

THE ADVENTURES OF A MAIL-ORDER BRIDE IN
JEROME, ARIZONA TERRITORY • 1894

UNDER A

COPPER
MOON



A NOVEL BY

GREG LILLY

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CHAPTER ONE

She knew one thing as a solid truth: no one would love her as her mother had. Inez closed the door of the small home to the clop, clop, clop of horses on hard red clay and the rattle of wagons wallowing down the rutted road. She avoided the few mourners who still lingered in the parlor of her mother's house and crept into her bedroom. The quiet murmurs of "Ain't it pitiful" and "She got to learn things early" and "Inez is so young" combined with the sad and sorry stares of neighbors and church members clouded her mind from the events of the day, but a chilly stream of understanding woke her from the haze. Now, at sixteen, she was alone in the world.

A timid knock at her bedroom door, followed by the gray walnut-head of Mrs. Hammonds peeking through startled Inez. The slight gap Mrs. Hammonds had pushed open allowed for privacy and confidential talk without a full commitment of entering the room. "Dear," she began, "you holding up?"

Supporting herself with the help of the old cedar wardrobe, Inez considered the question; no, she was raw; no, things would never be the same; no, her mother was dead. "I'm fine." Her own voice troubled her by its steady and strong resolution.

The door creaked open a little more, but Mrs. Hammonds still did not allow her body to step into the bedroom. "When your pappy passed on all those years ago, I never thought Sara would last this long—all alone... Well, if there is anything me or Thomas can do for you, you just yell." With that, she pulled the door closed as her

little head retreated back.

Inez wanted to scream, to stretch her mouth as wide as the river and shriek like a bobcat. And cry; cry like she had when she was a baby in her mother's arms—strong arms that would never hold her again.



William Grayson, the town bachelor, stopped by her house a few days later. He held his hat in his hand, twisting it as she opened the door. "Miss Inez," he stepped back from the threshold and off the stoop, crushing a two-foot high milkweed, "would you come out to talk to me for a while?"

The sight of 28-year-old William, nervous as a rabbit because of her, intrigued Inez. He had never married and still lived with his mother, which she thought displayed a fine quality for a man. To sacrifice starting a family of his own to help his mama with her seamstress work, well that just showed fine character, at least that's what her own mother had always said when the other women whispered about William.

"William, it's awful hot out. You can come inside." She pulled the door open wide for him as the summer heat spilled into the house.

"No, no, Miss Inez. It ain't right for an unmarried man and woman to be alone inside. You can come out here in the yard. Sit over here in the shade of the woodshed with me."

Propriety didn't mean scratch to her; who cared what people thought? Maybe seeing her and William going into the house together would give the old ladies something to talk about. But, she could see sweat rolling down the side of William's flushed face either from standing there in the sun waiting for her or from his nervousness, so she stepped down to the split-log step and out across the barren yard to the shed, shooing away a couple of chickens. William followed a few tentative feet behind her.

"Yes, William? What'd you want to talk about?"

He settled a respectable distance from her on the bench. "I

wanted to tell you I was sorry about your mama's passing. She was a fine woman."

The familiar hurt rumbled in her soul as his words brought the reality to her mind again. "Thank you."

"I brung you this newspaper from Charlotte," he handed her a creased paper. "It has your mama's listing in it. Thought you might like to save it."

From the fold, she saw the simple notice that her mother had left the world. She imagined her mama reading it and being proud that she had made the city paper. Now, Inez, just a shadow of her mother's size, but with the same cornhusk-colored hair and weary blue eyes, carried on the family name. She wondered if she would be the end of the Watkins line.

William sat still, sweat lingering on his forehead.

"Thank you," she said and placed the newspaper in her apron pocket. "That's the end of us."

"And that's... I... Well, it's..." The words refused to come to him, and Inez feared she knew where those forced beginnings would lead.

"William, you don't have to—"

"Yes," he awkwardly slipped from the bench with a crack of his knee hitting the packed red-clay dirt. "Miss Inez, I know you're all alone. One day I will be too. Mama ain't as spry as she used to be. I been thinking. Well, me and you..." He inhaled deep, then let the words wash out, "You should come live with us, as my wife."

