

Chapter 1

June, 1932

Rose floated down the dark tunnel. In the distance, she saw a soothing white light. She reached for it and her heart filled with joy.

She heard a whoosh and found herself in a lush green meadow blooming with tall grasses and colorful wildflowers.

At the edge of the meadow, a figure slowly materialized and walked towards her. As he came closer, a kaleidoscope of colors swirled his features, then quickly dissipated.

Her husband's dark hair was tousled, his eyes as arresting as they'd been on the night they met. She could see the wide grin on his ruggedly handsome face. Rose gasped as her being was flooded with memories of their first meeting so many years ago.

"Gavin!" she shouted as she ran toward him, her elderly body suddenly young and carefree. Her aches and pains were gone. There was no tightness or pressure in her chest.

When she reached him, she stopped and breathed deeply. "Here we are together again – two souls who were wandering from one life to a next, and now we are reunited."

His eyes sparkled with timeless charm and he smiled warmly but held his hand out to stop her. "It's not your time, Rose. You must go back."

She ignored his hand and wrapped her arms around his body, comforted by his familiar strength. "I'm sick, Gavin. It's my heart, and I'm so tired. I just want to be with you. I've given this world all I can. Let me come with you and our souls will be united for all eternity."

He kissed her gently, stirring up longings she hadn't felt in years. "I want to be with you too, but not yet." He chuckled. "You always were impatient. You have to

learn to be in the present moment.”

“I know what I want, Gavin. I want to be with you.”

His tone grew serious. “You still have unfinished business to take care of before you can come over the Bridge of Life. When you complete your task, I’ll be waiting with a bouquet of flowers.” He touched her face and smiled tightly. “I’ve had time to think here. I never meant to betray your trust, Rose. I am truly sorry.”

Tears welled up in Rose’s eyes. “That was so many years ago, Gavin. I’ve forgiven you. You are free from what happened between us.”

Gavin gave her the look that had always made her ache with longing. “That’s still no excuse for my actions. I never meant to hurt you. I got caught up in the matters of the flesh.”

“You were only a mortal man. You need to let it go.”

He smiled roguishly. “Only an angel could forgive me.”

“I forgive you, but I am no angel.”

Gavin laughed. “You were more like a vixen in bed.” His handsome face grew serious. “It’s time for you to go back, my love. I promise we will see each other soon. It won’t be too long. Please know that I am always with you. Our love has no earthly boundaries.”

He kissed her on the forehead and his form faded.

Rose heard a pop, opened her eyes, and surveyed her surroundings. She was back in her bedroom in Minden, Nevada. Sunlight bathed the room with a soft glow. Tears filled her eyes as she glanced around at the familiar floral wallpaper and sturdy furnishings. The dream had felt so real. All she wanted was to be back in Gavin’s arms.

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The doorbell chimed and Rose’s shoulders tensed. Why had she agreed to this meeting? Some things were better off left in the past. She picked up her cane and

walked slowly toward the front door.

Gavin's large portrait still hung in the hall. At the urging of a friend, he had commissioned it after his first year in politics. She softly brushed her fingers across his lips, remembering how they felt on hers. She longed to touch him again and feel his strong arms around her body.

She knew deep in her soul that it wouldn't be that long. The doctor had given her less than three months to live, and while she was uneasy about what really happened in the next life, she was ready. Her body, mind, and soul were tired.

Rose stood erect, opened the front door, and gasped. "You look so much like your mother," she said to her granddaughter. Adele had red hair like Rose and Cathleen, although Rose's hair was now gray. Adele's hair was short and sweet.

The young woman standing before Rose wore a chic dark green suit with matching hat and carried a small tan suitcase. Black patent leather pumps and a stylish green purse completed her outfit. Adele smiled nervously. "It's nice to see you, Grandmother. It's been way too long."

"I'm sorry, Adele." Rose blinked hard. "I've seemed to have misplaced my manners. Please forgive me." She opened the door. "Come in."

Adele walked into Rose's house, her heels clicking on the polished wood floor. She leaned over and kissed her grandmother's papery cheek. "I'd like to make up for lost time." She set her suitcase down. "Mother sends her love."

