

TRUTH BE TOLD



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To Dave and Katie:
Your unceasing inspiration and encouragement
keep me going.
Without you, this writing adventure would
never have been possible.

To Kevin and Samantha,
Emmalee, Madilyn, Wyatt, and Benjamin:
as you begin a new adventure of your own.

“If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

John 8:31b-32 (NASB)



CHAPTER I



GRANITE SPRINGS, ARIZONA TERRITORY
MAY 1893

Amelia Wagner stepped down onto the platform of the Granite Springs train depot and drew in a deep breath of clean mountain air. She closed her eyes to sort out the different scents tingling her nostrils—the sharp tang of pine trees growing on the nearby slopes, the pungent odors of fresh-cut lumber wafting from Martin Gilbreth’s sawmill, and the fragrance of the creosote bushes that dotted the hillsides of Arizona’s high desert. The scents mingled together to form a fragrance more pleasing than the costliest perfume any Denver emporium had to offer.

Amelia took in another deep breath, savoring the fragrance of home.

“Welcome back!”

Amelia’s eyes flew open, and she spotted Thomas Rafferty, station agent for the Prescott–Phoenix Railroad. Prior to that, he had served as the stagecoach depot agent for the local line and had been a fixture in Granite Springs for as long as Amelia

could remember. He nodded a cheery greeting as he rolled a hand truck laden with wooden crates into the depot.

She grinned back at him. “Where are my peppermints?”

Mr. Rafferty set the hand truck upright and patted his pockets. A slight flush tinted his weathered cheeks. “I’m afraid you caught me unprepared. I didn’t realize you were arriving today, or I’d have stocked up.” He tilted his head and chuckled. “Besides, I expected you outgrew that sweet tooth of yours.”

Amelia brushed his apology aside with a laugh. “No need to worry. Standing here on the platform just brought back a host of memories. Getting a peppermint drop from you whenever I came home is one of my favorites.”

The flush on the station agent’s cheeks deepened as he tipped the hand truck back and wheeled it toward the doors. “It was always a special day when you arrived. It’s good to have you here again, and I know your dad will be glad to see you, too.”

As Amelia watched Mr. Rafferty disappear inside the depot, out of the corner of her eye she saw someone approaching on her right. She swiveled around to see a lanky cowboy striding along the platform.

He swaggered up to her and tipped his hat. “Afternoon, Miss. I’ve always thought Granite Springs was a right pretty place, but the scenery got a whole lot nicer the moment you stepped off the train.”

Amelia straightened her shoulders and looked the brash young rider straight in the eye. “Thank you for the compliment, but you seem to be under a misapprehension. I’m not a stranger here—I was raised in Granite Springs. I’m not some Eastern debutante ready to swoon at the sight of her first cowboy.”

A dark red flush rose from the man’s shirt collar to his

hairline. “Beg your pardon,” he mumbled. “I didn’t mean any offense.” Ducking his head, he trotted down the steps to the street below and hurried on his way.

From her position on the station platform, Amelia turned her attention back to the bustle surrounding her. A smile curved her lips. Though small compared to Denver, the town had grown since her last visit.

An incredulous gasp from the street caught her attention. Two matrons stood engrossed in conversation just below where Amelia stood. The taller one drew back and pressed her fingers to her lips. “You can’t mean it! The bank is going to foreclose?”

Her companion nodded vigorously, setting the long black feathers on her hat into a bobbing dance. “I heard it straight from Bart McCaffrey’s wife. My husband says it’s due to poor business management, but . . .” Her voice trailed off when her eyes strayed up to the platform and focused on Amelia. Nudging her friend with her elbow, she gave a sniff, and the two women moved several yards away, out of earshot.

Foreclosure? On McCaffrey’s property? Amelia forgot her embarrassment at being caught eavesdropping in her eagerness to make a note of what she’d heard.

Why, oh why, had she packed her notebook in her trunk? She scrambled in her reticule and pulled out a scrap of paper and a pencil. One of the first things her father ever taught her about journalism was the need to jot down details while they were still fresh in her memory. With the information she provided, he or Homer Crenshaw, his able helper, would be able to track down the rest of the story.

Or . . . She caught her breath. Maybe she could persuade her father to let her chase down the facts and write the story

herself. What a wonderful way to begin this summer's visit to Granite Springs! Her heart quickened at the thought.

She scribbled a quick note, then looked up to see a tow-headed boy about six years old rolling a hoop along the street in front of the platform. The hoop suddenly appeared to take on a will of its own and veered from its path straight toward the spot where the two matrons stood.

Neither woman seemed to notice the hoop until it struck the taller one from the rear. She let out an indignant yelp and turned to locate her assailant. Her face tightened when her eyes lit on the boy.

“Come here, you young scalawag!” She reached out as though to snag him by the ear, but the youngster evaded her fingers with ease.

Snatching up his hoop, he called out a quick apology and scampered off. Seeing the impish grin on his face, Amelia doubted that the incident was entirely accidental.

She pressed her lips together to hold back a smile at his antics and scanned the street, hoping to catch sight of her father. It wasn't like him to miss her arrival. Where could he be?

There had to be a good reason. Being the editor and publisher of the *Granite Springs Gazette*—as well as its chief reporter—filled nearly all his waking hours. Perhaps he'd gotten wind of a good story and lost track of the time.

