

## Chapter 5

Gerrit stared at the closed shade in McConnell's Dressmaker Shop. He'd found the simple act of escorting her to and from the Wilsons' home quite enchanting. Hannah was indeed a woman worth remaining in Faithful for. Not that he would, though. Gerrit checked the lock on the bookstore and headed up McConnell Ave toward the resort.

Hannah McConnell had captured his interest with her first words and a quick smile. But this bitterness she harbored he couldn't understand and he wanted to. How could a sweet, beautiful young woman like her have so much contempt for another person?

He had been irritated at his uncle for leaving him anything. Uncle Duncan's brother, back east, was the one out of work and needing a job. Gerrit's life was waiting for him back in Harwood, Massachusetts. He was second in command at the firehouse. Then there were his friends and church. His mother would argue it wasn't much of a life, but he was happy with it. She wanted him married but all the interesting women were already attached.

The young ladies looking for a husband would act just as they were supposed to until they caught a man. How could a fellow get to know a lady's heart, the real person? He pitied a few of his friends. If they'd had a chance to see behind the masquerade, they would be bachelors too.

He didn't want a giddy schoolgirl, but Hannah was no capricious girl and old enough to be wedded. She was confident enough to speak her mind with passion. Already in one day he knew her better than ladies he had known for years back east, batting eyelashes behind fluttering fans.

His uncle had tried to get him to come out to visit, especially the last three or four years. What his uncle hadn't accomplished in life, he had in death. Why hadn't Gerrit come sooner? This visit would be much more pleasant with Uncle Duncan alive.

What was a fireman going to do with a bookstore? Hannah wanted him to keep it, so part of him did too. He wanted to know everything about her, like why she wasn't married. He was sure she wasn't married, but she could have a suitor. But if she did, wouldn't he have come to escort her tonight? Hannah McConnell was most likely completely unattached. Something in the way she answered when he suggested she already had a dinner companion. His mouth pulled up in a smile. Maybe Uncle Duncan had done him a favor after all.

He stopped on the corner of McConnell and Irene Street, and stared at the resort. What was he going to do about that? It was a bur in Hannah's side he desperately wanted to remove.

He turned west and headed up to the McConnell Faithful mine. It was where Hannah's father had hoped to make his fortune. And her childhood home.

The seasons had bested the cabin. Tilted away from the hillside, the sad structure was defying gravity and time. The little building was doomed to failure . . . and soon.

The mine entrance had enough boards nailed over the entrance to keep out a determined grizzly bear. An aged wooden cross tilted on its side stood in the center of where the opening had been. Carved in the crossbeam was Samuel McConnell 1880. There wasn't enough room for any words of endearment. The carved letters had been painted in, in black not more than a month or so ago. The small memorial must have tipped over since then.

He found a fist sized rock, straightened the cross, and pound it back into the ground. Satisfied, he turned toward the Majestic Resort. He filled his lungs, then sat on a large rock near the mine's entrance, and sought wisdom from the Lord.

## Chapter 6

Gerrit stepped into *McConnell Dressmaker and Millinery Shop* and was greeted by a warm smile from Hannah.

“Good morning, Mr. Finnley.”

He scowled at her playfully. “I thought you were going to start calling me Gerrit.”

Hannah set aside what looked like white kid leather and stepped around her worktable. Her eyes twinkled. “I never said that, Mr. Finnley.” Her smile tugged higher up her cheeks.

He gritted his teeth and tried to ignore her blatant defiance. He had really come just to see her smile. He had already accomplished that and should probably go back to sorting Uncle Duncan’s things. But he wouldn’t. Tedious work.

“What can I do for you?”

He walked among some of the bolts of fabric. “I came to commission a shirt.” That was news to him. “You do make men’s clothing.” There was no evidence of it. She would say no and that would be the end of that.

“Not normally, but I did make all of Duncan’s clothes. I would be happy to make a shirt for my dear friend and benefactor’s nephew.”

His head came up. She would do it? “Benefactor?”

“I didn’t know until his will was read that he owned this shop and not my mother and I. He left it to me.” Her eyes glistened with tears.

No, don’t cry. He did not handle crying women well. He needed to distract her. “So how do we start on this shirt?”

She blinked several times to clear her eyes. “What kind of shirt do you require?”

He raised an eyebrow. “The kind that resides under my jacket.”

Her smile was back. “I know where one wears one’s shirt. What I don’t know is if this shirt is for work, or church or perhaps something more fancy.”

How was he supposed to know that? “For church I guess.” Then she pelted him with more questions on cuffs and collars and plackets and fabric types. He never knew so much went into one shirt. Some of his shirts were ready-made and others were homespun by his mother. She still made him clothes and sent them to him. He had never had one professionally made.

After all the questions were answered and he had picked a nice white silk, she pulled out a measuring tape. Now that he recognized, the one familiar thing in this whole process. He removed his coat and waistcoat to allow her to measure him. The scent of lilacs drifted up to his nose as she stretched the measuring tape over him this way and that.

“One more measurement.” She slid the measuring tape up from around his waist to his chest just under his arms. “Forty-th--”

Her gaze locked with his and neither of them moved. Hannah was close enough for him to feel her breath fan his chin. He liked her proximity and didn’t want to do anything to make her move. Her gaze slipped away when the door opened. A blond woman entered who appeared to be slightly taller than Hannah. Hannah turned and greeted her warmly.

He hoped it wouldn't cause Hannah any undue embarrassment to have him alone in her shop half undressed. He quickly donned and buttoned his waistcoat. Hannah brought the blond woman over to him. She carried a little extra weight on her frame but it didn't detract from her pretty face.

"Alice this is Mr. Finnley, Duncan's nephew. He's taken over Duncan's bookstore. He's commissioned a shirt, and I was taking his measurements." She turned. "And this is Miss Sharpe, my assistant."

Gerrit nodded, as she balanced the pie she held in her hands. "Miss Sharpe, I'm please to make your acquaintance."

She giggled like a schoolgirl.

He sighed to himself.

The demure mask that so many wore was upon Alice's smiling face. She would act as society dictated like so many unmarried women, but Hannah was different. Hannah would call him Mr. Finnley not so much because it was "proper" but out of sheer stubbornness he was sure. Or until she was forced to call him something else or he made her change her ways.

Alice handed the pie to Hannah. "It's peach. Granny's been baking again and sent this over for you. I told her I didn't know what you would do with a whole pie but she insisted."

"You'll have to stay for dinner and help me eat some of this."

"I can't. Holace is coming over for dinner." Miss Sharpe's cheeks pinkened. Holace must be someone special. "Granny made two peach pies from what she canned last fall. Says she has too much to use up before fruit comes back in season. She'll use them all up then complain she doesn't have any fruit to eat."

The women seemed to have forgotten he was there, so he just listened. See what else he could learn about Hannah. She obviously didn't have dinner plans or any other plans tonight.

"I don't think any of that pie will go to waste." Alice glanced at him. "I better get to work on Mrs. Sutton's dress . . . unless you finished it." She headed for the back of the store.

"You know I didn't. I spent the evening with Tiny."

Alice stopped and turned. "How is the dear old woman?"

"Fine, as always. Are you sure I can't talk you into dinner?"

"Sorry. Granny would scold me like there's no tomorrow if I abandoned Holace." Alice continued back to her work place.

"You can talk me into dinner." He spoke softly so Alice couldn't hear.

Hannah turned but wasn't chagrined as he would have thought at him boldly inviting himself. "It's just stew and biscuits."

"And peach pie." He wiggled his eyebrows.