

TRACIE
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TRUTH REVEALED

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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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DECEMBER 1868

CHEYENNE, WYOMING TERRITORY

Laura Evans looked out the window at the snow-covered landscape as the train pulled into the Cheyenne station. After ten years living apart, she was about to be reunited with her father. At thoughts of Father, her fascination with the Western frontier faded, even as she surveyed the cowboy town that was to become her home.

Ten years.

Mama died in November of 1858. Consumption, the doctor said. A debilitating depletion of her body for which he had no understanding. And just a week after they buried her, Father sent Laura to boarding school over fifty miles away. Where he had gotten the money for such an endeavor was beyond Laura, but it had been her fate for the next decade.

In all those years, she'd only seen her father a handful of times. He had visited her at the boarding schools on several occasions and once during her college years. It had been six years since the latter visit. It came on the occasion of

Father settling her into the Tennessee women's college he'd chosen for her. Even with the war raging, he had figured her to be safe there. When that proved otherwise, and the college closed, Father had arranged for her to go abroad with a teacher to escape the ugliness of war. Now, the world was set right again—or at least it was no longer pitting brother against brother in a war that Laura still found difficult to understand—and she would soon be with her beloved father once more.

Granite Evans was the light of her life. He was her hero. Despite having sent her away, Father had always meant the world to Laura. He was generous and kind, making sure she had everything she needed. His absence had been difficult, but Laura had reminded herself that Father hurt just as much, perhaps more, in losing Mama than she did. She respected that he had needed time alone to grieve and mourn. It hadn't been easy for her, but Laura had been determined to be strong. She owed him that much.

"Cheyenne!" the conductor announced as he moved through the car. "All out for Cheyenne!"

Laura stood, adjusted her cloak, then brushed down the skirt of her burgundy traveling suit with her gloved hand. She wanted to look her best when she met her father again. She hoped—prayed—that he would be proud of her.

With the help of the porter, Laura stepped from the train, her travel bag clutched tight and her heavy wool cloak pulled close against her body. Father had told her that it would be cold in Cheyenne and to buy an appropriate wardrobe. She had taken the money he'd sent and did as instructed. As the December winds whipped at the hem of her cloak and skirt, Laura was glad she had listened.

She looked up and down the depot platform for some sign

of her father but found no one who resembled him. Six years was a long time, but she was certain he would look like he had when last he visited her.

Wouldn't he?

Making her way inside the depot, Laura shifted her bag from one gloved hand to the other. Quite a few people crowded into the building alongside her, and she allowed herself to be caught up in the flow of their movements. All the while she kept looking for the stocky, mustached man she knew would be there. And he was.

She spied him across the room talking with a couple of other men. She called out to get her father's attention. "Father!"

He looked up and caught her gaze. He smiled and quickly dismissed the two younger men. Crossing the room to greet her, he held open his arms.

"Laura!"

She dropped her bag and rushed to him. A sigh escaped her as his arms closed tightly around her. It was here she felt the safest and happiest. She thought of how few times she had known his tender embrace over the years, but she refused to let such thoughts discourage her. The fact that they'd had so little time together only served to make this moment all the more precious.

"Father, I'm so happy to see you again." She breathed in deeply of his cologne and the unmistakable scent of cigars and coffee.

"I thought you'd never get here. Welcome home."

Home. The word touched a place deep in her heart. She hadn't had a home since Mama died. Oh, but Laura had longed for one. She had enjoyed very little consistency as a child attending boarding school. Year after year, her father

moved her to a better, more stately and expensive school. As he was able to improve his own situation, he improved hers, never realizing that consistency would have been a bigger blessing than larger, more elegantly appointed rooms and educational halls.

Laura stepped back and studied her father from head to toe. He looked well and happy. “How wonderful it is to see you,” she told him. “I worried that I might not recognize you, but then I chided myself for such doubt. Nothing about you could ever seem foreign or strange to me.”

“And you.” He shook his head. “I had no idea you’d grow into such a beauty. You always favored your mother, but the last time I saw you, there were still remnants of childhood in your face and figure. That, alas, is gone for good. You are no more a child.”