Of course she does, Rose thought. "When you return home be sure and give her mine. Maybe I'll make it up to Reno one of these days."

Rose and Gavin's daughter Cathleen had married Preston Hobbs, a wealthy banker fifteen years her senior, and abandoned her life in the Carson Valley for the bright lights of Reno. Preston was a widower and had been in the market for a new wife. Cathleen had only been too eager to oblige. She jumped into her role as Mrs. Hobbs, running the large mansion that overlooked the Truckee River.

Adele walked past Rose and down the hall, stopping in front of Gavin's portrait. "He was such a handsome man. I imagine you miss him."

"Every hour of the day," Rose admitted, following behind Adele. The sound of the cane marked Rose's deliberate steps on the hardwood floors. She turned her head so her granddaughter wouldn't see her struggle to take a breath. Only Sally and Doctor Friedman knew about her condition and Rose planned on keeping it that way. She detested sympathy.

They entered the living room and Adele walked around, picking up faded framed photos from Rose's past, studying them, and putting them back. "Do you miss the ranch?" Adele asked.

Memories of the many years she had lived in the Carson Valley danced through Rose's mind. "There are times, but I'm getting on in years—and chasing all those cattle is hard work."

Rose rang a small bell and a middle-aged woman walked into the room. "Sally, this is my granddaughter, Adele. Please put her suitcase in the guestroom and set the kettle on for tea. We have some catching up to do."

Sally, a small, thin woman in her forties with mousy brown hair, nodded. She had been with Rose for many years and the two women were close. Rose felt that Sally was the daughter she should have had—not the spoiled, petulant one she had been gifted by the Universe.

"Pleased to meet you, Miss Adele. We've been expecting you." Sally picked up Adele's suitcase. "Shall I unpack your bag and hang your clothes in the closet so they don't wrinkle?"

Adele smiled. "That would be wonderful. Thank you, Sally."

As Sally took the suitcase to the guestroom, Rose studied her granddaughter. Adele seemed to be genuine, warm, and gracious—unlike her social climbing,

pretentious parents.

Rose had been caught off guard last week when Adele had called and asked if she could visit. During the phone call, Adele mentioned she had questions about her grandparents, but Rose wanted the past to stay locked away. Adele pleaded, and Rose reluctantly invited her for a short visit.

“I’m pleased you are here,” Rose said, “but I don’t know what questions you want answered. I’m sure your mother told you everything about the ranch and our life in the Carson Valley.” She smiled. “Your mother never liked living out there. I’m sure city life suits her much better.”

Adele laughed. “She mentioned she didn’t like the smell of the animals and all the manure. If Mother had her way, she’d be living in some fancy neighborhood in San Francisco, not on Court Street in Reno. She thinks Reno is a small town.”

“It is, compared to San Francisco,” Rose agreed.

“Unfortunately for Mother, Father is still working at the bank and seems in no hurry to retire.” Adele chuckled. “Then he would have to spend time with her, and between you and me, I don’t think that’s what he wants to do. Mother can be difficult.”

Rose winced as she remembered Cathleen’s teenaged years. “So, why are you really here?”

Adele cleared her throat. “I’m studying journalism at the University of Nevada and I plan to write a series of articles about your amazing life. I want to hear about your love affair with Grandfather. I would like to know about your life on the ranch, Grandfather’s political life, and all the things you did for the Carson Valley. I want to commit it to the page so others can learn.”

Rose glanced at a photo of her with Gavin, taken a few years before he had passed. She knew that everything changed. Time moved along, no matter how hard you attempted to stop, change, or rewrite it. “There’s not much to tell. Your

grandfather and I had a great life together.”

Adele green eyes twinkled mischievously. “I’m sure there’s much more to your story, Grandmother.”

Rose thought wishfully to the past and cleared her throat. “Your grandfather and I were devoted to each other during our marriage. I hope you get to experience a great love. Life is too short to settle for less.”

Adele blushed. “I have no plans to settle for less, Grandmother. I want it all—a career and a marriage.”

Rose grinned. They were similar after all. “There is no reason you can’t.”

“Try and explain that to my mother.”

“She was always definite in what she believed.”

