

Kimberley
WOODHOUSE

SECRETS of the CANYON
—BOOK ONE—

A
DEEP
DIVIDE

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This is a work of historical reconstruction; the appearances of certain historical figures are therefore inevitable. All other characters, however, are products of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

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Soli Deo Gloria

Glory to God alone.
Without Him, I am nothing.

This book is lovingly dedicated to my big brother, Ray Hogan.

My childhood memories would be so dull without you. From tossing me around in your football equipment in Arkansas, to tackling me across the floor vents, to stomping through the icy ditches in Michigan, to trying to kill Fred the Snowman, to hiding under the bed to scare our older sister, Mary—you were always there in the midst of the mayhem. And then you grew into the most caring, self-sacrificing, loving, teddy-bear-of-a-big-brother a girl could ever want.

No matter how much time or space separates us,
I know you are there for me. You are the best. I love you.

Dear Reader

Wanted: Young women 18 to 30 years of age, of good moral character, attractive and intelligent . . .

This series started in my heart and mind over twelve years ago. Some stories are like that; they sit and simmer in an author's mind until the time is right. When Bethany House contracted it, I couldn't even begin to imagine the beauty they would bring to it. I'm so grateful for this amazing publisher and the wonderful opportunities they have given me. What a privilege to bring this series set at El Tovar to you now.

The first time I saw the Grand Canyon with my own eyes, I couldn't say anything other than "Wow." Everywhere I peered into its majesty, the view was magnificent. The more pictures I took, the more viewpoints I visited, the more that one-syllable word came to my mouth. And what blew my mind even more was the fact that visiting the South Rim of the Grand Canyon and driving the thirty-plus miles back and forth to take in all the vistas still meant we saw only a small percentage of the vast canyon that is actually more than 270 miles in length.

My dear friend and fellow author Becca Whitham went

back with me to the canyon to do research for this series last spring before I started writing this story. No matter how many trips I take, I'm always amazed and in awe. On this particular trip, I FaceTimed my parents at the different viewpoints since my dad had just had surgery and they had never seen the Grand Canyon themselves. One of my favorite memories is when Becca and I were at the Watchtower. My mom said, "Don't fall in!" It gave everyone around us a chuckle and reminded us that we never stop being parents, no matter how old our kids get.

I owe Becca a deep well of gratitude for all her help, wonderful questions, insight, and just plain ol' friendship. And now we're family. This past year, her son married my daughter. Talk about fun. We are having a blast with this. To keep up with all our escapades, check out TheAuthorMoms.com.

My research into the fascinating history of the Harvey Empire and the Harvey Girls was quite extensive. Even so, I did take a few artistic liberties when details weren't known. To find out more about the research and historical facts behind *A Deep Divide*, make sure you check out the Note from the Author at the end of this book and sign up for my blog/newsletter at kimberleywoodhouse.com.

I'm so excited to share this story with you.

Enjoy the Journey,
Kimberley
James 1:2-4

Prologue

1891

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

The sugary-sweet cherry flavor burst on Emma Grace McMurray's tongue and made her mouth water. Pulling the striped candy stick from her mouth, she sucked at it so she wouldn't dribble any of the yumminess down her chin.

"I take it you like it?" Mr. Cooper raised his eyebrows.

"Oh yes." She spun around in a circle. "I think cherry is my new favorite."

"We'll take a few extra for a treat later." He nodded at the man behind the counter and then looked back to her. "I have to say, Miss McMurray, that's quite a pretty dress you're wearing today. If I had to guess, I'd say pink is your favorite color." Mr. Cooper leaned up against the tall oak counter at the mercantile, his smile warm and his eyes twinkling, then he winked. The man always bought her a penny stick of candy whenever he saw her. Now that he worked for her father, she got to see him more often. And she liked that.

Not just because he continued to buy her candy but because he was nice.

Eight-year-old Emma Grace glanced down at the layers of gingham and swished the skirt back and forth. “Thank you. It *is* my favorite color.”

“Well, it’s perfect for you.” He tapped the end of her nose. “Did you pick out a present for your friend’s birthday party?”

She nodded, and a little thrill of excitement ran through her. Most of the time, Papa never allowed her to go to parties, but this was for her best friend in the whole world. And Papa liked Mary’s father, so he’d said yes.

“Ah, I see it. It’s on the counter. Looks like a very nice choice.” Mr. Cooper straightened and looked at the clerk. “Wrap this for a party. With ribbon.” He tapped his chin and put on a puzzled face as he looked at her. “Pink?”

“Oh yes.” She giggled.

“Please put this on the McMurray account as well.”

“Of course, sir.” The skinny man in the apron must be new because Emma Grace didn’t recognize him. His mustache had big loops in the ends of it. She’d never seen one like that. It was funny-looking, but she couldn’t say that out loud. That wouldn’t be very good manners. He wrapped the fancy china doll with a pink dress and matching bonnet in tissue paper and then gently placed it in a large box. Then he tied it with a wide pink ribbon before offering it back.

Mr. Cooper tucked the package under his arm and held out his hand to her. “Are you about ready to head to the party?”

“Yes, please.” She took his hand and swung their arms back and forth as they walked to the carriage. “Thank you for the candy.”

“You’re welcome. It’s not every day that I get the privilege of accompanying such a pretty young lady about town.”

His words made the laughter she’d been holding back

bubble up to the surface. “You’re silly, Mr. Cooper. It *is* every day that you drive me.”

“Really? Are you certain?” He scrunched up his forehead like he was thinking quite hard.

It made her giggle even more, and she covered her mouth.

He winked again. “You are correct, of course. But what fun that I get to do this every day.”

“May I sit up front with you again?”

“Most certainly.”

She climbed up into the open two-seat carriage.

“You’re a lot more fun than Nanny Louise.” She made a face. Nanny Louise never left the house. She’d never take Emma Grace to the park or to parties. Since Papa hired Mr. Cooper, he’d assigned the nice man to drive her around. He and Mother were so busy all the time.

She liked Mr. Cooper. He was fun. And he gave her candy. As she leaned back in the seat, she let out a long sigh that turned into a yawn. Last night she couldn’t sleep a wink since she was so excited for Mary’s party.

“What’s this? Are you tired already?” He climbed up and took the seat next to her, then took the reins.

“Just a little.” She couldn’t tell a grown-up why she didn’t sleep. He’d think it was silly.

He pulled a blanket out from under the leather seat. “Here, why don’t you lay your head down for the ride? That way you’ll be nice and refreshed when we get there.”

With a nod, she pulled her legs onto the seat and curled up. She wasn’t little anymore and didn’t need afternoon naps like Nanny Louise insisted upon, but she was oh-so-tired. Maybe if she just closed her eyes for a few minutes.

