

A woman with her hair in a bun, wearing a white high-collared blouse and a dark skirt, stands on a balcony with an ornate railing. She is looking out over a vast canyon landscape under a sunset sky. The canyon features prominent red rock formations and a large mesa in the distance. The overall scene is bathed in the warm, golden light of the setting sun.

Kimberley
WOODHOUSE

SECRETS of the CANYON

—BOOK THREE—

A
MARK of
GRACE

Books by Kimberley Woodhouse

SECRETS OF THE CANYON

A Deep Divide

A Gem of Truth

A Mark of Grace

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All Things Hidden

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Under the Midnight Sun

THE TREASURES OF NOME

Forever Hidden

Endless Mercy

Ever Constant

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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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This book is lovingly dedicated to
two precious women in my life:

My daughter-in-love
Ruth Woodhouse

We've been so blessed to have you as part of our family.
I love how you keep Josh in line. And how much you love him.
Your sweet spirit and joy for life are beautiful.
Here's to decades more of memories together.
Love, Mom

And to MY mother-in-love
Brenda Woodhouse
Every time I typed 1909, I thought of you.
It made me smile and giggle.
You have been such a gift to me for more than thirty years.
Thank you for loving me as your own.
Love, Kim

Dear Reader

The Harvey Girls are one of my favorite parts of American history. Without them, would the West have been settled? Without Fred Harvey would we have the food and restaurant industry as we know it? What about marketing? Fred Harvey has been said time and again to be the father of modern-day marketing.

The more research I did, the more fascinated I became. With Fred Harvey, the Harvey Girls, the Kolb brothers, and Mary Colter. I could fill twenty books with all the interesting little tidbits.

What it all comes down to is this:

History is beautiful. And enlightening. And we have so much to learn from it.

It's amazing to see what shaped our country. What shaped *us*—and our society.

It is a privilege for me to bring *A Mark of Grace* to you, the end of the SECRETS OF THE CANYON series, and Ruth's story. I've had hundreds of you write to me about your hopes that she would have her own story. I pray that this story

blesses you and reminds you of how valuable you are. No matter what stage of life you are in, you are still useful and needed.

Let's venture back to the Grand Canyon, the El Tovar, and the Harvey Girls.

Enjoy the journey,
Kimberley

Prologue

1894

PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

“I’m not interested in settling down right now.” Ruth An-
niston allowed the words to spill out.

Mother’s gaze jerked up from the piano where she’d been
working on a new piece for her music students. Her eyes
widened.

Ruth watched. At twenty years of age, she had a close and
beautiful relationship with her parents. Rarely did she ever
surprise them because they knew her so well.

This was obviously one of those rare occasions. Had her
words finally registered?

Mother put a hand to her throat and removed her glasses.
“Wait . . . Ruth, are you saying you don’t wish to get married
one day? I thought you always wanted . . .” She swallowed.
Blinked several times. “Forgive me. Tell me what’s on your
heart.”

Ruth bit her lip. The intention hadn’t been to drop the idea

of becoming a Harvey Girl quite like this. But it had seemed like the perfect segue in the conversation and out it came. “I’m not saying that I *never* want to get married. Yes, I want a family. Just not now. I *do* want to help you and Dad out for as long as I can, and perhaps have a few adventures of my own along the way. You took me in—adopted me—and loved me when no one else did. I know what a sacrifice that was, especially on Dad’s small salary. This is an opportunity for a good job for me. A reputable job for a woman these days. You raised me to think for myself. Research. Read. Be independent.” She could ramble on forever, so she clamped her lips shut.

“But, sweetheart, just because we made the sacrifice—which was all worth it, by the way—doesn’t mean we are destitute. The college is paying your father much more these days. And his geology lectures are gaining popularity every year. I have more students than ever. There’s nothing disreputable about staying at home and living with us until God brings the right man along.”

Ruth’s shoulders fell as she let out a long sigh. “It’s not good for any of us if I sit around here and take up space. You know me. I like to explore. Love hard work.” Hopefully Mom wouldn’t pick up on her real reason for wanting to go. “There aren’t any interested parties offering marriage right now anyway.”

That wasn’t the *complete* truth. She wouldn’t bring up the young man who followed her around everywhere and wouldn’t leave her be. Mom would faint dead away if she heard some of the brazen things he’d said. At her age, Ruth longed for love. The kind she saw between her parents. But it wouldn’t happen here. Of that, she was confident.