“I was full grown last you saw me, or nearly so. Sixteen years old, in fact. Most of my fellow students were engaged to be married. I can’t imagine there being any remnants of childhood remaining then.”

“Well, there were. You were more gangly and awkward. Now you’re full grown and a lovely young woman.”

“Oh, Father, you do go on. Six years could not have made such a difference. You look the same as I remember you.”

“I’m an old man, and change is slower.”

She laughed. “You aren’t that old. Not even yet fifty.” She wrapped her arm around his. “I’m just so glad to see you again. I want to know everything that has happened to you in the last six years.”

He shook his head. “It’s more important we plan a future than lose ourselves in the past. That was the reason for our separation in the first place. A separation that has been difficult but necessary.”

She sobered. “And do you feel that time has healed your heart?”

“I will always have a place of emptiness where your mother once resided. She meant everything to me. You both did, but when she died, something in me died as well, and I knew I’d be no good to you. My poor precious girl.” He frowned, looking very close to tears.

Laura hadn’t meant to make him so uncomfortable, and in a public place. What was she thinking?

“Forgive me. This is a talk better suited to a private parlor.” She stepped back to where she’d dropped her bag and picked it up. Rejoining him, she gave her father a smile. “I have claim tickets for my trunks. Goodness, but I brought so much stuff. I got rid of as much as possible, but some keepsakes and pieces of memorabilia were impossible to part with.”

“It’s of no worry, as I told you in my letter. We are well-off now. I have a large home for you and staff to wait on your every need. I’ll give these tickets to my driver, and he’ll see to it that the trunks are delivered. For now, I’ll take that bag you’re carrying, and we’ll be on our way.”

She handed over her valise, then took hold of his arm. “I have dreamed of this day for so long.”

He led her through the station and outside, where the wind again whipped at her cloak from every side. Father approached an enclosed carriage as the driver jumped down from his seat in front.

“You have a landau,” Laura observed as the driver opened the door. “What a treat. I came fully expecting buckboards or buggies at best.”

Father assisted her into the carriage, and the scent of leather enveloped her.

Laura took a seat, and her father quickly joined her. He put her bag on the opposite seat and took up a blanket.

“I just had the landau delivered. It is a Christmas gift to us. As we rise to the top, it is only fitting that we travel in style.”

“It’s lovely.” She ran her gloved hand along the leather upholstery. “I’m sure no one has a finer one.”

“I have another smaller conveyance you can handle when you decide to move about town to see friends.”

“You sound as though you are very rich, Father.”

“I am. We are. It’s for you that I’ve labored so long and hard. If we’d had proper money, your mother might not have died. Destitute patients get very little attention, in either the hospital or the church.”

Laura hated to believe that her mother had died purely for lack of money, but Father had always insisted it was so.

“I’ve worked hard this last decade, bettering myself as I could. I invested heavily in the railroad, and it has done me well to be sure. There are, of course, other investments, and the ladies’ store. I think you’ll be impressed with what I’ve created there. I have items brought in from all over the world. Shipped right here to Cheyenne and made available to the women as if they lived in New York City or Paris.”

Pride was evident in his voice. Laura smiled but refrained from telling him that luxury meant very little as far as she was concerned. Many of her friends at school also had money, but even those of lesser means had been far better off than Laura. They had family. Mothers and fathers who came and took them away for holidays and summers. Laura had been left to travel with old-maid teachers or matronly facilitators whose children were grown. More than once she’d remained with the headmistress at the school all summer doing little more than reading and taking long walks. She used to dream

of her father showing up with a train ticket to take her away on some grand adventure. But he never came.

The carriage finally stopped, and the driver opened the door. Father was first to disembark, then he turned for Laura.

She gripped his hand and stepped from the landau to gaze up at a flat-faced white house. Snow lay all about the yard, where there wasn't a single tree or shrub.

The house wasn't anything elaborate on the outside. It was two-stories tall with a large square frame of white clapboard and multiple windows to break the lack of ornamentation. To one side there was a carriage house, but Laura couldn't see beyond that.