A smelly hand clamped over Emma Grace’s mouth and woke her up. What was happening? Her breaths came faster

and faster as a big scratchy arm picked her up off the carriage seat. *No!* She wriggled and kicked, screaming against the fleshy palm, but she couldn't force out a sound loud enough to do any good. The world tilted as she was tossed about until all she could see were the branches of an oak tree waving against the blue sky, a frayed rope hanging all alone from a branch. She didn't recognize the tree. Where was Mr. Cooper?

Kicking and squirming for all she was worth, she tried to move her mouth enough to be able to bite her attacker, but it was no use.

"Stop it." His chest rumbled. Tighter and tighter he squeezed. Fear clawed at her throat. She couldn't breathe!

The blue sky above dimmed as they came under the shade of another tree, and she gasped for air. What would happen if she couldn't get enough air? Would she die? The grip on her released a bit just as spots danced before her eyes. She felt her arms and legs go limp. *No!* She needed to fight. But the darkness was winning, and she couldn't move.

He put her over his shoulder. With every step he took, her head pounded. Lifting it, she forced her eyes to focus. Darkness remained at the edges of her vision as pain stabbed her eyes. She took a long breath. Anything to clear her head. Tried to squeak out something, but she couldn't. What was wrong?

The scent of horses and leather made her want to wiggle to see what was going on, but the pressure built in her head and made her dizzy. Her arms and legs felt like they weighed more than her father's prized stallion. Hanging upside down had never been something she liked. Not like their butler's son, who would drape his knees over the ladder in the barn and swing back and forth for what seemed like hours. For a moment she was transported home . . . in the barn. She

could see him. They were hanging upside down together. Swinging, laughing. Maybe she was dreaming.

Wake up. Wake up!

But then the man stopped for a second and as the motion stopped, her vision cleared.

It wasn't a bad dream. She wasn't in the barn. This was real. She took another large breath and put all her effort into screaming. "*Help!*"

He shifted her to the ground, and his hand tightened over her mouth. Hot breath hit her face. "Don't make another sound and don't fight me anymore."

The smell of tobacco assaulted her nose, and her stomach turned. It was bad enough she'd been hanging upside down over his shoulder and her head didn't like the sudden shifts. Now the smell. *Ew.*

"Did you hear me?" The voice was low and sounded full of grit. She couldn't get away from his breath.

She moved her chin up and down and tried to turn her head as far away from him as possible.

"Now, I'm not aiming to hurt you . . . *unless* you don't cooperate. In fact, I'm going to treat you like a princess. So, there's no need to panic. You'll be home with your family before you know it. Got it?"

Emma Grace nodded. But his breath kept washing over her.

"What's wrong?" The man narrowed his eyes and got closer, making it impossible to not breathe in the scent.

She shook her head and closed her eyes. Maybe if she didn't think about it. Or if she held her breath. If he would just move away. She didn't want to make him even madder. But her stomach turned.

When she was only four, she'd tripped over a spittoon in the railroad office and spilled it all over her shoes and

stockings. The smell had made her lose her lunch in the middle of the floor. She'd forgotten that rotten stench until now.

"Don't go gettin' sick on me. I said I wasn't gonna hurt ya."

But it was no use. As her stomach revolted and she started to heave, the man eased up his hold and moved his hand from her mouth . . . just in time.

After several moments of her losing her breakfast, the man patted her back. "You done?"

She slumped, hoping to get out of his grip, but his hands held fast to the bow and sash on the back of her dress. The one that *had* been her favorite.

Wiping her mouth on her crinoline, she straightened. He said he'd treat her well if she cooperated. Mother always told her God made her stubborn for a reason. Stubbornness could be negative, she'd said, but it could also be good. Like tenacious and determined. Emma Grace liked those words. Maybe she could be stubborn and get through this.

She refused to admit defeat. "I'm quite finished. Just keep your foul tobacco breath away from my face, and maybe I won't have to empty my stomach again, mister." She cringed. Another trait—she often spoke without thinking about the consequences.

A loud guffaw eased her worries. The man leaned back and slapped his knee. "You're quite the character. Your vocabulary isn't too shabby either for such a young'un."

She dared to look at him directly. He might smell bad, but he was dressed like a businessman. Like one of Papa's railroad partners. She tucked the little nuggets about his appearance into the back of her mind and looked away. Wouldn't do her any good to be caught staring at him. Not that he even seemed to be worried.

She glanced around. There wasn't a house, person, or

horse in sight. Where were they? Putting her hands on her hips, she frowned up at him.

“Like I said, I’m gonna treat you like a princess, but if you don’t behave yourself, you’re gonna have trouble.” His voice was gruff, but his face had softened.

Even though she knew she should be really scared, she kicked at him with her right foot.

He didn’t even flinch. “Now, Emma Grace. What did I just tell you?”

The way he said her name made her shiver. Wait. What did he just say? “How do you know my name?”

With one swift move, he tucked one arm under her knees, while the other hand went back around her mouth. “That’s enough talkin’ for now.” Lifting her up against his chest, as if she was sitting in a chair against him, he started to whistle and walked up the hill in front of them.

Where was he taking her? Who was he? And where did Mr. Cooper go? This man had grabbed her out of the carriage. Did he hurt Mr. Cooper?

The more her mind swirled through everything that had happened, the more questions she had. And the more scared she became. Closing her eyes, she counted to one hundred. Maybe it really was a bad dream and she just had to relax so she could wake up. Turning her mind back to the barn at home, she pictured Jimmy swinging like a circus artist from the ladder. She was dreaming. That was all. *Wake up. Wake. Up!*

But the smell of her own vomit made it all too real. When she opened her eyes, they were almost to the door of a little white house.

The man opened the door and set her down, grabbing onto the back of her dress again. “Now, don’t do anything stupid. There’s no one for miles. No one can hear you, and

there's nowhere to run." He pushed her forward and down a hallway. The door at the end was open. "In you go."

Taking slow steps, she made it to the doorway and looked around the room. A small bed with a pink coverlet. A little table with a tea set. A bookshelf lined with books, dolls, and toys. It wasn't a scary dungeon. But what was it?

He let go of her and blocked the door behind them. "I'll be right back with some food." He left the room, closed the door, and then there was a loud click.

As she looked down at her dress, she started to cry. It was covered in the remnants of her breakfast. And the stench of that awful man. The dress that once made her smile made her sick to her stomach. She hated it. She hated pink. She hated this room. This place. That awful man. And tobacco. She hated that too. She stomped her feet and marched around the room, her sorrow turning into anger. Why would he kidnap a little girl?