“You’re such a pretty young lady, Ruth. Don’t sell yourself short.” Mom shook her head. “We’ll speak about this over

dinner with your father.” She placed her spectacles back on the end of her nose and leaned over the staff paper. Her pencil didn’t miss a beat as it drew several notes.

Just like that. The conversation was set aside. “That’s not good enough. Have you listened to a word I’ve said?” Ruth shook her head and crossed her arms over her middle. “I can’t believe you would say something like that. *Pretty? Don’t sell myself short?* You and Dad raised me to care more about what was *inside* a person than what was on the outside. To value each and every person because God loved them, not because of how they looked.”

Mom released an exasperated huff and looked at her over the rims of her glasses. “It wasn’t meant as an insult, my dear, rather a compliment. You are beautiful. Always have been.” She pointed her pencil at Ruth. “And don’t even try to convince me there aren’t any interested parties. Your father and I know better.” She went back to her music. “Let’s talk about it over dinner. I really must get back to work before my next student arrives.”

With a deep breath, she shrugged. “All right.” Her parents were the most wonderful people on earth. Perhaps she could spend some time working on a sound argument to present at dinner.

But by the time dinner rolled around and she forged ahead with what she thought was a well-thought-out argument, Dad wasn’t easily convinced.

“I don’t see how becoming a Harvey Girl will be good for you. There are plenty of suitors here ready and waiting to have the chance—”

“They’ve spoken to you about this? Why haven’t you said anything?” Interrupting her father wasn’t something she ever did, but her parents’ attitudes were more than she could

fathom. They'd never even broached the subject of multiple suitors with her before.

“Of course they have. You are quite the catch. I was hesitant to bring it up, feeling you needed some time. But now that you're talking about heading off to who-knows-where, it's my place as your father to speak up.”

The discussion escalated and continued for well over an hour as Ruth—for the first time—felt like she was fighting with her parents over her future. How had they come to this place? Dad talked of how many interested suitors there actually were, then Mom made the comment about how pretty she was at least three more times. All it did was cement in Ruth's mind that she wanted to marry a man who loved her for who she was . . . not just her pretty face.

And as much as her parents disagreed with her, she wanted to head out on her own. Try something new. Experience life outside of the sheltered cocoon she'd always lived within.

They finally acquiesced. Albeit with tears and many cautions.

After long hugs with each of her parents, she headed to bed.

Her dream of becoming a Harvey Girl was about to come true.



1907

THIRTEEN YEARS LATER

EL TOVAR HOTEL, GRAND CANYON

“You're such a pretty young lady, Ruth. Don't sell yourself short.”

Pretty young lady. As the memories of the past washed

over her, Ruth couldn't believe how many years had rolled by since that day.

But now look at her. No longer did she have a pretty face. No longer was she young and eligible. Had she let her stubborn pride get in the way? Was she destined to be alone forever?

At this moment, the mirror across the room was the worst villain she could ever imagine.

The more Ruth thought about it, the more she wanted to throw something at it and make it shatter into pieces. But she wouldn't do that. *Couldn't* do that.

Because she was a Harvey Girl.

The head waitress.

In control at all times.

An example to all the girls under her. Mother hen. Mentor. Friend.

She couldn't allow herself to lose all command of her faculties just because her world would never be the same again. This had been her dream.

Even though she now faced the nightmare before her.

Ruth gingerly patted the bandage on her cheek. *Lord, give me strength to handle whatever comes.* She'd repeated the prayer too many times to count as she waited for the doctor to arrive.

She wasn't a vain woman. At least she hadn't been before a mountain lion mauled her face. Had she? Now she spent an agonizing amount of time consumed with her appearance and how it affected her future.

She was thirty-two—almost thirty-three. A veritable spinster. If she couldn't work, what was she to do? Where could she go? Working as a Harvey Girl had been her entire adult life. It had brought her so much satisfaction. Hopefully, she'd

brought God glory through it all. And even when she was younger and struggled when all the other girls were getting married and settling down, the Lord had given her peace.

Now she was the headwaitress at the crown jewel of the Harvey Empire—an accomplishment she'd worked hard to obtain. It was all she'd ever wanted after donning her first black-and-white uniform. And after a year on the job, it had been easy to think she still had plenty of time for God to bring the right man into her life. She'd been completely content.

Being a Harvey Girl was the perfect job for her. More to the point, it was the only job she knew. What if she couldn't do it anymore? Harvey Girls made people feel comfortable. They were trained to be efficient. Pleasant. And spotless.

Without blemish, as the Bible verse went. Her soul might be spotless before the Lord, but people were far less forgiving than He. And she was no longer without blemish . . .

