

Chapter 19

Two days after the Howard's house fire, Hannah received word that Duncan's lawyer wanted to see her. She hoped it wasn't bad news. She needed something to lift her spirits. She had been out of sorts since the Howard's house burned down, only having seen Gerrit twice. The first was the next afternoon, but he was contemplative and in a hurry. Then this morning she had hardly been able to say good morning when he smiled and said he had some important business to attend to and would see her later.

She was ushered into Mr. Humphry's office at his residence by his wife. His mahogany paneled office, though spacious, felt small. The heavy velvet drapes cut off half the light that struggled to gain entrance. Even on this bright, sunny day he had a lamp lit to read his papers. She resisted the urge to throw back the drapes and tie them out of the way.

He clasped both his plump hands around hers. "Miss McConnell, it's so good to see you. I hope you are holding up well in spite of your grief."

"I'm doing well." She sat in the offered chair.

"Good. I haven't much time right now, I'm expected at the courthouse, so I'll get right to business. I have good news for you."

That was a relief. But she couldn't imagine what he required of her good or bad.

“I wasn’t sure how long I would have to hold on to this and am pleased to be able to turn it over to you.” He opened a file cabinet drawer and withdrew an envelope from one of the files, handing it to her.

She broke the seal and slipped the contents out. There was a smaller envelope with her name on it in Duncan’s handwriting and a document that had Majestic Resort on it. “What is all this?”

“Duncan owned a share of the Majestic Resort. Now it’s yours. He asked me to wait until I thought you were ready. I figured after how well you are getting on with Mr. Coughlin, that the reservations Duncan had were all for naught.”

She looked up sharply. “You have been misinformed. I do not get on well with any Coughlin.”

“But at the Howard fire?”

She hadn’t known any of the Coughlins were there. It surprised her that they would dirty themselves to help others.

“You have been seen about town with him.”

Had Mr. Humphry gone daft? “Not only do I not socialize with Mr. and Mrs. Coughlin, but I have never set foot in that resort and never plan to do so.”

Mr. Humphry leaned back, supporting his ample weight on the edge of his desk. “I am not referring to the senior Mr. Coughlin, but rather his son, Gerrit Finnley Coughlin. I have seen you myself in his company, smiling. I assumed you got on well with him.”

Unmoving, Hannah stared at the lawyer. Gerrit Finnley...*Coughlin!*

“I see I may have put the mule before the cart. But what is said is said. I have betrayed Duncan’s confidence, for that I am deeply sorry. I truly thought you knew.”

“This-this is impossible. Gerrit is Duncan’s nephew. He can’t be a Coughlin.”

“Duncan was Mrs. Coughlin’s brother.”

“No. I would have known. Duncan would have told me.”

“Your mother made him promise not to reveal his relationship to Mrs. Coughlin.”

“No, this isn’t right.” She handed the envelope and its contents back to him.

He refused it. “Whether you choose to believe or not, you own a share of the Majestic Resort. You have since Duncan’s passing.”

How could he have lied to her all these years?

She folded the papers and put everything back into the envelope. She stood and stretched out her hand. “Thank you, Mr. Humphry, for all you have done. Good day.” She turned and left.

How could she have been so blind for so long? Her mother lied to her. Duncan lied to her. And Gerrit lied to her. He was the worst of them all. The only one who hadn’t lied was Father.

No, Mr. Humphry, this was not good news at all!

Chapter 20

Gerrit waited impatiently in the dressmaker shop for Hannah to return from her errand. Maybe she had gone to visit Tiny on her way back. He headed for the door.

Once outside, he saw Hannah striding toward him, but she was looking to the ground with her brows knit together and her lips pinched. What had put that scowl on her face? He had hoped she would be in a good mood to receive his news. Maybe he could fix whatever was troubling her and put a smile back on her face. He crossed the street to her. “Hannah.”

She looked up and her glare deepened.

He hesitated. “You look troubled.”

She pulled her hand back and slapped his face without breaking stride. She stepped off the boardwalk to cross the street.

He stood stunned. It hadn’t hurt. She wore gloves and hadn’t hit that hard. It was the action itself and in public that was the real affliction. He didn’t have to ask what it was for. She had found out his secret. He pulled himself together and caught up to her. “Hannah, I can explain.”

“You lied to me, *Mr. Coughlin*.”

That removed any doubt about her mood. “I never said my surname was Finnley. You took it upon yourself to call me that. I asked you to call me Gerrit. And my middle name is Finnley.”

She stepped up onto the boardwalk on the corner by the bookstore and turn on him. “A lie of omission is still a lie.” She swung back around and into her shop.

Gerrit stared after her a moment. He couldn’t deny he had kept the truth from her. He knew it was wrong and that it would hurt her. Leaving his heart behind, he walked to the Majestic Resort. As it said in the Bible, there is wisdom in counsel. Entering his parent’s apartment at the back of the resort, he stretched out on the couch and plopped a pillow onto his face.

“What is wrong? Are you sick?” He could hear the concern in his mother’s voice.

“Hannah found out the truth.”

“Found out? Oh dear.”

He removed the pillow. “She slapped me.”

“As well she should for keeping something like this from her. You should have told her from the start and won her from there. You are far worse off now than you would have been if you had made an honest start of it.” She handed him a cup of coffee.

He sat up. “You and father never told her.”

“That was different. We made a promise to Irene, her mother. It has not been easy. I, for one, am glad it is finally out in the open.”

In a way, he too was glad it was out in the open. Hannah was right. He’d lied. The weight of it now lifted left him with the ruins he’d created.