She walked over to the door and tried the knob, but it held fast. Locked tight. She went to the window and tried to open it, but it wouldn't budge. Maybe she could break the glass! But as her gaze focused beyond the panes, she saw barbed wire crisscrossing its way across the frame. There was no way she could fit through without hurting herself.

She turned back to the door and stared at it. It was the only way of escape. But how could she do it? Footsteps sounded in the hallway. Then the door opened with a squeak of hinges and the man entered.

"There's no use tryin' to get out, Miss McMurray. But like I said, I will treat you well as long as you behave yourself." He set down the tray he'd been carrying. "Here's some food and a pitcher of water. You may wash yourself up over there. You'll notice a water closet is attached to this room. Help yourself to clean clothing, and there's plenty of books on

the shelves. I'm sure it won't be too long before you're back home again." He turned on his heel, shut the door, and then she heard the lock click again.

Emma Grace ran to the door and squinted so she could see through the keyhole. Nothing. Just a wall on the other side of the hallway.

"Let me out, mister! Let. Me. Out!" She pounded on the door with her hands and kicked it with her feet. "My papa is gonna be so mad at you! I hope he comes and shoots you!" She slumped down at the door. But then her stomach rumbled. That achy, raw, awful kind of rumble. The kind that could only be satisfied with food. But she didn't want to eat. She wanted to go home.

But how long would that take? Wouldn't Papa do anything to get her back from this bad man?

Mother's words kept coming back. "*I pity the man who ever crosses you, Emma Grace. That fierce independence of yours will either protect you or push everyone away.*"

But she didn't want to be independent right now. She wanted Mother. And Papa. Tears slipped down her cheeks. What was the man going to do with her? He said he wasn't going to hurt her, but he'd taken her and locked her up. Bad men did bad things. So how could she believe him?

Sobs shook her shoulders, and she hugged her knees to her chest. What was she supposed to do?

Sucking in her bottom lip, she tried to stop the tears and swiped at her face with the back of her hand. She wasn't in a horrible dungeon. She wasn't tied up. But no matter how clean and neat the room might be, no matter that there were plenty of toys and books, it was still a locked room. Her prison.

Standing up, she worked at the wrinkles in her dress and straightened her shoulders. Walking over to the small table where the tray of food sat, she then picked up a napkin and

a biscuit and positioned herself in a chair to eat. But the smell on her dress overwhelmed her. She'd have to change her clothes first. But she didn't like the idea of wearing clothes that weren't hers.

Glancing around the room, she fisted her hands at her sides. New determination filled her. She'd wear the clothes and sleep in the dumb bed. She'd read every book on those stupid shelves if she had to—anything to pass the time. She'd survive and find a way to escape if her family didn't rescue her. Then she'd come back with the sheriff and make sure that man could never hurt anyone ever again.

Emma Grace counted the scratches on the doorpost and then made another. Eighteen slashes. Eighteen days.

The first few days had been full of tears. But after that, she fell into an odd routine. The man that took her came to see her several times a day. Sometimes it was with her food. Sometimes with a new toy or book. Sometimes he even stayed and played checkers with her. He never put his hand over her mouth again or grabbed the back of her dress. In fact, he hadn't touched her. He really wasn't all that bad. He never yelled at her or hurt her. He even smiled once in a while when she beat him at checkers.

And every day, he brought some sort of a treat. Candy, cookies, cakes. She'd read every book on the shelf. *The Swiss Family Robinson*, *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, *Treasure Island*. Every day she wished that she could escape into one of the adventures. For real.

But then the man would come back. And she'd realize she was still locked up.

Flopping back onto the bed, she stared at the wooden planks in the ceiling. How much longer would she have to stay in this room?

Thumps sounded outside the door. A lot of thumps. More than usual. It was more than just one man's footsteps . . . wasn't it? It made her heart jump in her chest.

She held her breath. Was she imagining things? Or was today the day she could go home?

She sat up straight on the bed and then jumped off. Closing her eyes, she listened as the thumps got closer. How many other times had she gotten her hopes up? It was best to just think it was food coming.

The familiar sound of the key in the lock made her open her eyes, then the knob turned.

The door swung open, and Mr. Cooper stood there with a smile.

She ran to him and hugged him. "Mr. Cooper! You're here to take me home?"

"I sure am, Miss McMurray."

"Oh, thank you, thank you, thank you!" She clapped her hands together and then grabbed onto his hand.

But as they exited the room, the man who had kidnapped her stood in the hallway with his arms crossed. Why was he still here? Shouldn't he be in trouble? Where was the sheriff?

"I told ya it wouldn't be long before you went home. See?" The man smiled at her. In all this time, she never knew his name. Every time she'd ask, he'd leave. He leaned down and looked at her. "You know, I sure will miss seeing all those pretty pink dresses."

Looking down at her clothes, she frowned. Pink. Everything had been pink for the past eighteen days. And she was sick of it. Had he picked it all out?

Mr. Cooper tugged on her arm and led her down the hallway as he spoke over his shoulder to the man. "Thanks for your assistance."

Assistance? "But—"

Mr. Cooper squeezed her hand and put his other hand over her mouth. Just like the man who kidnapped her had done. “No questions, now. Let’s go find your father.” His smile didn’t seem as nice as it always had. He escorted her out of the small house.

Emma Grace wanted to kick Mr. Cooper. She put on her best scowl and pulled her hand out of his.

Then she looked ahead and saw her father standing by the carriage. The same carriage she’d been taken out of. As soon as he spotted her, he held out his arms. “Emma Grace!”

She ran toward him. She was finally going home!

Papa scooped her up and swung her around in a circle. “It’s so good to see you. Oh, how I missed you.” After several more twirls, he placed her up in the back seat of the carriage.

Relief poured through her, and her anger melted away. Then the tears started. She was safe with her father. No longer a captive and locked up in that little room.

Papa handed her his handkerchief. “I’m so sorry. I know this hasn’t been easy for you. You just let it all out. I’ll be right back.”

The tears turned into great big sobs. She’d been so scared. Never knowing if she would ever see her family again. She covered her face with the handkerchief and cried until there weren’t any tears left. It was hard being brave.

Wiping at her face, she had to blink several times to be able to see, and when she looked up, Papa was slapping her kidnapper on the back and smiling.

Wait . . . what was he doing? She looked between the men. Mr. Cooper and Papa were both smiling and talking to the man like they were old friends. Shouldn’t Papa be furious with the kidnapper? In the last eighteen days, she’d often imagined that he came to rescue her and had to fight the bad man.

She squeezed her eyes shut. Was she really seeing this?