"This is only a temporary home," her father explained as they moved toward the front door. "I have property over on Ferguson and plan to build us a mansion. You can see, however, the beautiful windows. Those cost a pretty penny."

"I know they must have, but they're lovely, Father. I'm sure you've made it a wonderful place."

"Well, it will be a home now for sure, what with having you here. There's so much I want you to know about me, Cheyenne, and this territory. I intend to do big things here, Laura. Big things."

She'd gathered from bits and pieces in his letters that her father had taken a strong interest in politics. He had left more than one hint at hoping to get involved rather than just be a sideline supporter.

"I've no doubt you will, Father. How could you not? You've done so well in just one decade. Imagine what you'll accomplish in another."

He fixed her with a proud look. "Exactly so. Now come. I'll show you the house and staff." He opened the door and ushered her inside out of the cold.

Laura was glad to find the house quite warm. She'd never much cared for cold weather. Mother often said the blood of Alabama women was much too thin for the colder climates. Laura didn't know if that was true or not, but she always suffered during her travels in Europe when they ventured where it was cold. She supposed she would just have to get used to it now.

"This is my housekeeper, Mrs. Duffy," Father said as three strangers entered the foyer. "She's agreed to act as your lady's maid until you can find someone else. She doesn't live with us, as she has two teenage boys, but she comes every day from six in the morning to nine at night. Her days off vary."

Laura smiled at the dark-haired woman. "I'm pleased to meet you, Mrs. Duffy."

"The pleasure is mine, Miss Evans." She had a small frame, but there was an edge in her voice that betrayed strength.

"This is our cook, Mrs. Murphy."

Mrs. Murphy was a stocky woman with a serious expression. Laura had often heard it said that she should never trust a skinny cook. There was no concern of that here.

Mrs. Murphy looked to be somewhere in her late fifties or early sixties. She gave Laura a nod, then looked her up and down as though trying to assess how much she would eat. The thought made Laura smile once again.

"I'm sure you are a blessing, Mrs. Murphy. Good food makes all the difference in a household." Laura saw her comment caused the older woman's expression to relax just a bit.

"And this young man is Curtis. Curtis does whatever needs to be done with the yard and stables. He often works with Mr. Grayson, my driver and stableman."

It was clear that Curtis was uncomfortable. He couldn't have been more than sixteen or seventeen. Laura took pity

on him and offered him her best smile. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Curtis." The young man blushed and looked away after a brief glance.

Her father gave the trio a nod, and they all hurried away as quickly as they'd come. Laura untied her cloak, since the warmth of the room proved more than enough. Father put aside his hat and gloves, then doffed his coat and hung it on a nearby coat-tree.

"Not a very elegant approach to outdoor garments," he said, reaching for Laura's cloak. "But as I said, next year I intend to begin building a new and luxurious place for us. We'll have a full staff to take care of everything."

Laura pulled the pin from her hat and set both aside on a nearby table. Last of all, she drew off her gloves. "This looks like a lovely house, Father." She could see to his right that the pocket doors had been pushed back partway to reveal a large comfortable-looking room, complete with a hearth on the far wall. A fire blazed in welcome.

"It is sufficient for the time being, but I intend to better myself further. Many of us here feel the same. There are a great many quality families who have settled this growing community, and we intend to see that the elite make a clear and present mark on society."

Laura had never heard her father talk in this snobbish manner. She didn't feel it was proper to approach him on the matter her first day home and so gave a simple nod and followed him as he took her bag and led her upstairs.

"I'll show you to your room first. I hope you'll like it."

"I'm sure I will," Laura replied. "Everything seems perfect."

"I run a well-ordered house. Mrs. Duffy understands that and follows my instructions to the letter. I brook no

nonsense, as I have a great many important people who come here from time to time.”

She noted the highly polished oak banister and stairs. Mrs. Duffy apparently kept a very neat house. The upstairs hall was papered in a print of gold, beige, and green stripes, with prominent gold fleur-de-lis running down wide panels of powder blue. It wasn't something Laura would have chosen, but it gave the hall a touch of elegance.

