

Chapter 11

Gerrit sat in the leather chair in the corner of the store where he had found Hannah the other night. He sorted the letters his mother had given him by the date and filed the ones he had found here in Uncle Duncan's things with them in order.

September 7th, 1870.

My dearest brother, Duncan,

I was so delighted to receive your letter. I was afraid you perished on your long journey. I hope you are tired of Colorado and are ready to return home.

The letters unfolded a story of love and commitment and determination to succeed on ones own. Apparently Uncle Duncan tried a number of times to get Sam McConnell to get investors and get him out of that dreary mine. But Sam didn't want to be beholden to anyone and wanted to be sole owner of his resort hotel.

He read half the letters before he succumbed to reasoning and headed off to get a little sleep.

It was two days later before he could get back to reading the letters. The last one he opened was dated after his mother and father had moved to town.

My dear sister, Eleanor,

I shall be at your apartment on Thursday for our usual visit. I have a concern I wish to discuss with you and wanted to give you time to think on it before I come. It is Hannah. She worries me more than ever. If she is not working in her shop, she is at the bookstore fussing over me. I have invited several young men over but none have caught her eye. I'm afraid her heart is set and not where it should be. I would be ever so grateful for any advice you could bestow on me.

Your loving brother, Duncan.

Who was Hannah's heart set on that was so disagreeable to Uncle Duncan? He pictured Hannah in the bookstore curled up on the couch, then her tears as she hurt for her loss. He envisioned her a few years younger sitting there, reading with his uncle. Cooking him meals. Measuring him for a new shirt.

He reread the letter and stood completely still forcing the fledgling thought at bay. When he could wait no longer, he drew in a breath and the thought took form. Hannah was in love with Uncle Duncan!

He set the letter aside and stood abruptly. No! It couldn't be!

Chapter 12

Gerrit waited until he was sure his mother was up or at least should be, and went over to the plush apartment. If she wasn't up, she soon would be. Or maybe his father would be around.

When Gerrit walked into his parents' living room, his father was wrestling with his tie in the mirror. "Your mother can do this the first time around."

Gerrit smiled. "I assume Mother isn't up yet."

"She was up again last night fretting over her eldest son."

"I'm sorry to be a bother."

"There I got it." His father turned from the mirror. "It's no bother. She misses having you children around to worry about. If it wasn't for your sister Penelope being here, we might have moved back east. She wants to be close to her grandchildren. But with Duncan gone now, we may just sell this place."

"You would do that?"

His father walked over to the credenza. "Coffee?"

Gerrit nodded and went over, picking up a cup.

His father filled it. "Your mother still hopes to talk Charlotte and Hugh to move out here. I think she might be wearing them down. Hugh could be a big help here. I'm not getting any

younger. I wish your brother had chosen to stay here. But you didn't come to talk about all this. You wanted to talk to your mother. Is it anything I can help you with?" He stirred cream into his coffee.

"It's concerning Miss Hannah McConnell." He took a sip of the steaming, dark brew.

"I was surprised you've been able to converse with her at all until your mother told me your secret. Are you wanting to know how to confess to her?"

"No. I'll tell her soon. Mother gave me some old letters. One of them alluded to the possibility that Hannah was in love with Uncle Duncan."

His father took a drink of coffee. "This is definitely your mother's area of expertise. But I think you should just ask Miss McConnell about it. You don't want to have a thing like that lingering in the shadows."

Gerrit set his cup down with a clank. "I can't just ask her!"

"Not all the same social rules apply here as they do back east. It's a different kind of country out here."

Gerrit nodded. He had felt the less high-strung atmosphere, but there were changes in the air even for the most uptight circles back east. They might be long in coming, but change was inevitable.

"Women are not always easy to figure out, Son, that's for sure. Your mother and I have prayed for Miss McConnell often."

"Keep praying because I'm going to need a lot of it here real soon."

His father swung on his coat. "I'm sorry. I have to be off. This place won't run itself. I hope I've been of some help. You can wait for your mother if you want and see if she has some

other advice. She would know better than me in matters concerning women. And she would love to be able to help.”

Gerrit poured himself another cup of coffee and waited.