Opening her eyes back up, she took a deep breath. She *was* really seeing this. It was real.

Her father shook hands with the bad man.

Then the man shook hands with Mr. Cooper too. And Mr. Cooper handed him a small bag.

The kidnapper went back inside the house. Like he hadn't just kidnapped her and held her in a room for almost three weeks.

Papa and Mr. Cooper walked toward the carriage. "It worked. . . . There's a sucker born every minute." Her father's words floated to her. But she couldn't hear the rest. Why was he whispering?

What worked? Why weren't they mad at that man?

Mr. Cooper climbed up into the front seat and so did her father. Neither one even looked at her. They just started talking business, like she wasn't even there. Something about a new spur for the railroad.

"Papa?" Her voice squeaked.

He turned back to her. "Yes?"

"Why were you shaking that man's hand? Why didn't the sheriff come arrest him? I was kidnapped." Her eyes throbbed from crying, which made her head pound, but she crossed her arms over her chest and ignored the pain.

"Oh, it was just business, sweetheart. Don't you worry about it." Papa reached back and patted her knee.

But she *would* worry about it. Nothing made sense so she pressed. "What worked?"

He turned back around with a long sigh, his eyebrows raised. "What do you mean?"

"I heard you say 'it worked.' So, what was *it*?" As much as she was glad to be out of that room and with her father, it upset her that they didn't do anything to the bad man.

In fact, she was madder than she'd ever been in her whole life.

"It's nothing for you to worry your pretty little head about, Emma Grace. It was just business, trust me." He smiled. The kind of smile she'd seen him give at the railroad office a hundred times. "Now, why don't you lie down? You must be exhausted, and we have a long drive home." Without waiting for another response, he turned back around and started talking to Mr. Cooper again.

"It was just business, trust me." The words ran over and over in her mind as she watched them. Back and forth they chatted.

The whole thing played through in her mind. Mr. Cooper putting his hand over her mouth and thanking the man. Papa shaking the man's hand. Then he and Mr. Cooper acting all happy that something worked. . . . It didn't make sense. She'd been *kidnapped*. Locked up. Why weren't they mad at the man?

"Trust me." As Papa's words repeated in her mind again, she looked down at her dress. He knew her favorite color was pink. He always brought her gifts that were pink. Always. And every dress in that room the last few weeks had been pink. Even the coverlet and pillows on the bed had been pink.

How did the man who took her know her name and her favorite color?

Well, it wasn't her favorite anymore. She hated it. She'd never wear pink again.

She laid down on the carriage seat and tucked her knees up close to her chest. Letting her anger grow in her belly, she watched the back of Papa's and Mr. Cooper's heads and gave them the meanest look she could. Neither one of them should have been nice to her captor.

Mr. Cooper turned around and dropped a small brown

bag in front of her. “This should make you feel better.” Striped candy sticks stuck out of the top.

No. It wouldn’t make her feel better.

She wouldn’t trust Papa. Or Mr. Cooper.

Wrapping her arms around her knees, she whispered to the backs of the men in front of her, “As soon as I’m old enough, I’ll get away. Forever.” She could have her own adventure like in the books she’d been reading. “*Forever.*”

“What was that, Emma Grace?” Papa peered over his shoulder at her.

“Nothing.” She practically spat the word.

“Mind your manners, young lady. And don’t interrupt us when we’re talking.”

As soon as he turned forward, she mimicked his words with her lips. But her little-girl heart was broken.

NINE YEARS LATER

1900

BOSTON

Emma Grace slid the sheer lace curtain an inch to the right to take a closer look at the happenings below her second-story window.

Just as she expected, her father stood in the circular drive, talking to yet another one of his business friends. With a sweep of his arm—a gesture all too familiar to her—her father invited the man inside. And if Emma Grace knew her father at all, the guest had also been invited to dinner.

Her father was up to his matchmaking yet again.

Before she could arrange the curtain back, her father’s guest looked up and caught her eye. He nodded with a smile that showcased his crooked teeth.

Well! Never let it be said she let a man know when he’d

surprised her. Emma Grace opened the curtain fully and tied it back with the satin sash. She graced him with her own nod and a raise of her eyebrows, but she refused him a smile. She knew why he was there. And she didn't like it a bit.

If only her mother were still alive . . .

With a sigh, Emma Grace turned from the window, sat at the vanity, and stared at her reflection. Only a quarter of an hour before she was expected to dinner. Maybe she could pretend to be sick? A headache?

No, Papa—Father as he liked to be called now—would know. Emma Grace had the constitution of the strongest stallion.

She might as well face the dreaded meal with her best foot forward. Father would be more inclined to hear her out if she were a gracious hostess at dinner. She'd give him one last chance. Not that he would change.

She fully expected to put her plan into play. At seventeen years of age, she was ready. She'd planned for this since she was a little girl. Only a few more months until she could leave.

Sliding her fingers over the top of the intricately carved box that had been her grandmother's, Emma Grace thought of the contents locked inside. Underneath a few family trinkets, jewels, and treasured daguerreotypes of her grandparents lay the family birth record she would change and letters she'd prepared. Everything she needed to start over.

With one last check in the mirror, she tucked a strand of hair behind her ear and pasted on what she hoped was a sweet smile.

Two hours later, the man left. A Mr. Brogan. A man she hoped to never see again. Dinner was over, and she was tired of waiting to speak to her father alone. But after seeing the man out, Father walked to his office without a word.

Marching after him, Emma Grace rehearsed what she wanted to say as she stood in the doorway. “I need to speak with you.”

“I’m expecting another visitor, Emma Grace. This isn’t a good time.” He didn’t even look up from his desk.

“You need to make time, Father. I’m tired of your match-making.”

This time, he looked up over the rim of the reading spectacles perched on his nose. “It doesn’t concern me if you’re tired of it. You’re getting married, daughter. That’s the end of it.”

She rushed forward. “Oh really? To whom? That Hawkins man from New York you swooned over last week? Or is it that slimy man from St. Louis? Oh wait. I forgot Mr. Sweeney from Detroit.” Her temper continued to build.

Father removed his spectacles and threw them down onto the desk. “You impertinent girl. I won’t allow you to speak to me in this manner. What has gotten into you?”

For years, she’d wanted to lash out at him—to let him know that she knew exactly what he’d done. She bit her tongue, but the words spilled out anyway. “No need to keep the charade going any longer. I know you were behind my kidnapping when I was a child. Now you’re arranging *my* life without any thought to my wishes, but I’m sure it will greatly benefit *you*.”

His eyes widened for a moment. Then they narrowed and he looked back down at the papers spread out before him. “So you know.” He shrugged. “You weren’t hurt in any way. You were treated well. It was simply business. That spur was worth a great deal of money.”