A beige hallway runner covered the oak floors nearly wall to wall. A few decorative tables were placed between the multiple closed doors.

“My room is to the right,” Father announced, pointing. “If you should need me for any reason in the middle of the night, do not hesitate to knock on my door.”

“Thank you, I will.” Laura turned as he drew her to the left.

“The door to your right is a bedroom that has been appointed for sewing and storage. The next door is a bathing room. I had a copper tub brought in from Boston. It's situated beside a stove that can be used to heat the water and keep the room warm when in use. I find a hot bath to be one of those things I cannot live without.”

“How very nice.” Laura had wondered what kinds of things would be available for their personal needs.

“And this door on the left is your room. It's actually two rooms. They seemed rather perfect to join together, so I had a doorway created when I knew for sure you'd be coming home.” He smiled. “One can be used as your sitting room and the other your bedroom.”

He opened the door, and Laura stepped inside. The room had been furnished with a large wardrobe and desk of matching white oak. Dark rose-colored draperies were hanging at the windows, and a delicate print of pink roses on white

paper trimmed the walls. It had been designed with a young woman in mind. On the wall to the right was a small but efficient fireplace trimmed in white tiles with the same rose pattern as the papered walls. A fire had been built up, and it, along with the lamps, gave the room a beautiful glow. A large chintz-covered chair waited in welcome.

“I shall be quite comfortable here.” She turned to her father and kissed his cheek. “Thank you so much.” She ran her hand along the back of the chair. “It’s just perfect.”

“Nothing is too good for you, my dear Laura.” He patted her shoulder. “Now come see the bedroom.”

Turning away from the fireplace, Laura found the bedroom door already open. Inside was a beautiful four-poster bed and dressing table in the same white oak as the wardrobe and desk. The draperies and paper matched the sitting room.

“This is certainly everything a girl could want,” she said, touched at all the details her father had put into the setting.

She went to the dressing table and found all sorts of bottles of perfume and lotions for her skin and a delicate silver hairbrush, comb, and mirror set. A large framed mirror was attached to the dressing table so that she could simply sit and survey her appearance at will.

“It’s all so very nice, Father, thank you. I’m quite surprised by all of this. I read almost everything I could get my hands on about Cheyenne and Wyoming Territory, and I must admit, I wasn’t hopeful of finding much, but I am pleased to be mistaken.”

He chuckled. “We have worked hard to improve the situation in our little town. Mark my words, Cheyenne will one day be as fine a city as any other. Important people are making their mark here, and incredible things will be accomplished. You are to be a part of all that, my dear.”

She could see the excitement in his eyes. This was significant to him, and she intended to join in as much as she could. If only to please him.



Granite Evans settled into the leather chair behind his desk and considered the young woman upstairs. His daughter. His only child. He'd hardly seen her in the last ten years, and now she would be his constant companion. Could he still manage to accomplish all that he had planned with her under his roof?

All of Cheyenne's society would adore her. The men would line up to court her. He could probably arrange a lucrative betrothal. It was something he hadn't given much thought to, but now that she was here, he could see she was a valuable prize. There weren't that many women in Cheyenne, and certainly none as beautiful as Laura. She favored her mother more than he liked to admit.

When he'd first seen her in the depot, she had startled him. For just a moment, he thought Meredith had returned in all her youth and beauty. Cinnamon-red hair framing a lovely oval face. Dark brown eyes and full lips. Laura was the spitting image of her deceased mother.

Then again, Laura had always reminded him of her mother. It was the reason he had sent her away. He couldn't bear the constant reminder of what he had lost. Meredith had been his entire world. He had been nothing of value prior to meeting her. She had transformed him with her love, and her death had forever changed him. Even now, remembering her and what she went through stirred undiluted anger, as though he'd lost her only yesterday.

Granite would never forget the attitude of the doctors and

hospital staff when he'd sought help for Meredith. With no money to pay up front for the needed treatment, they had been given nothing more than the smallest bit of attention and then sent on their way. Knowing his wife's faith, he had gone to the church, as well, but found them equally callous.