Mr. Owens—the manager of the El Tovar—had bent the stringent Harvey rules for Emma Grace in her time of need. Surely he would do the same for her. Only, Emma Grace could still do her job. Ruth *couldn't*. Not to the Harvey standard. Her leg would take a long time to heal. And she'd probably always walk with a limp. But that wouldn't be as visible as her face. She closed her eyes. What would she look like?

Reaching up with her right hand, she covered the bandaged area of her face. And for a moment, she looked normal again.

Lord, give me strength to handle whatever comes.

The prayer grew frailer with each repeat. It had started out sturdy and resilient but was now thin and ill-equipped to hold her together.

Against the doctor's orders, Ruth began to peel back the

edge of the bandage. She stepped close to the mirror, hoping the damage was far less than she feared.

“I asked you not to do that, Miss Anniston.”

Ruth turned away from the mirror, her emotions a mix of chagrin for disobeying the doctor’s orders and relief that she’d put off the inevitable for a few more minutes. “I’m sorry.”

Dr. Collins’ kind smile made the gray in his eyes blend nicely with the silver in his hair. He was such a nice-looking man.

Nice-looking. She cringed. No one would probably ever say that about her ever again.

“In truth, Miss Anniston”—he stepped deeper into the room and set his bag on the desk—“I’m surprised you haven’t removed it already. How are you feeling?”

He wasn’t asking about her pain, but she still didn’t have a grip on her emotions, so she tempered her answer. “Fine. It’s itchy more than painful at this point.”

He narrowed his gaze. “All right. We’ll leave it at that.” He snapped open the black leather medical bag and peered inside. “I have an ointment that will help with the itchiness.”

“Oh good, you’re here.” Mr. Owens strode into the room, a false smile on his face. “How are you feeling today, Miss Anniston?”

Unlike the doctor, Mr. Owens surely wanted assurance that she’d hold up under whatever the removal of her bandage revealed. So Ruth squared her shoulders and gave him her best Harvey Girl smile. “I’m fine, sir. Thank you for asking. How is the dining room?”

“Nothing to worry about. Miss Schultz will do a tremendous job in your stead, I’m sure.”

Oh, please. Don’t let him replace me already! She banished

the selfish plea. “She will make the Harvey name proud.” Her smile cracked at the edges. Her newest protégé had become a dear friend.

“She’s been begging to see you all day. Shall I let her know that after the doctor leaves, she can come in?” The manager raised his eyebrows.

“Let’s wait for visitors until later, shall we?” The doctor looked between the two of them. “I want to remind you both that Miss Anniston’s wounds are still very fresh. They will be red and swollen today, far beyond what they will eventually fade to. I hope you’ll keep that in mind.”

Lord, give me strength to handle whatever comes.

The prayer was tissue-paper thin now. Barely holding her together. Her hands were damp, and her heart began to pick up speed. “I’m ready.”

And she’d told Julia that lying wasn’t the Harvey way. What a hypocrite she’d become.

“Have a seat, Miss Anniston.” Dr. Collins pulled the chair out for her, the one not facing the mirror. Should she ask to be turned to face it? Or was it better to see the full damage at one time rather than in slow, tormenting pieces? But the doctor didn’t give her a choice. He turned the chair away from both the mirror and Mr. Owens.

How bad did he expect this to be?

She wiped her hands against her skirt and, calling upon all her training, forced her legs to cooperate when they were dead set against moving. “Thank you.” It was an automatic response to a man holding a chair for her, but was she thankful? No. Not for this.

But she was thankful for his many visits and his skill. She closed her eyes and focused on that while he eased the bandage away from her cheek.

While he worked, Mr. Owens talked. “I’ve been thinking about how to ease you back into working, Miss Anniston. I think it’s best if we keep you off your feet as much as possible, don’t you, Doctor Collins?”

“That’s going to be a requirement until her leg fully heals, and that will take some time.”

But that wound was hidden. It wasn’t ugly and out in the open. Ruth cringed at her own thoughts.

Her manager was still talking. “I’d like you to keep training the new girls, of course, but perhaps it would be best to do that when the dining room is closed so you aren’t interrupted by our guests. That way you can sit and not strain your injuries.”

Ruth stiffened. Her fears were coming true. He didn’t want her to be seen.

“I saw that, Ruth. I know what a workhorse you are, but you are too valuable to Harvey to not let you heal completely. It’s for your own good,” Mr. Owens continued. “I’m thinking we should keep you off your feet. But don’t think we won’t put you to work in other ways. I’d like you to take over some bookkeeping responsibilities. Don’t you think that’s a good idea?”