“She hasn’t changed.” Adele reached for Rose’s hand and led her to the couch. Rose sat and placed her cane to the side. “It feels good to be off my feet,” she admitted. “Growing old is not for sissies.”

Adele sat next to her and smoothed out her dress. “I’ve discovered some articles about the history of your ranch and your marriage. One of the articles talked about the great love story that was your marriage and how you and Grandfather were equal partners in a time when women didn’t have the vote and there was no equality in a marriage. I’d like to know more, Grandmother. You experienced a modern marriage and I’ve never witnessed a great love. My parents and all their friends have married for convenience.”

Rose took a deep breath. “Not all marriages are as they seem.”

“But your marriage was different,” Adele exclaimed. “Or at least it appears to me from what I’ve read.”

Rose stared off into space. “It does seem like many women marry for convenience, money, or status. I married your grandfather for love.”

In her mind’s eye, Gavin stood before her, strong and healthy. He had been

forty and she had just turned twenty-six when they married on that glorious September day in the little church in Genoa, Nevada, a few miles south of Minden.

“I still struggle with the fact that he’s been gone all these years,” Rose continued. “I know he’s watching over me on the other side of the veil. When it’s my time to leave this earth, he’ll be waiting for me with a bouquet of flowers.”

“Flowers?”

Rose smiled. “Your grandfather used to go out into the garden and cut beautiful bouquets and arrange them in a vase and place it by my side of the bed. He said it gave the room the smell of heaven.”

“That’s a lovely gesture,” Adele said. “The only time Father brings Mother flowers are for Valentine’s Day and her birthday.” She grinned. “See, I told you.”

“Told me what?”

“That your marriage was different than others.”

“Flowers should brighten a marriage with regularity and partners shouldn’t take each other for granted. Life is short.”

Adele looked wishfully. “From what I’ve heard about Grandfather, I’m sad I never really knew him.”

“You were pretty young when he died,” Rose reminded Adele. “I remember his passing like it was yesterday. He had contracted influenza in the epidemic of 1918 and became violently ill. He was in his early eighties, and at his age, he couldn’t fight it.”

“That must have been difficult to watch the man you love slowly leave this world.”

Rose shivered as she remembered that day. “Tomorrow we’ll pay our respects at his gravesite. I go there a couple of times a week.” Rose smiled. “It’s probably silly, but I think he knows when I’m there.”

“I don’t think it’s silly, Grandmother. I think it’s sweet.”

Sally entered carrying a tray loaded with a teapot, cheerful blue mugs, and a plate heaped with freshly baked chocolate chip cookies. “Miss Rose, it’s such a beautiful day in the garden. Why don’t I take this tray out there and you both have a nice visit in the warm sunshine. Adele can help you get situated.”

A shiver of anger slid down Rose’s back. Sometimes Sally acted as if she was decrepit. Sally had convinced the doctor that Rose needed to use a cane. Rose shook off her annoyance—it really wasn’t Sally she was upset with. It was growing old.

Rose stood and straightened the folds of her skirt. “That’s a wonderful idea. Follow me, Adele, and I’ll show you my garden. It’s one of the best in town.”

“You’re too modest,” Sally said. “It is the best.”

Adele grinned. “I’d love to sit in the garden,” she said, “but I need my notebook. I’ll just get it and meet you outside.”

Adele turned to Sally. “The guest room is down the hall?”

“Second door on the left,” Sally said. “You will find your things in there.”

As Adele left, Sally turned to Rose. “Now why would that young woman want a notebook?”

“She wants to write a series of articles about Gavin and me.”

“Are you going to be honest with her about your health?”

After Rose’s heart attack, Sally wouldn’t let her do much of anything but garden. Rose still liked to do things for herself, but as her strength diminished, she found herself sleeping more.

Sally had pressured Rose into taking Doctor Friedman’s advice and they had visited a specialist in San Francisco. Sally had accompanied Rose on the long train trip.

The specialist conducted a series of tests and confirmed Doctor Friedman’s diagnosis. There was nothing they could do for her. He had advised prolonged bed

rest and sedation, but Rose had declined. It was a matter of time, but Rose was content. She had lived a full life, and she was ready for whatever came next.