With nothing left to do, he had contacted her well-to-do parents in Birmingham. Meredith had defied them and run away to marry Granite. They denounced her as their child and refused to even listen when he begged for help. They told him she'd be better off dead than married to a low-life gambler. Rejections from the doctors, church, and family had left Granite hard and angry, and when his beloved wife died, he vowed to make a success of himself in such a way that he could get back at those who had denied her help.

Her parents died before he could do anything to them, and their wealth passed on to a distant cousin. But then the war had come, and opportunities arose on every side. Granite had never been afraid to step over the line where laws were concerned. As the South's needs grew, he found ways to accommodate, using the persona of an Irishman named Marcus O'Brien, while Granite Evans kept his hands and name clean. Eventually, Granite had a team of men working for him. They smuggled goods, robbed warehouses and shipments of supplies, and did whatever it took to put money in their pockets.

Granite didn't care about the outcome of the war. He wasn't a patriot in any sense of the word. Let there be slaves or none. Let the states be in control or not. The only things he cared about were himself, Laura, and getting back at the people who had failed him.

Already he'd had some of his revenge on the hospital back in Alabama. After the war, he had pledged to give them an endowment and help rebuild and expand their facilities.

There had been a front-page photograph showing Granite with the smug-faced hospital board members to announce his decision. He felt a great sense of satisfaction in knowing they were confident of good things to come. But that satisfaction could not equal the feeling of accomplishment that came when he denied them the gift based on trumped-up charges. His accomplices had been able to create quite an ordeal for the board with declarations of moral lacking and scandals too great to mention in mixed company.

It had satisfied Granite's sense of revenge—to a point. They had no idea of the real crime he held against them. But he had no intention of reminding anyone of where he'd come from. Instead, Granite let them think what they would and suffer his decision as the reputation of their hospital was lessened in the public eye.

A dull thump sounded from upstairs, catching Granite's attention and reminding him that he was no longer alone. Having Laura here would create complications. Hopefully she'd be cooperative and easy to manage.

He poured himself a drink, then went to the window. Winter wasn't his favorite time of year. The weather was unpredictable—even deadly. Sandwiched between vast prairies and the Rocky Mountains, Cheyenne was at the mercy of a variety of elements. The wind in particular could be most annoying. Throughout the year, winds often caused a great deal of misery, but when combined with snow, the town could find itself seeking shelter for days.

For tonight, though, the winds were calm, and the weather at peace. Granite walked to the fireplace and finished his drink. He would meet with some of the business leaders tomorrow and put forth his proposals for town improvements to benefit as many as possible. He knew if he could convince

the others that his concepts were beneficial not only to him but also to them, they would go along with his ideas and remember Evans when it came time to vote in future elections. His popularity would also be sure to reach the ear of the president, who was charged with choosing a governor for the new Wyoming Territory. Thankfully, President Johnson had never gotten the job done, and the November election had given the office to Ulysses S. Grant. Grant was a man who was indebted to Granite. They'd met on many occasions during the war when Granite had shared information with Grant and produced supplies for the North. Of course, he'd provided them for the South as well, but Grant didn't know that.

With the money he made through underhanded means, Granite had been able to create a credible way of making money. Investing in the railroads had been a sure thing, especially after the war. The country was desperate for ways to unite once again. And of course, there was his idea for a large emporium. It was the perfect solution for moving products purchased both legally and otherwise. He'd started small at first, then increased in size—always selling at a large profit when he sold and moved to another location. Lady Luck was clearly his companion, and when he reached Cheyenne, the stage was set for the Cheyenne Ladies' Department Store—a grand and glorious emporium with multiple departments, focusing on all that any woman could ever desire in fashion, home management, and entertaining. He'd even put in a seasonal department just for Christmas decorations and gifts. That had proven quite popular.

Granite deposited his glass on the table, then headed to bed. He was quite satisfied with how he'd overcome the obstacles in his life, but now a new element had entered in.

Laura had come back into his daily life. At first he'd been rather alarmed when she'd written to say she'd completed her studies. But the more he thought of her being in Cheyenne, the more benefits he could envision. Tomorrow, he'd start to figure out what role Laura would play in his schemes.