No. It was a terrible idea. She had no idea how to handle books. She knew how to handle people. But at least he was offering her work. “That sounds good, sir. Although I’ll need to be trained on bookkeeping as it’s outside of my—” She gasped as a piece of gauze pulled her tender skin. “Out of my expertise.”

With the last piece of gauze removed, she took a shallow breath . . . then another one.

“Of course. I’m sure you’ll be a quick study. Managing the dining room and kitchen alone are a huge undertaking.

With all your knowledge and skill as headwaitress all these years, perhaps we could make another arrangement. I find myself overwhelmed a good bit of the time.”

Was he trying to make her feel better? It wasn't working. What she wanted was to be able to get back on the floor and do *her* job. Not the books. Not managing the dining room and kitchen.

“But whenever you're ready, my dear.” The man's voice held a slight edge. Like he was tempering his tone. What did they see?

Ruth closed her eyes, forcing back hot tears. Mr. Owens was as no-nonsense as they came. He didn't believe in false hope or platitudes. He told it like it was. If he was calling her *my dear*, things must be worse than even he expected.

“I believe I should leave the stitches in for another week,” the doctor said. “Even though they make the injuries look so much worse, it will be best for long-term healing. If you would like to keep it covered with bandages during the day, that is fine. But at night, it's best for the wound to be uncovered.”

“All right.” How bad did it look?

“I think we should leave Miss Anniston alone for a moment.”

There was her answer. Yes. Things were much worse than expected.

Ruth opened her eyes and whispered, “Thank you.”

Dr. Collins nodded once, his gray eyes wet with compassion. “Take your time. And remember, this isn't how you'll look in a few months. It will get better. I promise.”

She swallowed and nodded. The tears she'd held back earlier leaked out, stinging her skin. She wanted to say thank-you again but couldn't get the words past the trepidation clogging her throat. She looked down at her lap.

He patted her hand, then stood. “Let’s go, Mr. Owens.”
“But I wanted—”

Ruth imagined the good doctor either grabbed her manager’s arm or silenced him with a glare. Either way, she was grateful she didn’t have to endure a gasp or horror-filled eyes or any other reaction. Dealing with her own was going to take every ounce of whatever courage she had left.

She stood, smoothed her skirt, and took one more shaky breath. As she turned to face the mirror, she whispered, “Lord, give me strength—”

But then she saw.

The prayer perforated, and she fell apart.

The next day, crisp air in the early morning hour gave Ruth a little jolt as she hobbled out to meet Frank Henderson. After pulling herself together yesterday evening, she’d scribbled a note to him and sent one of the girls to deliver it and wait for a response. If anyone would be honest with her and help her to sort through her feelings, it was her longtime friend.

For years, they’d both worked for the Harvey Company. Twice now, they’d worked at the same location. He understood the work she loved and understood her. Made her laugh. Challenged her in her walk with God. He was the one she trusted most.

She wanted to be respectful of his responsibility as a chef but knew that he loved to walk the canyon rim long before dawn. So, she’d asked to meet him. Early. Thankfully, he agreed to spare a few minutes for her.

It had taken everything in her to get up the stairs by herself. The crutches the doctor gave her to use were incredibly uncomfortable and awkward. She still hadn’t mastered the

technique, but she didn't want anyone else to know she was venturing out. The glances full of pity, the offers to help her move—even just across the room—well, they were more than she wanted to deal with for a walk out to the rim.

Her own emotions were tenuous at best, and she needed someone to help strengthen her fortitude. To stiffen her up. It was like she'd become a bowl of mush the past couple of weeks. That wasn't who she was. So yes, she would risk the consequences of coming out here by herself because something had to change. And soon. But the distance to their favorite bench loomed.

She lifted her chin. She would make it there. She would. And if she had to beg Frank to carry her back, so be it.

“Good morning, Ruth.” Frank's mellow voice greeted her from the bench. He reached for her arm. “Why didn't you let me help you out here?”

With a shrug, she maneuvered over to the seat. “You know me. I'm stubborn and independent. I didn't want anyone to know. No one is out and about right now, and I was afraid of making too much noise and it making a fuss.” The more she said, the less sense she made—even to herself. She sat on the bench and set the crutches beside her. That simple walk—one she'd made hundreds of times on two good legs—now took everything out of her.