The words took all the bluster out of her. Her breath caught in her throat, and the room began to spin. No apology. No feelings whatsoever. Just. Business.

Emma Grace moved to a chair and sat. Closing her eyes, she forced herself to breathe naturally. She couldn't let him know how his words affected her. If that's how things were going to be, then fine. Steeling herself, she fisted her hands. She had a plan. It would work. And maybe one day she'd be able to forget all of this.

Father looked up at her. "This is also business. But it's for your own good. For your future."

"I'm not going to marry a man because you order me to."

"Oh yes, you are." He leaned over his desk, his palms flat, his eyes narrow. "I can do whatever I want. And if that means banishing you to a tiny hovel, locking you up, taking away your clothes, jewels, money, and making you destitute, then I most certainly will."

Was he serious? Who would even think of doing that to their own daughter? Not that she even cared about any of those things anymore.

He picked up a pile of papers. "You know what these are?"

She shook her head.

"Contracts. Legal and binding to whomever marries you." He rattled the papers as he walked around his desk. A slight smile lifted his lips. "These men paid handsomely to have the chance for your hand . . . and to eventually inherit my empire."

If she hadn't already been sitting, she would have plummeted to the floor. So that's what it was all about.

Once again.

Money.

The railroad.

His empire.

Not his cherished little girl.

She held his gaze, determined to not let him see her true feelings. "I see." Every bit of anger she'd been ready to heap

upon his head had been destroyed. Just like her heart. There were no more words. No chances for him to change. This was her fate.

Unless she followed through with leaving. Did she have a choice?

Not anymore.

Her stomach dropped. Her eighteenth birthday seemed too far away. The plan wouldn't work until then. What could she do?

"Mr. Wellington is first in line. He will be here in thirty minutes, so you need to excuse yourself before then. We can talk again in the morning. I don't care which one of them you marry, because I will benefit no matter what. But rest assured, you will be married before your eighteenth birthday."

She didn't cover her gasp.

Which only made him smirk. Obviously his intention had been fulfilled. To put her in her place. To show his power. To leave her no way out. He went back to his chair behind the desk and sat. "Good night, Emma Grace."

Dismissed. Just like that.

She stared at him for several seconds, swallowed the bile threatening to clog her throat, and then stood up. "Good night." Turning toward the door, she determined this would be her last time to ever be in this room. No matter what she had to do. Papa had always been a shrewd businessman. But he'd once been softer. Doted on her. But then her baby brother died and everything changed. It hadn't been long after that she'd been kidnapped. And then a few months later, Mother died.

Papa was no longer the man she couldn't wait to see at the end of each day. The man who shared picnics in the park with his family and stories under tents made out of blankets.

That man must have died with his son and wife.

If she thought about it that way, then there really was no

guilt to feel about leaving. She'd endured years of his coldness. Given him chance after chance.

This was what she had to do.

When she reached her wing of the house, Louise was waiting for her. "Would you like anything, miss? Perhaps some hot chocolate?"

Louise was always there. Ready to serve. But now, Emma Grace needed her to go. "Hot chocolate sounds lovely, but I'm also in a bit of a mood for something more substantial. I'm afraid I was too nervous to eat much earlier."

"Would you like me to warm up some of the beef from dinner for you? Or something else?"

"Yes. That would be nice." She waved a hand. "You can choose. You know what I like."

"Of course." Louise smiled and exited. The poor woman likely felt sorry for Emma Grace.

She had a few minutes before her former nanny came back. With a drop to her knees, she reached under her bed and pulled out the bag she'd packed and tucked away. Grabbing a few more things from around the room, she tamped down her fear. She would simply find a way. A new life awaited. A life without all of this.

And she was fine with that.

After she shoved the last items into her bag, she looked at the list she'd tucked into it. A list she'd added to for the past year. Yes. She had everything.

She fetched a coat and hat from the closet and picked up her bag. Without another look back, she padded her way down the hallway. Every step on the plush carpet was taken with care as she listened for any noise. When she reached the landing where she had a view of the massive foyer, voices floated up to her. She slid back and hid behind the wall, hoping they hadn't seen her.

Peeking around the corner, she saw a gentleman shaking hands with her father. They were both all smiles. Father with his smooth-talking voice sounding ever-so-gracious and welcoming. The other man nodding his agreement. His gray hair and beard making him look old. And boring.

They disappeared into his office, and Emma Grace let out her breath.

Time to go.

A jerk brought her awake. The hotel room was small and stuffy. Three days she'd traveled. Back and forth, north, south, east, west—hoping against hope that if anyone saw her, they'd never be able to say where she was headed. It was a risky plan, but one she hoped would keep any investigators off her trail. Because Father would no doubt send the cavalry out after her.

At first, she'd taken the new open subway cars, zigzagging her way around the city as if it were any other day. Then she'd taken a train that took her several hundred miles away. Then a streetcar in another town. Then another train. And another. This last city still had horse-drawn carriages, and she'd taken one to the hotel so she could sleep in an actual bed after two days of attempting to sleep while traveling. She'd registered under a different name and finally fallen asleep after her mind had spun through every possible scenario of how her father would try to track her down.

But today, she would head farther west. A new adventure awaited.

Dressing as quickly as she could, she put on the outfit she'd purchased yesterday. All black. Then the hat with the netting over the front. Also black.

If the mourning attire didn't deter onlookers, certainly the cut of the dress would. These were not the clothes of Emma

Grace McMurray, daughter of one of the richest men in the country. They were a *normal* person's clothes.

After breakfast, she hurried to the train depot and bought her ticket. Keeping her head down, she hoped that she looked the part of a grieving woman.

But a newsboy's words on the platform caught her attention. "Railroad magnate murdered! Read all about it!"

A horrible sensation started in her stomach. Her breath caught in her throat. Her legs wouldn't move.

Then the boy moved down the platform, shouting his news.

It spurred her into action. She had to know. With quick steps, she caught up with the newsboy, paid him his five cents, and took the paper.

But nothing could prepare her for the front page. A picture of her father. Then a picture of *her*. And the headline in big, bold print:

**Railroad Baron McMurray Found Murdered,
Daughter/Heiress Missing**

All the sound around her muffled as her vision blurred. Papa was dead? No. It couldn't be. She tried to scan the article and make sense of it all, but the words wouldn't come into focus. She blinked several times and looked up. But everything around her spun like the world had turned into a carousel.

Someone bumped into her, and she crushed the paper to her chest. She scanned the crowd, but her mind refused to process anything. There was no sound. Just the roar in her ears.

