled away. A woman who couldn't cook. He'd never met one before.

Something about Catherine fascinated him for some reason.

Maybe it was her odd manner of dress or her reckless streak. Obviously she'd been in the sun without her hat more than once. Her golden colored skin attested to that fact. But he liked it just as he liked the smell of her. He'd never been near a woman who smelled like she did. He wanted to fold her into his arms and bury his head in her hair, what there was of it. What had happened to make her cut her hair so short? Had the robbers cut it off? Had she had some strange ailment? He couldn't ask her, not yet, but the desire to know burned in him. Another desire grew beside that.

He kicked at the dust with his boot and strolled back to the camp fire.

Sarah bit into the piece of meat Henry offered her. "Thank you." She smiled at him. Venison, biscuits, and coffee. Not a very balanced meal, but hunger consumed her and she didn't care. Anything would taste good right now and, surprisingly enough, it tasted wonderful. She'd have to do with just half a cup of coffee though. The caffeine would keep her awake all night.

She watched while Joshua poured himself a cup and downed most of it. "Nothing like good strong coffee." He refilled his cup, then sat in front of her, leaning back against the side of the rock. His arm brushed against her leg. He took the meat offered by Henry. "Does it suit you, Miss Hodges?"

"Very much. Please stop calling me Miss." She took a sip of coffee, nearly choking. She'd never tasted anything so strong or bitter. Setting the cup down, she tried to shift so Joshua's arm didn't touch her, but to do so would mean falling off the rock. One tumble a day in front of him was sufficient, so she tried shifting her leg a little away. His arm still brushed her leg. A quiver ran through her.

"And what would you have us call you?" Joshua leaned forward to pour himself more coffee.

How he could drink the brew that resembled mud, she didn't understand. She'd kill for a soda. "Sa...Cathy."

"Cathy?" He looked up at her with his clear blue eyes.

"Cathy. Short for Catherine." She'd always wanted a nickname. Sarah didn't shorten into anything intelligible. So, for a short time, she'd borrow someone else's.

Henry threw a stick onto the fire. "Seems a bit informal, Miss Hodges."

"I like Cathy. Is that a problem, Henry?" Sarah asked.

Henry glared at her. "Miss Hodges and Mr. Martin would be more appropriate under the circumstances."

"What circumstances?" Sarah looked from Henry to Joshua.

"We've only just met," said Henry.

"Nonsense. I can't remember the last time I called someone by his surname."

Joshua choked, sputtering coffee into the fire. "You cooked up this idea, Henry. Remember that."

Henry stared at Sarah with wide gray eyes. "You're never going to let me forget."

"Not in the near future." Joshua stood up. "Did you think to bring a bedroll, Miss Cathy?" He moved to bank the fire.

"Well...no. But I can sleep wrapped up in my cape. It's

plenty warm."

"Lay here next to the fire." He pointed to a flat spot covered by grass. "I'll bed down near." He spread out his blanket. "One of us better stand guard in case the thieves backtrack. You want me to go first?" He turned to look at Henry.

"No. Get Miss Hodges settled in. I'll call you in a couple of hours." Henry disappeared into a clump of trees.

"Do you think the crooks will come back?" Sarah sat where Joshua had pointed, wide-eyed.

"Could be. Don't worry. Do you know how to use a rifle?" Joshua sat next to her.

"No." She shook her head.

"I'd better teach you if you're going to live in these parts. Lie down and wrap up in your cloak. It'll keep you warm."

Sarah pulled her head in as she lay down and curled up her legs so she would be completely covered. After a few minutes, she stretched her legs. All of her muscles were cramping from being on the horse, and the ground felt very hard.

Joshua stretched out his hand to her. "Get up."

She peeked out of the blue material at him. The fire glinted off his red hair making it appear to be aflame. "Why?"

"I'll put my other blanket down and then I'll put the cloak over you. You'll be more comfortable that way."

"But what'll you use. You'll freeze."

"Won't be the first time nor the last."

Sarah smiled at him. "I've put you out enough. I can't take your blanket."

"Woman need to be protected and taken care of. I can't have my future wife getting the grippe because she had to lay on cold ground."

She snatched her hand away from him. Taken care of indeed. "Excuse me, but I can manage just fine."

"I'm sure you can." His eyes laughed at her.

She curled back into her cape, her back turned toward him.

"Miss Cathy, you are being stubborn. Take the blanket."

"I'm fine." Stubborn! He hadn't begun to see stubborn.

"No, you're not. Besides I can't have you feeling poorly in the morning. We have a long way to go."

"Hmph."

"Miss Hodges, I insist."

"Don't worry. I won't slow you down." She glared up at him, but the cramps in her legs won the argument for him. She couldn't stay curled up and ever move again. "Okay. You win. But only it we share. I won't have you freeze."

After stretching her legs, she stood and watched him make up the bed.

"You can lay down now. Here's my extra shirt you can use as a pillow." He grinned at her.

"Thank you." She took the shirt. "I'm sorry for the inconvenience."

"I doubt that." He laid down next to her and spread her cape across her. Such a fragile one. He could pick her up and

snap her in half like a twig. How she'd managed to escape the stage robbers perplexed him. But then, she was a spunky little thing. They were probably glad to be quit of her.

An owl hooted nearby.

"What was that?" Sarah bolted upright.

"Just an owl out looking for his supper."

A shiver ran through her. "You sure?"

Joshua pulled her back down. "Positive. Go to sleep. We'll be off at first light and you need some rest." Her body trembled next to his. He rolled on his side and pulled her into his arms. "I won't let the wild animals get you."

She snuggled against his chest. One night wouldn't matter. He had promised to marry Catherine Hodges and tonight she'd be Miss Hodges, until they found the real one. If they found her. If she still lived. In Rachel's diary Catherine had died during the stage robbery, but now.... She'd changed things. How much was yet to be discovered.

Tomorrow they'd find Catherine and Rachel, dead or alive. Then she'd have some heavy duty explaining to do. All of this smacked of a strange dream. Joshua was a reincarnation of the man she'd met the other night. Being in the church had just set her imagination on a rampage. No other explanation could be feasible. "I'm being silly," she said aloud without realizing it.

"Very, but women are allowed."

Her body tensed against his and pulled away. "What?"

He tightened his grip on her. "Go to sleep."

"But," she sputtered.

"We'll argue in the morning. It'll give us something to do while we ride."

She remained stiff for a moment, then relaxed against him. "I'm not used to being outside at night."

Joshua hugged her tightly. Maybe Henry's idea of getting mail-order brides hadn't been such a bad idea after all. This one would make his life interesting. She rolled over so her back curled into his body. He draped his arm around her. Her head nestled beneath his chin. Her hair smelled fresh and felt soft against his neck. She fit perfectly against him. His Cathy. No. Cath. That name fit this unusual woman far better.

She was right. The cape was too short to cover his legs. But he wouldn't suffer from the cold. Not with her curled into him. The heat within him would keep out the cold. Sleep would not come tonight. Once she fell asleep, he'd relieve Henry. No sense in both of them staying awake all night.