She had hoped a proposal of marriage would come from love, or want, or even barnyard desire, but she knew that at sixteen with no family and no dowry but the slumping house in front of her, she couldn't expect much. Although, she did expect something more than pity, and that was what he and Mrs. Grayson had for her. She wanted a husband; someone to take care of her and she could take care of him. They could be as happy as her parents had been. William searched her eyes, so she glanced at the few logs left in the wood stack. "Thank you for asking, but I can't say yes. It's too soon after Mama died."

His body had stopped shivering in the heat; she felt he must be

relieved. “But,” he sat back up on the bench, “how will you live alone?”

“I have my garden out back, these few chickens, and that old cow for milk. Besides, my aunt and cousins aren’t that far. Maybe just a couple of days travel. I’m fine,” she said. Then added, “Thank you for asking. There probably ain’t another man in town who would take in an orphan like me.”



Her letters to a cousin in Greenville, an aunt in Charleston, and another cousin in Kershaw didn’t receive replies. She considered loading up her trunk of clothes and a few of her mother’s books and quilts, packing the wagon, and arriving uninvited on her aunt’s doorstep, but the thought of traveling that far, alone, and with an uncertain reception, frightened her more than staying in the house and surviving on what she could find in the garden. Her few hens had stopped laying eggs on a regular basis; she had fried the rooster, maybe the hens protested that decision. The cow’s milk had dried up, and she had exchanged that old cow for the overdue bills at the mercantile. Using her father’s rifle, she tracked through the woods and fields searching for rabbits, but once she had one in her sights, she dropped her aim when she saw it had a mate nearby. She couldn’t bring herself to widow a rabbit.

The legend of Annie the Witch came to mind as she wandered back to her empty house and yard. Annie had lost her husband and sons to Yankee cannon fire, then living by herself, she ran out of food and roamed into the woods to scavenge. Town people later said they caught sight of Annie with tangled hair, torn clothes, and no shoes dancing in a forest clearing to the full moon’s light. They said the devil had married her to keep her from dying alone.

The summer sun warmed Inez’s back as she hummed a childhood song about Annie the Witch and scratched in the dusty rows of wilting potatoes. By her side, a skinny white chicken called Sally kept her company. “Sally,” Inez said stopping to rest under a shady sycamore, “we don’t have much left. As a matter of fact, we didn’t

have much to begin with.” Sally cocked her head then picked at a feather on her wing.

Her tears had dried up with the summer drought, but Inez remembered her mother every time she walked into the old house; the air still held her smell: warm cornbread and butter. Milk thistle, polk, and dandelions had grown up in the front yard, but she didn't have the energy to keep it cut back, and besides, she substituted polk and dandelion leaves for lettuce in her meals. None of the neighbors checked on her anymore, not that she expected them to continue; she wasn't their responsibility. Pecking the chalky dirt, Sally fished for a June bug. Inez watched, then pulled the tattered newspaper out of her apron pocket and re-read the advertisement.

Two other chickens, each a bit plumper than Sally, roamed the yard. With the advertisement safely tucked back in her pocket, Inez grabbed a startled rust-colored hen and held it down by the neck on a hickory stump, then with one swift hatchet chop, severed its head from its body. Inez turned away until she guessed the bird had stopped flopping on the stump. One last scrawny chicken and stewed weeds supper in South Carolina, she reasoned, then a new life rises with the sun.



Rattling over rough tracks, the train pitched back and forth into a steady rhythm that Inez let her body sway along with. She sat near an open window that allowed in some fresh air, but coal smoke drifted in with it every time the train twisted to the right. The women surrounding her seemed to be just the same country folk as her, except Inez knew she had to be the youngest. The other women in the passenger car had the appearance of years of working a farm in the sun, raising babies, scrubbing clothes, and gathering firewood. Maybe these women are here because their husbands died, she thought, because surely they had had husbands to look so haggard. Her hands held tight to her canvas bag containing her money, change of unmentionables, her mother's Bible, and her father's traveling pistol.

The woman sitting across from her forced a smile and asked “Are you as scared as I am?”

“Yes, I think so,” Inez smiled back at the woman with crow-black hair and a barrel of a bosom. The woman’s face held a grin, or a grimace, that Inez hoped meant she was friendly and not going to take her bag away from her with those big bear-claw hands. Face powder had settled into the creases of the woman’s jowls giving her the lines of a catfish.

“This is as far from home as I ever been,” the woman said and shifted her weight in a quick waddle on the pine bench. “What ‘bout you?”