She closed her eyes against the overwhelming sense that she was going to faint. No. She couldn't let that happen.

"Ma'am?" A deep voice broke through the roar. "Let me help you."

Without her permission, someone took her arm and guided her to a bench. She put her bag on the ground at her feet and realized she felt better with her head down. So, she laid her arms on her lap and kept her face buried there in the fabric.

Her dress. It was supposed to be a disguise. And yet it now told the truth of who she was.

Her father was dead? How could that be? She'd left without saying good-bye. Her heart pinched under the weight of living with that fact. Their last words to each other played through her mind. Angry, ugly . . . harsh words. Would they haunt her for the rest of her life?

What did this mean for her? Oh no. The men with the contracts... she swallowed against the thought. Her age made her more vulnerable than ever.

A few minutes passed, and her ears opened up to the world again. Steps shuffled around her. Voices chatted back and forth. Trains hissed.

Lifting her head, she glanced around. No one seemed to care about the grieving woman on the bench. She saw the crumpled paper in her lap and smoothed it out. As much as she wanted to read it, she couldn't. Not yet. Not until she was on her way. The urgency to flee grew inside her. No matter what, she had to run.

She stood up on shaky legs. She needed to get as far away as possible.

Panic built inside her as the conductor called, "All aboard!"

Keeping her head low, she picked up her bag and headed for the train. Tomorrow, she'd read the paper. Then she'd make a phone call. Just the one. Then she'd know the gravity of her situation. But it couldn't be good.

Right now, the only hope she had was her plan.

1



JANUARY 1905

ARIZONA TERRITORY

Something touched Emma Grace's shoulder. But she was so tired, her eyelids too heavy.

"Next stop, Grand Canyon and El Tovar!" The shout jolted her fully awake. Clutching her bag to her chest, she blinked away the last vestiges of dreams in her mind. The three-hour ride from Williams, Arizona, had passed in the blink of an eye. At least it seemed that way . . . probably because she fell asleep. Not something she was prone to do, but not sleeping for three days straight as she traveled across the country had obviously taken its toll.

With a deep breath, she sat up straighter and swallowed down every emotion that tried to climb up her throat. Working for the Fred Harvey Company the past five years had brought her to the top ranks. When she heard the El Tovar would be opening, she put in her request that very day. It was Harvey's crown jewel, after all. But why was she doubting? She was good. All her managers even wrote *the best* on her recommendation letters. She deserved this, didn't she?

The job would be great—this was something she could do almost with her eyes closed now. But the jitters in her stomach persisted. It was starting all over again that intimidated her. Five years she'd done it, at seven different Harvey Houses along the rail line. Each time it seemed to get more difficult. But her circumstances demanded it. She needed to increase the distance between her and Boston. A new place was necessary.

This was the farthest west she'd ever been. And it was remote.

But was she far enough away that *he* couldn't find—

"Miss Edwards?" The conductor held out a slip for her. "This is for your luggage. But not to worry about it, they will take it directly to your room."

She pasted on a smile. "Thank you."

"I know Miss Anniston is looking forward to your arrival." The man gave a small nod.

Emma Grace put a hand to her throat. "I'm looking forward to it as well." The fact that the conductor on the train, in addition to some of the railroad personnel in Williams, had spoken of Miss Anniston and her anticipation of Emma Grace's arrival made her throat a bit dry. How lovely that the woman had spoken so highly of her, but would she be gracious and kind? Or would she be a tyrant?

That remained to be seen.

A couple of the head waitresses Emma Grace had worked under were hard—almost to the point of being callous and mean. No two ways about it. But it had made her a better waitress, and if she were honest with herself . . . a better person as well. The training had been difficult, but she had the upper hand of knowing what customers expected in fine dining establishments. She'd lived that life. Been that customer. It gave her a bit of an edge, but she realized quickly how much she truly had to learn about humanity.

Even though she loved being a part of the working class, there were times she had to remind herself about her position in society. She couldn't speak to people the same way she could as Emma Grace McMurray. Not that she had ever been a snob—oh, she prayed she hadn't been—but speaking her mind had been her norm. As a socialite, she could do that. As Emma Grace Edwards, she could not.

Was she doing the right thing? The same question haunted her everywhere she went. She lifted her reticule to her lap and opened it. The aged newspaper article's edges peeked out of the side. But she shoved it deeper inside the bag. Now was not the time. She practically had it memorized, anyway.

This was what new situations did to her. They brought up the past and everything that went with it. All she wanted to do was move forward. Live a simple life. But after all this time, she doubted it was possible.

Still, it didn't keep her from hoping.

The whistle blew, and the train slowed. As it chugged its way into the depot, she took a moment to straighten her hair and pin her hat back into place. It was nice to not have to deal with the wigs anymore, nor push glasses up her nose. It had been five years since she'd let her blond hair be seen. Five years of disguises, different at each place she'd lived.

But it was time to let her natural look be her new disguise. No one had recognized her in all this time. And it wasn't like she hadn't matured over the years. For too long she'd been thin and scrawny—too thin. But she found out the hard way that not eating wasn't a good way to be able to withstand the rigors of her job and its twelve-hour shifts. After a bath one evening, she'd even passed out. When she finally allowed herself to eat and fill out, she found she liked her sturdy frame and curves. She didn't look at all like the young girl who'd run away from . . . everything.

She shook her head of the thoughts and gripped her reticule. That was the past. And it needed to stay there. No man would control her. No one would ever fool her again. No chance that money would dictate her choices. She loved her job and her life. And she had the opportunity for a completely fresh start here, one that hopefully would include new friends and a warm atmosphere. Like family. Something she'd craved for far too long.

As long as it wasn't anything like what *her* family had become.

The brakes hissed, and the train stopped moving. Out the window, the snow-covered, rocky landscape appeared dry and dusty and was dotted with scrubby-looking trees—some tall, some short. It certainly didn't look like much. Could one of the most glorious wonders of the world really be here? She'd seen photographs of the Grand Canyon. It was hard to imagine that such a place even existed.

Passengers scooted out into the aisles of the train. It was time.

Time to face this new world and tackle her job.

The past didn't matter. All that mattered was here and now.

With rhythmic steps, they all shuffled down the aisle toward the door. Emma Grace took a peek around the man's shoulder in front of her. Only a few more steps and she'd have some fresh air and room to breathe.

She closed her eyes for a moment and then stepped forward again. It was almost her turn to disembark. What she wouldn't give to be able to stretch all of her muscles—touch her toes and reach for the sky—but that wouldn't be very proper. She'd have to wait until she was in the privacy of her room. Whenever that would be.

Another step.

Oh, it made her antsy. Only one more person, then she could get off this train.