It was a miracle she'd been able to keep her leg, she knew that, but oh, how she wished things were different. She swallowed her pride and touched his arm. “I might need your help to get back, though. I'm afraid I don't have much strength left.”

“Oh, Ruth, of course I'll help.” His eyes glistened in the first light of the day.

She pointed a finger at him. “Don't feel sorry for me, Frank. I don't need your pity.”

“I most certainly do *not* feel sorry for you.” He looked offended. “I’m hurt you would even accuse me of such a thing. After all we’ve been through. Tsk, tsk.” He quirked one of his bushy red eyebrows at her. “You should know that you are my dear friend and I care about you. None of this pity nonsense. I know better.”

The expression on his face made her laugh. “Thank you.”

“Now, what is it that you needed to discuss? It must be of some import since you dragged me out here so early in the morning after you’ve been avoiding me for two weeks. My feelings might be hurt, by the way.” He crossed his arms over his chest. But the twinkle in his eyes told her what she needed to know. He was her friend and wasn’t treating her any differently than before her injury. Exactly what she needed.

Ruth swatted at his arm. “Oh, hush. I’ve never once seen you get your feelings hurt. Besides, I haven’t been avoiding *you*. I’ve been avoiding everyone.”

“Well, that explains *everything*.”

“Don’t take that sarcastic tone with me, Mr. Henderson.” It felt good to tease and scold. Like she was still in charge. Like she wasn’t an invalid.

“Yes, ma’am.” His mustache wiggled with his lips, his humor evident.

“Thank you.” She lifted her chin at him and grinned. What would she do without this man in her life? While she had always been so serious and a rule-follower, he’d continually made her laugh. “We’ve been through a lot, haven’t we, Frank?”

He shook his head and let out a hearty laugh. “That’s putting it mildly, yes. But the good Lord has seen us through, wouldn’t you say?”

She nodded. But couldn't bring herself to affirm his statement with words. That was part of her struggle.

"Ah . . . so the crux of the matter." He turned to face her completely, his green eyes drilling into her. "Tell me why you asked me out here."

She broke eye contact and looked out at the canyon that was coming to life in brilliant colors with the sunrise. A strong scent of pine filled the air. "You've always been honest with me, and I'm asking the same of you today."

"Of course."

"I also know you well enough that I know your character. You won't judge me." Now that they were out here and the time was right, she couldn't quite get the words out. Why was she stalling?

"Heavens no."

Wringing her hands together, she took a deep breath and turned to face him again. "I'm worried about what this will do . . . how it will affect how people see me. Will I be able to do my job? You know as well as I do about Harvey's high expectations. My leg is going to make me limp for some time—at least that's what the doctor says—and my face . . . well, that's why I asked you out here."

His brows dipped as his forehead wrinkled. "I'm not sure *what* you're asking."

Without taking another second to think about it, she removed the bandage covering the wound on her face. "I need you to be honest. How bad is it, really? Will people ever be able to see past it? I know I can't." The last words slipped out before she could catch them. It was like baring her soul. If only she could take them back.

Frank lifted his shoulders and studied her face. With his

thumb and forefinger, he gently gripped her chin and turned her face back and forth.

It seemed an eternity passed while she waited for him to speak.

He patted her steel-gripped hands in her lap. “Ruth, you are beautiful. Inside and out. That mountain lion left its mark on your face, but that doesn’t change anything. It doesn’t change your beauty one bit.”

She huffed at him and turned the mutilated side of her face toward him. “Look at this! You can’t tell me this doesn’t change things.”

“You’re still covered in stitches. Once those are removed, it will look a lot different. And over time, it will heal and probably not even be noticeable!”

“Frank, I asked you to be honest with me. Not try to cushion it with flowery words.” She crossed her arms over her chest. What she wouldn’t give to be able to jump up and stomp her feet.

“Ruth, you are the most stubborn woman I think I’ve ever met. I didn’t give you any flowery words. I *am* being honest. Yes, you’ve been clawed by a lion. Yes, there are lines on your face. But I stand by what I said, it doesn’t change your beauty. It doesn’t change who you are.”

It doesn’t change who you are.

Oh, but it did. Couldn’t he see that? Everyone had tiptoed around her, waited on her hand and foot, but she’d seen her reflection in the mirror. It was burned into her memory.

She would *never* be the same.

“I’ve always thought you were the prettiest lady I’ve ever met.” Frank reached for her hand. “Bandage or no bandage, scar or no scar, I still think that. I mean it with all my heart.”