“Yes ma’am, this is as far as I been too.” Calm settled on her as she talked to the big woman. She leaned forward, over her canvas bag, “I drove my wagon up to Charlotte this morning to meet with Mr. Dula; he took it as my payment for this ticket.”

The big woman tipped toward her, and Inez sat back to stay a safe distance away. The woman whispered, “Honey, you didn’t need to pay for this ticket. The man out west is paying expenses.”

Anger burned her cheeks as she realized Mr. Dula had talked her out of her horse and wagon, but she didn’t have anywhere to put them... But, dang it, she could have sold a horse and wagon in the streets of Charlotte for some good money. A deep breath to settle her nerves helped, but Inez bet the woman thought she was a foolish little girl for letting Dula take her horse and wagon.

“By the way,” the woman smiled crooked teeth at her, “my name is Gertrude. Just call me Gert. What they call you, Honey?”

She thought about making up a name, to become a whole new person with a new past, a different past, a more exciting past, but her imagination failed her. “Inez,” she finally said.

Gert held out one of her big bear hands, but Inez pulled her bag closer to her. “Pleased to make your acquaintance,” Gert pretended to shake hands with Inez. “I find this quite exciting, going to a new place, but I hear stories about the West, you know about Indians snatching white women.” Something funny must have occurred to Gert because she laughed a little covering her mouth with her large hand. “I’m probably too much woman for some Indian to throw

over his saddle and ride off with.”

The image of Gert being thrown over anything brought a giggle out of Inez too. “I don’t worry none about Indians. The few around home are just as nice and polite as the preacher’s wife.”

“Well, that may be,” Gert said, “but I still heard a lot of stories.” She glanced out at the thick trees sweeping by the window. “Any idea where we might be? That looks like the Smoky Mountains coming up. Once we get over them, it’s pretty much down hill from then on.”

The question Inez yearned to ask surfaced, but she dismissed it as being too personal. But, weren’t they all going for the same reason? Why not ask? Why not talk about it? She sat her bag at her feet and leaned toward Gert. A faint scent of roses lingered around the woman. “Do you know him?”

Gert sat back, “The man I’m going to marry?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“No, Honey. Do you know yours?”

She guessed she could admit it, since Gert didn’t know either. “No, but I was told he’s a fine gentleman with wealth from mining.”

“Mr. Dula told you that?” Gert asked.

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Honey, he told me the same thing. You think we’re marrying the same man?” Gert laughed a hearty laugh and slapped Inez on the knee.

Afraid she might be going after the bag, Inez kicked it under her seat. “You don’t think so, do you? I mean I heard of Mormons out there having a whole herd of wives. You don’t think we’re heading for Mormons, do you?”

Gert sat back and crossed her arms over her vast chest. “Better not or I’ll grab me an Indian and throw him over my shoulder to be my husband. I ain’t putting up with no other wives.”

Inez ventured another of her list of questions, “Do you know exactly where you’re going? Which town?”

“All I know is I ride this train and,” she looked at her papers, “switch in Chattanooga, then Memphis, then up to Kansas City, then

I jump on the Kansas Pacific line going to Denver. Whew, that's a lot of train hopping. What about you?"

Inez pulled her bag from under the bench and dug out her own piece of paper wrapped around her tickets. "Me too, but in Kansas City, I go on the Santa Fe line to the Arizona Territory, switch in Flagstaff to a local train, then" she caught her breath, "to Ash Fork then to Jerome Junction." She looked up and smiled. "A copper mining town," she revealed to Gert as if she might be impressed.

"Honey, sounds like we're not marrying the same man." Gert rummaged through a straw bag next to her and pulled out a fried chicken leg. "Here, Honey, eat something, it's way past supper time and I don't think this train is going to stop until we hit Chattanooga in the morning."

Inez thanked her and sank her teeth into the cold chicken that tasted a hundred times better than her old, tough, skinny hens back at her mother's house in South Carolina.



After helping each other learn the ways of the different train stations and eating a lot of greasy food in the railroad establishments, Inez and Gert parted ways in Kansas City, but Gert promised to write as soon as she got settled in Denver. Back on another rattling train, Inez daydreamed about the life of luxury and romance that the gentleman in Jerome would give her. Her budgeted money allowed her one good meal a day at a whistle stop around noon, then she would snack on bread or crackers until the next day. She tracked the amount of money she spent against how much she had expected, then adjusted accordingly; her mother had always stressed the importance of money and how to keep track of it. The Santa Fe line didn't have as many single women as the Eastern trains. Families and men now out-numbered the lone women; Inez kept to herself, but always sat near a family instead of a group of men. If some man said howdy to her, she would respectfully smile and then look down at her open Bible, not that she was actually reading the Good Book, but she held it in her hands as a lucky charm.