The conductor nodded at her as he tipped his cap. "Enjoy the most amazing wonder you'll ever see." His smile was genuine as his eyes twinkled. "I look forward to seeing you in the dining room."

"Thank you. I look forward to it as well." Emma Grace turned toward the steps and ventured down.

As she exited the train, the chill of the air took her breath away for a moment, and the wind threatened to take her hat with it.

A lovely dark-haired woman approached. Probably a good ten years her senior, she was still young and beautiful and seemed nothing like the harsh spinster barking out orders that Emma Grace had dramatically conjured up in her mind.

Several inches shorter than Emma Grace, the woman had a soft, warm appearance and moved with confidence and grace. Her hands tucked into the pockets of her long black coat. One eyebrow quirked upward. "Miss Edwards?"

"Yes." She stepped forward as butterflies filled her stomach. Why was she so nervous? She'd done this many times and had years of experience to rely upon. "I'm Emma Grace Edwards."

"Welcome to El Tovar. I'm Ruth Anniston, head waitress." She tilted her head toward what appeared to be the hotel. "Let's get you out of the cold and settled. The rest of the girls don't arrive for another two days." While the greeting wasn't at all unamiable, there was only so much to ascertain in the brisk breeze and bitter temperature.

"Oh? How many are you expecting?"

"Twenty-five in all. We've hired the best of the best. And while they've all been Harvey Girls for at least a few months, there will be training for the El Tovar in particular, as it is

expected to attract the most elite of clientele. You—along with the other senior waitresses—will be assigned a trainee.”

That made Emma Grace’s nerves jitter even more. Would Miss Anniston approve of her? It was so important for her to make a good impression. She wanted this job to last for a long time. Hopefully for the rest of her life.

Following the woman from the rail tracks to a set of stone steps that would take them up the hill, she gazed at the massive structure. As she made her way up the steep incline, the large building loomed in front of her. This side of it was a half-hexagon shape. From where she stepped, she could see that it stretched in length for a substantial distance before her. The large stones at the foundation were topped with giant logs and then more dark wood siding as the building rose for several stories above her. Basement . . . one, two, three stories. Was there even a fourth up there? As they walked around and up the hill, she noticed a turret at the top that seemed to almost touch the sky from this angle. Was that in the center of the hotel? She got dizzy with her neck craned back.

While its height was not much compared to the tall buildings in the cities back east, this one stretched out in breadth even more than its height. The closer she got, the larger it loomed. Its unique design drew her in. “It’s a lovely hotel.”

“Mr. Whittlesey—the architect of El Tovar—envisioned it as a mix of Swiss chalet and Norwegian villa. Would you agree?” Miss Anniston stopped and gazed up with her.

Emma Grace did indeed agree, but she didn’t dare say that out loud. The real Emma Grace had seen Swiss chalets and Norwegian villas, but Emma Grace the waitress most certainly wouldn’t have had the privilege of vacationing in Europe. So, she shrugged. “I can’t say that I have an opinion one way or the other.” She let out a light laugh, hoping

to convey the innocence of a poor young waitress. “It’s a beautiful building though to be sure.”

Miss Anniston started walking again before her abrupt stop outside a basement door almost made Emma Grace collide with her. “You’ll find your way around quick enough. Are you terribly cold?”

What did her question imply? Was this some sort of test for her ability to work here? She shook her head slightly to rid herself of her anxious thoughts. Everything put her on edge when she was in a new place. “It’s chilly, but I’m all right.”

A secretive smile spread across the woman’s face. “Good. Because I think there’s something you need to see before we go inside.” With her hands still stuffed into her coat pockets, she tilted her head again—this time away from the hotel—beckoning Emma Grace toward the west side of the building. “Follow me. Just be prepared—it will get even colder at the rim.”



CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

A centimeter to the left should do. Ray Watkins straightened the pencil jar on his desk. There. Perfect.

Before he could get to the stack of reports waiting for him, he’d have to deal with the chaos that was his workspace. While blowing at a piece of lint on the blotter, he caught something out of the corner of his eye. One of the files on top of the cabinet was askew. He’d have to ask his secretary one more time to make sure he stacked the files appropriately. He walked over to the mahogany cabinet and straightened them. Might as well put them in alphabetical order while he was at it. The satisfaction of the simple task steadied his

breathing. As he shuffled them back into a neat position, his mind cleared.

Much better.

With a tug on his pinstripe vest, he went back to his chair.

The tedious reports where he checked the work of the accounting department weren't his favorite task, but alas, it fell to him. His father had poured his whole life into Watkins Enterprises, and one day Ray hoped to be able to add to it. He'd have to earn his way, that's for sure. Dad hadn't created it overnight—a fact Ray was reminded of often. It was a privilege to be able to follow in his father's footsteps.

A few years ago, that hadn't been his opinion, but God had changed him. Each day was a gift now. A chance to live out his favorite verse in Colossians. The words tumbled through his mind, *"And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him."*

So, even the mundane reports needed to be done well and with a good attitude—something else he needed to be reminded of on a daily basis. His hope was that one day all of the empire his father had built and hoarded could be used to help the poor or used for missions . . . however God directed him.

Two hours into the afternoon, he stretched his arms and back as a sense of accomplishment filled him. He dipped his pen and signed the last page, conveying that he'd checked and double-checked the work. Another task complete.

Shifting his gaze to the window, he took in the sunshine and perfect white clouds dotting a blue sky. It would make for a great picture. Made him imagine what it would look like through the lens of his new camera. The clock chimed the hour. Perhaps he'd be able to get away in time to drive by Lake Michigan. His favorite view.

“Ray!” Dad’s booming voice pulled his attention away from the window. Looming in the doorway, with a catlike smile on his features, his dad stroked his beard. “I’ve got exciting news.” Even if it wasn’t exciting for anyone but him, Dad would expect anyone and everyone to listen and nod their agreement. His father’s presence dominated no matter where he went. “I’m sending you out to the new Harvey House at the Grand Canyon. I’ve been in discussions with the Harvey boys about the investment opportunities in the West. They’ve agreed to advertise for us, and we will do the same for them here.”

Ray leaned back in his chair. Dad was always looking for new ways to expand and get his name out there. “What exactly will they advertise for us? It’s not like we have the same attraction as the Grand Canyon.”

“I asked them to start with our art galleries and jewelry stores. Since the wealthy will most likely be the ones to make that trip, it will give them something to look forward to when they come home. Or perhaps those who aren’t from Chicago or New York will want to take a trip so they can visit one of our fine establishments. I’m even thinking of building out west myself. Oh, make sure you pack that box-camera-photograph thing of yours.” He waved a hand, as if that would make the right word appear.