She closed her eyes against his words. His intent was good,

she couldn't fault him. But it was exactly what she *didn't* want to hear. All her life she'd been told how pretty she was. And all her life she'd been taught to not look on outward appearance, but on a person's heart. She never thought she actually cared about what people thought of her.

But that had been because she *was* pretty. Now she wasn't. And it bothered her more than she cared to admit.

"Ruth?" Frank's voice pleaded with her. He gripped her hand tighter. "I need to tell you how I ca—"

"I'm not feeling too well. Would you help me back to my room?"

He let out a sigh and moved closer. "Of course. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to keep you out here so long."

Ruth struggled to her feet, but once the crutches were in place, she didn't have the strength to move.

"I'm right here if you need me . . ." He put a hand on her elbow. His words roared through her mind over and over again. "*I've always thought you were the prettiest lady I've ever met.*"

Before the attack, she would have loved to hear those words from him. Why did things have to change? Why did her heart feel like it had been pushed through a meat grinder?

She took a step with the crutches before collapsing to the ground. Tears rushed to her eyes. Why did she come out here? What had she expected? Frank had been nothing but supportive and encouraging. Why did that hurt so much?

Without a word, Frank scooped her up into his arms. Ruth tucked her head against his shoulder, trying to hide her face and her tears.

Silence surrounded them, and all she heard was the beating of his heart, his steady breaths, and his steps as he carried her home. Her mind swirled with all the what-ifs from her life.

What if she'd stayed at home like her parents suggested?

What if she'd married one of the interested suitors?

What if she'd never been injured?

Her leg and face both throbbed against their stitches. Her heart felt like it was shattered. And she didn't understand why.

When they came close to the hotel's entrance, Frank veered down the hill to the left. "I'll take you down to the basement entrance and ask one of the girls to go back and fetch your crutches. I'm sure you just overdid it. Don't worry. Time heals all wounds. You're a strong and beautiful woman, Ruth Anniston."

At that moment, his words were like a knife to her gut.

No. She was sure time could *never* heal these wounds.

1



MONDAY, MAY 3, 1909

EL TOVAR HOTEL, GRAND CANYON

Spoons clattered against pots. Steam sputtered out from under lids. The scent of fresh-baked bread and brewing coffee filled the air.

Frank grinned to himself. He loved the hustle and bustle of this kitchen. It practically hummed with a symphony of culinary life.

Over the past twenty years, he'd worked for the Harvey Company in one capacity or another. But once he discovered the kitchen and cooking, he'd been hooked, and he'd been in a Harvey kitchen ever since.

Once he came to El Tovar . . . well, that had changed everything. The luxury hotel perched on the very edge of the Grand Canyon was a marvel, especially this far away from any city. Not only did they have electric lights powered by their own steam generator, but railroad tank cars brought fresh water in daily—120 miles—and the kitchen grew their own fruits and vegetables in greenhouses. Right here. Add

to that their own dairy and poultry flock and they were set. It was a chef's dream.

Yesterday had been a huge success. Celebrating the opening of the official summer season at El Tovar had become quite the treat over the years, and the food only increased in volume and specialties. But when Chef Marques had been called away for a family emergency, the task of pulling it all off fell squarely onto Frank's shoulders. He'd learned so much from being the assistant chef under such an amazing mentor all these years that the event had run with precision and clockwork. But there was no time to revel in that. Another day, another crowd of people to feed.

"Chef Henderson!" Mr. Owens' voice rose above the kitchen clamor. "Might I have a word?"

"Yes, sir." Frank dipped his chin toward his manager and gave directions to the new hire beside him. He wiped his hands on his apron and headed toward the door.

Mr. Owens didn't stop there, though. He headed toward his office.

That was odd.

But Frank followed and hoped this wouldn't take too long. His bouillabaisse needed to be started for dinner.

When they reached the office, Frank saw Chef Marques standing beside the manager's desk, dressed in a suit. The man looked out of place without his chef attire. Derby hat in his hands, he nodded at Frank.

Mr. Owens closed the door and stepped behind his desk. "Chef Henderson . . . Frank. You have been an invaluable asset to the El Tovar since its opening."

"Thank you, sir." Hopefully that wasn't an opening for his dismissal.

"Chef Marques is needing to leave us."

The statement hit him like a cleaver chopping through thick steak bones. The man had taught him more than anyone else in his life. He couldn't believe it.

"I'm sure you are very sorry to see him go," Mr. Owens continued.

"I don't know what to say, Chef," Frank stammered. "You have been—"

"It is time." The man's French accent was thick, even though he'd been in the States for many years. He dipped his head and twisted his hat before lifting his head again, a sheen of tears in his eyes. "You will do me proud."