Rose gazed out the front window. A silver sedan drove down the street. “I don’t want to ruin this precious time I have with Adele worrying about the inevitable,” she said. “Gavin and I enjoyed a wonderful marriage. It is just all the other things that went on.”

Rose thought for a moment. “I want to keep the past where it belongs, not worry about the future, and concentrate on the present. Rehashing events doesn’t do anyone any good, nor does worrying about things we have no control over.”

Carrying the tray, Sally walked toward the back door. “I remember the stories my momma used to tell and those were some stories. You’ll just have to edit out the juicy details.”

“Or I’ll tell her some of the scandalous things that went on. That might sell her articles.”

Sally frowned. “You need to concentrate on your health. I wish you would reconsider going down to Los Angeles for a second opinion. I didn’t like that doctor in San Francisco much. He thought he was so much better than us. You do know that they are learning new things in medicine every day.”

Rose gathered her cane and followed Sally outside. She wished that Sally had never learned about her illness, but Sally had been the one who, a couple of months ago, discovered Rose collapsed on the floor and had summoned the doctor. Doctor Friedman examined Rose and determined she had suffered a mild heart attack. She was put on bed rest for six weeks and he had visited daily to make sure she was following his advice.

Rose had no intention of following his orders. Sally tried to argue, but Rose cut the disagreement short, saying that Sally’s mother, Millie would want her to get up and get on with what remained of her life.

Rose had met Sally through Millie, a tough gal who had worked for Rose and Gavin on the ranch. Sally had been married briefly, but her husband had been killed in a duel. So, when Millie passed, Sally came to the ranch to take her place. Sally was a diligent worker, and after Gavin passed the two women grew close. When Rose sold the ranch, Sally moved with Rose into town.

Rose hated to admit it, but she liked Sally's attention and companionship. Her two living sons were on the east coast and her daughter did not have time for her. Rose knew once she left this world, her family would descend on her estate like vultures. In her will, Rose had left Sally enough to live comfortably.

Sally set the tray down. Adele walked into the garden with her notebook and pen and placed them on the table. "Do you need anything else?" Sally asked.

Rose patted the wooden cane, which she had affectionately named Meg O'Malley, after a beloved nanny she had had as a child. "Don't you go fussing about me? I'll use Meg. I know you have errands to run, Sally. Go ahead. Adele and I will be fine."

Rose smiled at her granddaughter. Adele was nothing like her own children. There was an innocence and compassion Rose hadn't seen in a long time and Rose detected a splash of spunk, which she felt was so refreshing. "We'll get to know each other on this beautiful afternoon."

Sally frowned. "Well, let me pour the tea first."

"I can do this," Adele said, putting her notebook and pen on the table. "Enjoy the day."

Sally looked concerned. "If you're sure."

Rose grinned and patted Adele's hand. "Don't worry about us. We're going to sit here, enjoy our tea, and get to know each other."

"You make sure you have a rest, Rose. I'll be back in a couple of hours." Sally turned and walked into the house.

“Is she always like this?” Adele asked. She poured the tea into the china mugs.

“She’s a good woman, but she feels overly responsible for me.”

Rose stared into the lush backyard. Even after years of living in town, she still wasn’t used to city noises. There were times she longed for the wide-open spaces of the ranch, the wandering cattle and sheep, and the lonely song of the coyote. She missed her friends, the Washoe Indians, who had lived outside the ranch, and the traditional healer who had done odd jobs for her when she first moved out there. She hadn’t lived in congestion since her Virginia City days.

“Your backyard is glorious,” Adele said. It was June, and Rose’s garden was in full bloom. A variety of colorful flowers filled the air with their intoxicating aroma. The sky was brilliant blue, and a gentle breeze whispered cool air from the west.

Rose sipped her tea. “The garden is beautiful, but it’s not the ranch. Of all the places I’ve lived during my life, I was most at home there. There’s something about the earth that calls out to me, and I miss the ranch every day.”

“Why did you sell the ranch?” Adele sipped her tea.

