

Chapter One

It was a cool July evening when Melissa stepped off the stagecoach steps into the small town of Gunnison, Colorado. After two long weeks on the trail she was hot, tired, and a mess. Once the driver had unloaded her luggage and boxes, she thanked him and headed to the general store. Before entering the store Melissa glanced around at what was to be her new home. It was a small town with dusty streets and very few buildings nothing like in the city. Few children ran around chasing the dogs and playing while the noise of the mill hummed in the distance. Being it was so close to supper time Melissa figured most folks were in their homes but hoped to find some friendly faces. She knew coming from the city life would be different here but she had always wanted to be a teacher following in her father's footsteps and when this opportunity came up she knew she couldn't turn it down. If this was where the Lord wanted her, she would make it work. Taking a deep breath and shaking off the last of her fears, Melissa entered the store hoping to get more information. Looking around there wasn't much, but the friendly smile behind the counter was pleasing, welcoming, and an encouraging relief.

"May I help you?" The lady asked.

"Yes, my name is Miss Melissa Cassidy. I was wondering if you could direct me to the Pastor," Melissa smiled shyly, taking off her gloves to shake the ladies hand.

"Oh, you must be the new teacher we've been hearin' about."

"She's too perty and young to be the new teacher," a man commented, coming up front.

"George," the lady reprimanded, "You'll have to excuse my husband; we don't get many new folk around here. My name is Martha Clem and this is George Clem."

"That's quite all right. Now if you would please, can you direct me to the Pastor?" Melissa asked politely, eager to get herself settled.

"Oh yes, you'll find him and his wife over at the church 'til six every evening. Their son's a doctor ya know. He practices right here in Gunnison," Martha smiled, rounding the corner to escort Melissa

back outside. “We can’t tell ya how much we’re glad you are here to help our youngens.”

“That’s nice,” Melissa politely smiled, not sure why Martha shared that information.

“Sure, we hope we’ll be seein’ ya around here lots,” George waved, as the two ladies walked out the door.

“Certainly.” Melissa replied, leaving with Martha.

As soon as Melissa walked outside a gust of wind blew in her direction. She grabbed her hat on her head to hold it on. “You’ll soon be learning to not be needing that on your head around here. Things that pretty don’t stay that way too long,” Martha replied, just as a little boy approached them.

“Hi I’m Tommy, my Pa sent me here to get ya. He told me just to put yer stuff in his wagon.”

“Hi Tommy, you must be the Pastor’s son,” Melissa replied, already wanting to correct his speech.

“Yup, one of ‘em at least. So where’s yer stuff?”

“Over there,” Melissa replied, with a light chuckle, pointing to the post office. “Thank you,” she sighed.

“Well good day Miss Cassidy, hope to see you around again soon,” Martha said walking back inside.

Being from the city Melissa knew living in the country would take some work, but she was determined to make it happen. She decided to help Tommy, to hurry things along. Once the wagon was loaded evening began to settle in, and the night chill came out. Melissa shivered as she wrapped her shawl around her a little tighter. Although the church was within walking distance from the post office, Tommy insisted that they drive the wagon over to it. Melissa smiled at the quaint little church as they approached. While walking up the steps they could hear the piano playing softly. Walking in Melissa looked around the room surprised how small it seemed. There was room to probably seat about sixty people and up front was a small pulpit with a simple piano in the corner. There Melissa saw an older woman playing the music she had heard outside. Walking in more she could see a door leading to the back of the church which she assumed was the Pastor’s study. Tonight though she found him at the pulpit writing intently with his Bible open. By now it was almost six and Melissa was getting hungry and anxious.

“Pa, she’s here,” Tommy stated, flopping down into the back pew.

“Ah, Miss Cassidy it’s a pleasure,” the Pastor smiled, walking toward Melissa to shake her hand. “I’m Pastor Timothy O’Day and this is my lovely wife Sara. I see you’ve met one of my sons, Tommy.”

“Yes,” Melissa said. “He was most helpful.”