Frank swallowed hard. Blinked against the burning sensation in his own eyes. How could he say good-bye after all this time? How could he say . . . thank-you?

Mr. Owens gripped Frank's shoulder. "We will have an announcement with all the staff later this afternoon, but I wanted to inform you that as of right now, as long as you are willing, you are being promoted to the head chef position at El Tovar."

Frank gasped. Not what he expected. It was hard enough thinking of Marques leaving. "Head chef." He mumbled the words.

"You deserve this honor, Frank." His mentor patted his arm.

Their manager raised his eyebrows as if in anticipation.

Oh. He was supposed to accept. He pulled himself together. "Of course. I am thrilled and honored, sir."

"Good. We are thankful to have you here. We will hire a new assistant chef within the week, but you have enough staff to make it through, I presume?"

"Yes." Clearing his throat, he shifted his brain back to the schedule of the kitchen. "If we have everyone pull extra shifts, we will be fine."

“Excellent. Chef Marques needs to leave on the train today, so I’m thankful you’ve got it covered.”

Frank looked from the manager to the man who’d mentored him the past four years. He could never repay him for all he’d learned. Fumbling around for words, he cleared his throat again to cover the lump that felt like rising bread dough. “I . . . um . . . that is . . . it has been a privilege to learn and work under such an amazing chef. I can’t thank you enough for the knowledge and skill you poured into me.”

Marques put a hand to his chest. “*Merci*. But it is I who should be thanking you. This is the first head chef position where I truly had an assistant—a right-hand man, as you put it. Most kitchens are full of egos and competitions, but *non*, we did not have that here. It has been *my* privilege, Frank.” He bowed at the waist.

Frank held out a hand. But the former head chef held out his arms and embraced Frank instead of shaking. “I will write letters. We share recipes, *oui*?”

Frank patted the man on the back and released him. “Yes, Chef. It will be like old times.”

With a nod, the man clamped his lips together, and headed out the door. But Frank had seen the heartache in the man’s eyes. He’d truly loved his kitchen and the people he worked with.

“Those are some awfully big shoes to fill, Mr. Owens. But thank you for the opportunity.”

“I’m confident you will do the Harvey name proud.” The manager’s broad smile was warm. “We’ve known each other a long time now and you’re one of my most trusted employees. It’s an honor to have you here, Henderson.”

“Thank you. Again.” He plopped his chef’s hat back on his head. “I better get back to work.”

As he left the manager's office and strode through the rotunda, he looked down the hallway into the dining room. Head chef! All he'd ever hoped for in his career, and it was now his. The steps through the dining room and into the kitchen made his heart pound. What an honor. And what a responsibility. *Thank You, Lord.*

With a glance at the clock on the wall, he went over the tasks for the day and looked at who was in the kitchen. Word would spread soon enough, so there was no need for him to say anything. Even though there was one person he wished he could tell before the news spread.

His face stretched into a smile. How would Ruth respond?

A pot clanked against the stove as one of *his* workers jostled about and brought Frank's thoughts back to the job—keep everything running smoothly, make sure delicious food was prepared, keep the guests happy and coming back for more.

The perfect job. Which he better focus on if he wanted to keep it.

Precisely at 10:45 a.m., Ruth walked into the kitchen. Every morning at this time, they went over detailed lists for luncheon and dinner. Secretly, it was the highlight of Frank's day.

With her dark hair piled on top of her head in that poofy bun that all the women wore these days, she was prettier than ever. The scars on her face weren't even visible anymore, but probably because she'd started wearing makeup as soon as she went back to work—something that Mr. Owens must have approved since none of the Harvey Girls had ever been allowed to do such a thing.

But she technically hadn't been a Harvey Girl since her

injury. As she'd healed, Owens had her doing tedious jobs with the books for the hotel and then had gradually given her more responsibility. Instead of being the headwaitress—of which she was the best Frank had ever seen—now she was the supervisor over the entire dining room and kitchen.

Her steps were a bit slow, but he didn't mind. After two years the limp was still there, but she covered it most of the time. Doc said that her leg would continue to heal but it didn't matter to Frank. She was still Ruth—feisty and accomplished and as pretty as ever.

“Good morning, Chef Henderson.” Her hands were clasped in front of her.

“Good morning, Miss Anniston.” He pulled the chart of workers and list of dishes from his desk on the side of the kitchen. “I have some big news.” He couldn't help but grin like a silly schoolboy. He'd been wanting to find her and tell her ever since he found out.