Rose’s thoughts skipped back through time. “After your grandfather passed, the ranch felt big and empty. I hung on to it for a few years, but then it got too much for me to manage.” She thought about the cattle, the employees, and the struggles she endured. “I was lucky to sell the ranch and all the cattle before the stock market crashed. I remember my father always said it was better to be lucky than smart.”

Adele sipped her tea. “It sounds like you were smart to me. I remember visiting the ranch when I was a little girl. I thought it was beautiful, but Mother was never fond of me getting dirty.” She looked down at her hands. “We didn’t go back because she didn’t like being out there with the animals.”

Rose tried to envision Adele riding a horse or getting dirty, but the visage of

the well-dressed young woman made it hard for her. “Your mother used to get dirty when she was a little girl, and being the only girl, she was always your grandfather’s favorite. The boys could not tug at his heart like she could. Gavin spoiled her rotten and her brothers complained that he treated her differently, but he reminded them she was a girl and that made her his princess. Your grandfather and mother enjoyed a special bond, but once she married your father, things changed.” Rose stared into space.

Adele raised an eyebrow. “Really? She never mentioned anything like that.”

Rose set her mug on the table. “Your mother was born nine years after our last son.”

“Theodore?” Adele asked.

Memories flooded Rose’s mind and she forced the tears back. “My beautiful baby. Theodore died of diphtheria when he was just a little lad. His death tore us all up, especially your grandfather. The other boys were six and four; they were into all kinds of mischief. I had my hands full with them and the ranch. Your grandfather wanted another child, but I had no desire.”

“Why?”

Rose shook her head. “I couldn’t stand the heartache if I lost another child. In those days, childbirth was difficult.”

“Why was that?” Adele reached for her notebook and opened it up. She jotted down a few words.

“Mothers had their babies at home. If you were lucky, there was a midwife in attendance. In those days, doctors were scarce and if something went wrong the woman usually died. We were surprised when I discovered I was pregnant with your mother because I was forty. That was pretty old to be a mother.”

Adele gazed out into the garden. “Mother was young when she had me. I would have liked a sibling.”

“Why didn’t your parents have another child?” Rose asked.

“Mother once said one child was all she was going to have because she hadn’t liked being pregnant and she didn’t like what it did to her body.”

Rose watched a hummingbird buzz the flowers. “I managed pregnancy well. I feel children need siblings, so they have a family after the parents are gone.”

“Do you have any siblings?”

“I have four siblings,” Rose said. “When I was a young girl, I was closest to my younger sister, Margaret. When I left the east coast with my first husband and came west, we didn’t communicate often. There were no telephones back then and the mail was terribly slow.” Rose laughed. “Telephones are the most marvelous invention! Who would have imagined you could talk to someone on the other side of the country?”

Adele gasped. “That reminds me. Mother told me to call when I got here and let her know I arrived safely.”

“The telephone is in the hall.”

Adele thought for a moment and picked up her pen. “She can wait. She’s probably not home anyways. My mother lives to shop. Sometimes I think she does it to annoy my father.”

Rose laughed. “Shopping is something I have never found enjoyable. There are so many other things to do with one’s time.”

Adele blushed. “There are times I like to go shopping, especially if I’m going to a dance.”

Rose smiled. She liked her granddaughter and felt it was sad that Cathleen had kept them separate for all those years. “Do you like going to dances?”

“I really enjoy doing the Lindy Hop, but enough of me.” She stared at her grandmother with her green eyes. “I want you to tell me about Comstock Rose.”

Rose’s eyes widened. “How did you find out about her?”

Adele grinned and tossed back a strand of her glorious red hair. “There’s quite a bit of information written about you in the university archives.”

Rose laughed. “I’m not sure all of it is truthful. Writers tend to spice up their work with fictionalized accounts to make the story more interesting.”

Adele uncapped her pen. “Then why don’t you tell me the real truth.”

“The truth?” Rose felt uncomfortable. She had placed Comstock Rose in a box in the back of her mind for so many years.

Adele grinned. “Yes. The truth from Rose Miller’s mouth. That is one of the reasons I’m here. I want to know all about the people who have come before me. I want to connect with my heritage.”

The past started to come alive in Rose’s mind. Should she tell her granddaughter the true story? Studying the young woman and remembering what it was like to be full of questions, Rose nodded.