“Good, good that’s great. I suppose we could wrap things up here and go eat,” Timothy said, grabbing his papers.

“My girls are at home getting supper ready. You can take some time to relax. I’m sure you’ve had a hard trip.” Sara smiled, ushering Melissa back outside. “Our house is half a mile from here on the edge of town. We would have preferred it closer, but we took what we could get.”

“If you don’t mind me asking. When will I get a chance to see my place? I really would like to get settled.”

“It’s too late now. Tomorrow’s another day. For tonight you will be staying with us at our place. It will give you a chance to relax and start out fresh in the morning.”

“I am very tired, thank you for your generosity,” Melissa replied, feeling the trip all over her body.

Pulling up to the house Melissa was surprised to see a nice sized garden and a rather modern house. The house was light blue with white trim. Sara had brightened up the place with flowers in window boxes and flowers along the path of a white picket fence. Melissa smiled at the homey touch.

“So how many rooms are in this home?” Melissa asked, noticing the size of the house.

“There are three rooms upstairs, two bedrooms downstairs, a study, the kitchen/dining area, a living room, and a room in the back for bathing.”

“That’s what I would love to do,” Melissa sighed, longing to get the dust of the trails off her.

“It looks like Grant made it,” Timothy replied, heading toward the barn after helping both ladies down.

“Grant’s our eldest son,” Sara explained, ushering Melissa inside. “He’s the town’s doctor and lives in the back of his office. He likes to visit all the time.”

“Mama,” two little ones called, running over to Sara and hugging her.

“Hi my loves,” Sara smiled, hugging her kids a little tighter.

Melissa stood back shy to her surroundings. Soon a nice young lady walked into the room followed by a younger girl holding a baby.

“Dinner’s just about ready mama. Just wash up and we can eat,” the young lady said.

“Good. Miss Cassidy here is probably very hungry. Where’s my other younguns?”

“Out in the living room with Grant,” one of the other girls piped in.

“Wonderful, why don’t you go get them for me,” Sara smiled.

The kitchen was soon full of youngsters as Melissa stood back smiling at them. She had heard about woman on the frontier having lots of babies, but coming from a family with three children this was a little overwhelming. While Melissa stood there watching Sara greet her children a handsome gentleman walked in bending over and giving Sara a kiss. “Hello Mama.”

“Hello Grant.”

So that’s Grant, Melissa thought. He had a gentle low voice and a welcoming smile. His hair was a dark brown almost black and his eyes were hazel. He was tall and well-built, a spitting image of his father only younger.

“Children I’d like you all to meet Miss Cassidy. She’s your new schoolteacher. Miss Cassidy this is my family. Grant our oldest is twenty-five, then we have Ruth who’s twenty. Emily seventeen, Edward now sixteen, and you met Tommy, he’s thirteen. Oh and I missed Kendra, she’s fourteen, next we have Elizabeth who’s nine, the twins Karen and Jeremiah who are six, that little one over there is John who’s four, and last and never any more, my baby Matthew, who’s one.

“Wow, so many,” Melissa gasped.

“When you get to be forty-five dear, you have the right to be blessed with so many children,” Sara smiled. “Unfortunately Ruth will be getting’ married next fall, so we’ll be losing another one.”

“Are you married Grant?” Melissa asked, suddenly feeling her cheeks turn red with embarrassment.

“No not yet. I find my work keeps me too busy for anything else,” Grant calmly replied, not affected by the question.

“You smell pretty and have such pretty clothes,” Karen said, coming over to Melissa.

Melissa knelt down to her level, “Why thank you Karen. I came from the city where they sell nice smelling perfumes and things.” She then took off her hat and set it on Karen’s head. “How about since I’m not in the city anymore you can wear my hat while I’m here tonight?”

“It’s so beautiful,” Karen looked on wide-eyed. “How do I look Mama?”

Grant watched the entire transaction take place smiling at the care Melissa immediately showed toward complete strangers. He hoped she would be a good asset to the town and children.

About that time the Pastor entered. “I see you’ve met my bunch. I hope that means we can eat now.”