“Oh? Do tell.” She smirked at him and raised one perfectly shaped eyebrow. Her blue eyes sparkled in the bright lights of the kitchen.

“I've been promoted to head chef.”

Her grin spread across her face, and she glanced around the kitchen before squeezing his arm. “I know! I'm so proud of you. Congratulations!”

Of course she would know. She was in charge of the kitchen and dining room, after all. “I can hardly believe it. I mean, I hate that we had to lose Marques, but this is a dream come true for me.”

“You deserve this, Frank. And I couldn't be happier for you.” She leaned in close and squeezed his arm again before glancing around and resuming her stiff posture. Miss Professional Supervisor. “Is there anything important we

need to cover today? Because I'm sure you have your hands full."

While he'd hoped to chat as friends for a few minutes after he shared his news, he could see the trepidation on her face. The longer she stood here, the harder it was for her to sneak back to her office without a lot of eyes on her, which was her habit, even though she'd never say it aloud. The dining room opened again at precisely eleven in the morning. He handed her the chart and list. "Thanks for believing in me to do this job."

"You completely earned this on your own merit, Frank. As much as I think you're the best chef in the world, I didn't need to put in my two cents for Mr. Owens to make the decision." She waved the papers and turned. "Thanks. I'll see you later this evening."

With a swish of her skirts, she was gone. Head held high. Shoulders straight. Trying her best to keep her steps smooth and steady as she exited the kitchen. He'd watched her do the same thing every day for the past two years. Never allowing himself to tell her what was in his heart. And the couple times he'd tried when they weren't working, he had been interrupted. Which made him think God was having him wait.

Until when? Neither one of them was getting any younger. But Ruth wasn't ready. Not since the accident.

When would she see how valuable and cherished she was? That scars and limps didn't matter? That she was the most beautiful woman in the world?

The way *he* saw her.



MAY 5, 1909

KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI

Uncle Melvin would be proud.

After years of meticulous research and planning, Oliver had figured out a way to put his plan into action. A way to tarnish the Harvey name. And not just tarnish it but ruin it. For good. That would be the ultimate win for his family. To make up for the decades of disgrace and loss. The empire that should have been O'Brien. *Not* Harvey.

While the rest of the family wallowed in self-pity and poverty, sitting around rehashing the story, he'd made a name for himself and was determined to reclaim what should have been theirs. Uncle Melvin should have never gone into business with Fred Harvey. They'd had a thriving restaurant and saloon until that thief took off with every cent they had. All because he disagreed with Uncle politically. What a slimy, backstabbing wretch.

Oliver walked over to the chessboard under the window and looked at the pieces in play. He'd practiced his moves over and over again. Until he could capture the king each and every time. Perfect.

Granted, his initial attempts to put a dent in the Harvey Empire had been chaotic. Half-hearted. Not well thought out. He'd been young, stupid, naïve, and poor. It not only took money to make money, but it took money to *steal* money.

Things were different now. He was older . . . wiser. Richer. He knew his opponent better. He had a saboteur in place. Just like in studying the game of chess. If he had to lie, cheat, steal, even kill to accomplish his goal, he didn't care, because he would do whatever it took. Every time he heard

of Harvey's success, it dug the knife in a little deeper. His family could whine and complain all they wanted, but it wasn't helping them. He, on the other hand, had allowed the rage to boil inside him until revenge was the only way out.

He looked out the window and straightened his collar. This quick trip home would be his last until it was all over. The busy street before him would soon bear his family's name. It wouldn't be such a dingy place. He could turn everything around. His cousin's little restaurant, started by Uncle Melvin, could become something bigger. They would expand across the country. Just like Harvey, but they would do it better. And use *their* own name.

It would all come out. People would hear the truth.

It had taken a lot of time to learn the inner workings. To analyze the Harvey Company. The food. The Harvey Girls. The standards. To understand how the El Tovar succeeded. How a luxury hotel could exist in the middle of nowhere. The supply chain alone was outrageous. But because the wealthy wanted the best at one of America's wonders, Harvey made it happen.

Well, money could disappear.

Supply chains could be disrupted.

Accidents could happen.

Rumors could spread like wildfire.

People could even get sick.

Which would mean guests would stop coming.

Newspapers would write about the demise of Harvey's Crown Jewel and predict that the empire would fall.

And in time, it would. Just as the O'Brien Empire rose.

Wouldn't be long now until all the pieces would be captured. He'd take the queen—the El Tovar—and then?

Checkmate.