

### Chapter 13

At church on Sunday, Hannah took Sophie aside after the service and spoke to her in confidence. “I am happy to tell you your doll has a body and some of her under-things.”

“Oh, can I come over and see her.” Her smile faded and she ducked her head down. “Mama said not to bother you.”

“You tell your mama I have invited you for tea tomorrow and I will be very hurt if you don’t show up.”

Her smile stretched wide across her thin face and she ran off in the direction of her mother. She skidded to a stop and came back part of the way. “Thank you. I will come. Mama just has to let me. I’ve been invited!”

Hannah smiled after the girl then swung her gaze around the crowd still lingering on the church lawn in the bright sunshine. Mrs. Coughlin’s gaze was upon her. She wore a cream linen dress, her brown hair pulled up into an elegant twist with jeweled picks. The woman gave her a gentle smile and a regal nod. Hannah still didn’t understand how people like the Coughlins could one day try to take people’s homes and the next sit in church. Though it was not her preference, Hannah politely returned the nod then turned to walk away.

“Leaving without your escort?” Gerrit came over to her. He looked particularly handsome today.

“I don’t see how people can sit one pew away from the very people whose homes they tried to take away.”

Gerrit looked in the direction of the Coughlins. “Maybe they weren’t trying to take the Wilson’s and their neighbors’ homes but trying to make them better for the people who live there.”

“Knowing what I do of them, I find that unlikely. They have done nothing but swoop in and try to take over the town. I fear oneday they will succeed. I would like to leave now.” She started walking.

Gerrit fell into step beside her. “Do you know the Coughlins well?”

She honestly didn’t know then at all and preferred to keep it that way. “I know all I care to know about them. Can we speak of other things?”

Ever since Duncan’s death, she sensed that there was more change in the air for her. It gnawed in the pit of her stomach. And the Coughlins would be at the heart of it. If that were the case, it wouldn’t be good. For her or the town.

## Chapter 14

Gerrit wished he understood Hannah's distrust of the Coughlins. He wanted to press her further on the matter but let it drop .

The earlier Sunday clouds had succumbed to the sun's heat. Gerrit ducked out of the way as Hannah pushed up her parasol to keep the strong heat from her. They walked along Church street up Duncan Ave and across on Jack street. She said she preferred not to walk up McConnell Ave and have the Majestic Resort looming before her the whole way. It mattered not to him which route they took.

He hoped she was in a talkative mood today. There was more than just the Coughlins he wanted to know about. "I must admit I have found myself concerned about you. I fear that your mourning for my Uncle might be too great for you to bear." His mother had warned him to tread carefully on this subject and no matter how desperate he was to hear the words from Hannah, he was not to ask her out right.

"I miss him terribly. It was nearly unbearable until your arrival." Her lips turned up in a gentle smile.

His heart thumped out an erratic beat. "I'm glad to hear I have been of some comfort. I was afraid your hurt was deep and would take a great deal of time to overcome."

“My grief is deep indeed. Though not related by blood, he looked after me as a father. He even told me he thought of me as a daughter or a niece.”

That didn't tell him how she felt about his uncle. “And you thought of him likewise?” That was close to asking her if she had been in love with his uncle. He hoped he hadn't stepped over the boundaries of propriety.

Silence seemed to wrap around Hannah. He wondered if she would say anymore on the subject.

She spun her parasol. “Would you permit me the privilege to bend your ear on the subject of your uncle?”

“Permission granted.” It had been the point of him bring up the subject. Now if she would willingly give up the information he desired.

“I didn't always think of Duncan as a fatherly figure. When I was eight, I told him I wanted to marry him when I grew up. After Father died when I was nine, I noticed something in the way Duncan looked at Mother. I was a child and didn't understand. Now I know he was in love with her. After Mother died, Duncan was the only one I had left. He took care of me and soothed my aching heart. For a time I thought I loved him.”

This was it. What he wanted to know. His heart felt heavy at the knowledge, and he could feel his shoulders droop with the weight of it.

“Your uncle was so sweet. The pain in his eyes when he broke my heart touched me, though I cried for a week and refused to speak to him. He told me he understood how painful it was to be near the one you love and not to have them. I feared he would leave me and I would have no one. I thought if I cooked and cleaned for him he would see he needed me and would

marry me. Somewhere along the way my love for him changed. When he passed away, I mourned the death of another father.”

Surprise would not adequately describe Gerrit’s reaction to her forthrightness. But there he had it. She had been in love with his uncle but upon his death, she grieved him as a father. Relief washed over him like a summer rain. Her heart was not buried with his uncle. His heart became lighter, and he smiled.