The office of the *Gazette* was only a few blocks away. Amelia glanced over at her luggage. Her trunk would be safe under Mr. Rafferty's watchful eye. Her valise was heavy, but she could manage to carry it that short distance.

Hefting the small bag, she made her way down the steps and walked briskly up First Street, studying the false-fronted

buildings along the way. The land agent's office sported a fresh coat of creamy yellow paint instead of the graying wood she'd seen on her last visit. A steady stream of people flowed in and out of Kingston's General Store, and a neatly painted sign reading *Bon-Ton Café* hung over the building where the Coffeepot Café used to be. Amelia felt her stomach rumble at the thought of food.

She scanned the street again, and her lips curved in a broad smile when she saw Homer Crenshaw making a beeline for the depot. That confirmed her earlier supposition—her father must be on the trail of an important story if he had to send his right-hand man to meet her.

She watched Homer's lanky form as he walked along with a purposeful stride, obviously a man on a mission. His bowler hat didn't completely hide the wisps of white hair sticking out in wild disarray atop a frame so spare that it seemed as though a mere puff of air might blow him into the next county. Anyone seeing that scarecrow-like form for the first time would never guess that Homer was not only a whiz at operating a printing press but a competent reporter in his own right. If her father was the captain of the *Gazette*, he couldn't have asked for a better first mate.

“Miss Wagner? Amelia!”

She looked over to see Emmett Kingston hailing her from the front steps of the general store, just beyond the café. She stopped and waited while he loped across the street.

His path and Homer's converged on her at the same instant. Homer came to a halt when he spotted her on the boardwalk in front of him.

Amelia bounced on her toes, scarcely able to contain herself as she waited for him to break into the glad smile of welcome

that always lit his face when she arrived. To her surprise, his expression remained solemn.

Emmett Kingston stepped up onto the walk beside them. “I thought that was you.” The merchant wiped his hand on the front of his storekeeper’s apron before extending it to her. “I’m sure glad to see you here. Tell your father I’ll be by to visit in the next day or so. It’s a shame . . .” Kingston’s voice trailed off as he focused on a point over Amelia’s shoulder. She turned in time to see Homer finishing a shake of his head.

“We’d best be on our way,” Homer said. “Good to see you, Emmett.” He reached for Amelia’s valise and set off at a rapid pace.

“We have a new eatery in town.” Homer pointed to the Bon-Ton on the other side of the street.

“I noticed that,” she panted, trotting to keep up with his long-legged stride.

“The food there is quite tasty,” he continued. “‘Blithe souls and lightsome hearts have we, feasting at the Cherry Tree!’”

Amelia laughed out loud. She had grown up hearing Homer quote snippets of poetry at odd moments. The lines from Wordsworth made her feel even more at home.

Homer’s mouth curved in a shadow of its usual smile, but the expression in his eyes remained bleak.

Something was wrong. Amelia felt sure of it, but she had no idea what the problem might be. Trying to keep her voice light, she asked, “Where’s Papa? Out chasing down a story?”

Homer’s lean face tightened even more, and his eyes took on a shuttered expression. “He wasn’t feeling up to it today. Didn’t he write to you about that?”

“He mentioned not feeling well, but that was last month. You mean he’s still ailing?”

Homer kept his eyes focused on the street ahead and drew a ragged breath. “He’s worse.”

He pulled off his hat and ran the fingers of one hand through his hair. White strands stood out in a billowy cloud around his head. “But he’s looking forward to seeing you. Let’s keep moving.”

Two blocks later, they reached the two-story, whitewashed board-and-batten building. A sense of belonging swept over Amelia at the sight of the sign hanging above the door, proudly emblazoned with the name *Granite Springs Gazette, A. J. Wagner, Proprietor*, and directly underneath it, a line that read *Job Printing*.

Homer swung the door open with his free hand, and she stepped inside. At first glance, nothing had changed since the last time she’d set foot in the newspaper office. The smells of ink and paper permeated the large room dominated by the sturdy Washington Press, her father’s pride and joy. On the far side of the type cabinets, she could see the smaller Peerless jobbing press. To the right of the stairs in the rear, the door to her father’s office stood open. From where she stood, Amelia could see one corner of his oak rolltop desk. At any other time, she would have headed straight to it to flesh out the notes she had taken at the station, but today concern for her father overshadowed her urge to get to work.

She walked to the back of the printing office, intending to climb the stairs that led to the second-floor living quarters, but Homer’s voice stopped her.

“No need for you to go up just yet. I’ll carry your valise to your room.” He skirted past her and started up the steps.

Amelia followed on his heels. “I don’t mind waiting to

unpack until after my trunk arrives, but I want to go up and see Papa first thing.”

Homer half turned to face her, but his gaze didn't quite meet her eyes. “He's been staying down here since he took sick. We fixed up that little storeroom near the back door when going up and down the stairs got to be too much for him.” He turned and went on up, leaving Amelia standing with one foot on the bottom step.

A wisp of apprehension wound its way up her spine and coiled around her heart. Until that moment, Homer's words hadn't fully struck home. Her father's recent letters had mentioned not feeling well, but they'd given no hint that anything serious might be going on.

Now she wondered whether he had been completely open with her. *If Papa can't manage the stairs, how sick is he?*