She watched the women. Did she know how to act like a lady? Had her mother taught her right? These women sat quietly with their babies and young children; even a five-year-old girl had the teaching to stay calm while her brother pointed out the window with excitement at buzzards coasting circles above a field. Ladies learned the proper way to behave: no bloomers, petticoats; no slang, speak correctly; no face paint, no flouncy clothes, no exposed limbs, no imbibing alcohol. She knew what to do; she could be a good wife, as good a wife as any. With that settled in her mind, Inez pushed up the window allowing the wind to blow past her face.

The flat lands of the prairie seemed to stretch for a thousand miles as she watched bigheaded, woolly cattle, which someone called buffalo and bison, graze near the tracks the train sped over. She missed the lush green trees and grass of the Mississippi Valley; all she saw now was dirt-colored. The land, the animals, the people, the buildings, everything had settled in hues of brown. As if her prayers had been answered, the train chugged up hills, higher and greener. Shrubs of juniper and pinyon and sporadic stands of pines spotted the sharp, rugged ridges and valleys, so unlike the rolling, gentle slopes of the East. The Western landscape intrigued Inez with its raw beauty, a little dangerous looking, but definitely a refreshing change from the dusty bland plains.

Before the train stopped in Gallup, of the New Mexico Territory, the conductor walked through the car taking lunch orders for the restaurant. "Eat one of the best meals in your life," he announced. "See the world famous Harvey Girls and be served in luxury. This is a treat for the weary traveler. Gentlemen need to wear their coats in this establishment." He walked down the aisle, jotting things in his notebook, and when he came to Inez, he asked, "Lunch counter or dining room?"

"How much?" She worried that such a fancy place wouldn't fit her budget.

The conductor grinned, "35 cents for lunch counter, but for 50 cents in the dining room, you'll get your choice of steak, chicken, duck, turkey, a lot of vegetables, and plenty of dessert. All you can eat. Plus," he glanced down at her budget scrawled with numbers,

“it’ll fill you up until tomorrow morning.”

She ordered the dining room meal, and as they pulled into the Gallup restaurant. Young girls, not much older than her, in starched aprons and simple black dresses, their hair tied in back by a single white ribbon, escorted the passengers to their tables and immediately began serving food. Inez drank iced tea and ate roast sirloin, English peas au gratin, sweet potatoes, some sugar cured ham, beets, French slaw, and for dessert, she tried cantaloupe, peaches, and custard. The Harvey Girls kept bringing food, until Inez could eat no more.

“Do you like the West?” Inez asked a Harvey Girl who looked about her age as the girl refilled her iced tea.

“Yes, ma’am. We meet a lot of interesting traveling people. And,” the girl looked around as if getting ready to share a trade secret, “most of the girls find husbands. It’s rare to find a Harvey Girl that has worked for more than a year.”

“Good men?” Inez asked.

“Bankers, lawyers, company men,” she boasted and collected empty plates from Inez’s small table, “and a few cowboys and miners, but mostly impressive successful men.”

“I’m on my way to Jerome, a copper mining town,” Inez said. “I have a man waiting for me there. It’s been a long trip. I’m a bit scared.”

“Don’t worry,” the girl said. “The men here are so much better than the Eastern men. They have respect for women because there’s just so few of us.” She glanced around, “Do you want me to wrap up some ham biscuits for your traveling?”

“That would be right kind of you,” Inez said.

“I know how the trains can get,” the Harvey Girl said. “Take something with you. How many more days do you have?”

“I should be there by morning. The biscuits will make a nice supper.” She wondered if things didn’t work out if she could be a Harvey Girl. “Does Mr. Harvey hire girls with no experience serving?”

“If you can stand on your feet all day and be sociable then you can work here. Like I said, we’re always looking to replace newly wed girls.”

Back on the train, she napped a few hours then snacked on her ham biscuits and slept again until the sun rose and the conductor walked through announcing Flagstaff of the Arizona Territory. Her new life was budding.