Ray’s eyebrows shot up. “Oh?” He couldn’t trust himself to say much more. All he could do was attempt to mask his shock. When had Dad ever expressed *any* interest in his photography?

Dad sat in the chair across from him and leaned back with his hands folded across his chest. “It’s supposed to be a grand affair—the El Tovar I believe is what it’s called. My investors are eager to hear how we can capitalize on the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe rail line. Everyone is fasci-

nated with the West and wants their piece of it. Harvey has a good corner of it now, so we need to find our own niche.”

Ray’s heart sank a bit. It was just another errand for the investors. What would he have to do this time? Make a list of all the Harvey Houses along the way? Journal the food that people could purchase along the line? His initial shock about being asked to bring his camera faded fast. Another waste of money for Dad and a waste of time for him. He let out a sigh. Not exactly the good attitude he’d been aiming for.

“The brand-new hotel is a charming, Swiss-chalet-looking lodge. Supposedly it has every amenity the social elite will enjoy.” He leaned forward and lifted his chin, that telltale sparkle in his eye. “But next door—or across the courtyard—is the Hopi House, designed by a Miss Mary Colter. She’s been a decorator for Harvey and a designer. But she knows the Indians. It’s a lovely Pueblo structure that represents the magnificent people of the West and houses their art. Apparently, they’ve got real Indians from nearby villages who create the art right there in front of people. This is Harvey’s new plan, to have Indian art and souvenir shops next to their hotels. But at this location, they’ve put an exhibit of rare and costly specimens. It’s the priceless Harvey collection that won the grand prize at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition.”

That actually *was* interesting to Ray. “So, you’d like me to visit and detail what El Tovar offers its visitors?”

“Yes, but I also need you to think bigger. Our class is fascinated with the West, didn’t you hear me? *Fascinated*. Primitive as it may be.”

Next would come the lecture on how to charm the rich into spending money. Again. Investing in something new and interesting. Building the company into something bigger than Rockefeller or Vanderbilt dared to dream. Ray had

heard the spiel before, but he nodded at all the appropriate places and listened.

His father had been criticized often for his unfocused way of doing business. Rather than investing in oil, steel, coal, the railroads, or even creating or making something, Ray Watkins Senior was all about trying his hand at everything: investing in real estate, jewelry, art, restaurants, hotels . . . it was all over the map. And he'd made quite a fortune, but their investors were always looking for more. Lots more.

"What I'm saying is that I'm giving you an incredible opportunity. You need to ponder the tough questions. What could we—our investors—capitalize upon? What else could we build there that could attract our social crowd? What would people want to spend money on? I've heard that more and more people are willing to venture down into the canyon. The stories good ol' Ralph Cameron has sent state that he's getting a hefty profit from his toll on the Bright Angel Trail. You need to find out if we can get in on something like that too." Dad stood and began pacing. A sure indicator that he was winding up for even more ideas.

Not one to usually interrupt his father when he was on a roll, Ray couldn't let one thing pass. "Why did you want me to bring my camera?"

Dad's face turned very serious. "To send me pictures, of course. I need to see what's there: the canyon, the hotel, the opportunities, the art." Dad pointed a finger at him. "Don't forget the art. Perhaps we could even acquire some of it for the galleries here." He went back to stroking his beard. "I know this is a larger task than I've given you before, and it will be quite time consuming, but I need you to be my eyes and ears. It may be some time before I can get away myself. So be thorough."

He clasped his hands behind his back and lifted his chin.

“I’m counting on you. This could be huge for us. Expansion into the West is our future.” With a dramatic flair, Dad sat back down in the chair and leaned forward. “I’ll send at least two or three men with you to help. Put them to work for whatever you need, but keep in mind I’ve got several other errands for each of them to run.”

Of course he did. Dad always had an agenda other than just the errands he’d send Ray to pursue. But one day, through hard work and perseverance, he was determined to have his father trust him with the entirety of the business. But Dad wasn’t one to let things go easily. He liked being in complete control. “How long do you want me to stay?”

“It will probably take several weeks. Or even perhaps a couple months, I would imagine. I’ll let you know when you’ve accomplished all that needs to be done. Once I’ve had time to look over everything you send, I’ll need to meet with the investors here and possibly bring some of them out to see it for themselves. That’s why it’s crucial for you to send me detailed reports—something I know you are outstanding at producing.”

“Thank you, Dad.” He’d take the compliment, seeing as his father didn’t hand them out very often. “When would you like me to leave?”

“Within the week, if possible.”

Ray stood, straightened the papers he’d been working on, and placed his pen back in the holder. He offered Dad a smile. “I guess I better start packing then. I wonder what the weather is like in the Arizona Territory this time of year?” He shrugged. “I guess I need to prepare for multiple seasons if I’m to be away for a couple months.”

His father stood as well, gripped Ray’s upper arm with his left hand, and shook his right hand vigorously. “I’m excited for this next stage for you, son. One day, I know you’ll make

a fine head for this company—my legacy—and bring even more pride to the Watkins name.”

Still shaking Dad’s hand, Ray smiled. “I hope to make you proud.”

“You have.” With a brief nod, he turned on his heel and left.

Ray sat back behind his desk and pulled a small notebook out of a drawer. Best to start a list of all he needed to bring with him, especially if he was to be away for months. Which really wasn’t a problem. It wasn’t like there was anyone or anything that truly tied him to Chicago. The senior Watkins had sent him on many trips since he’d come home as a college graduate hoping to take on the business. At least this one didn’t seem to be as tedious or even as frivolous as so many of the others had been. Perhaps Dad was ready to start handing him some more responsibility. It was an encouraging thought.

The patience he’d learned the past few years after he’d turned his life around had begun to feel like it would never bear fruit. Today was proof that Reverend James had been correct. The pages of the notebook in front of him blurred as his thoughts rushed back to their last conversation.

“You’ve been given a second chance. Don’t waste it by complaining about what you wish you could do. Instead focus on what you can do. Be grateful to Almighty God. It’s time to show your family that you’ve changed. You’ve given your life over to the Lord and are allowing Him to work in you. Perhaps you will have an impact on them as well. The wild Ray Watkins of your youth is gone.”

“But there’s still so much guilt inside,” Ray had replied. *“How do I get past the horrible things I’ve done? Is it even fair for me to have a fresh start?”*

“Thankfully, the good Lord doesn’t give us what we de-

serve. Your sins were covered on the cross. They're paid for in full. Now, go and live for Him." Reverend James squeezed his shoulder and then headed for the door. Hat in his hands, he turned back toward him. *"You didn't kill that young boy, Ray. Remember that."*