Chapter 1

Ginny could feel herself moving, but didn't want to open her eyes. Judging by what her senses were picking up, she knew she wasn't home. Once she opened her eyes, the illusion would be gone. But which illusion? The one she just left, her handsome husband leaving the room to order her bath? Or the one where she was back in her own body, living in her own house, and working as a physician's assistant? But of course, that wasn't an illusion, at least it shouldn't be.

Moving her hands down her body, Ginny knew she was definitely not in the 21st century. For one, she was wearing a dress. Ginny could count on one hand how many times in the past year she'd worn a dress. And two, she was on a train. With the amount of rocking, it wasn't the high speed train between London and Paris.

With a deep sigh, she finally relented and opened one eye. The first thing she noticed was all the wood. Definitely not Arizona, definitely not even close to her own time. Ginny had seen trains like this one, even been on one. They were antiques, used as props at train parks.

Dammit, she thought with another sigh. Begrudgingly, she opened the other eye and turned her head around to take it in. Hopefully she wouldn't be kept waiting with the information on who she was and why she was on a train. Beside her, sat another woman, looking excited. The woman's eyes were wide, looking out the windows of the train as if anticipating their arrival.

Confirming her suspicions, Ginny noticed the dress. Using her limited knowledge of history, she guessed the time period to be in the mid to late 1800's. Glancing out the window, she knew she had to be in America. England did not have this type of open plain landscape. The woman next to her would shortly confirm her guess.

“Henny, you awake?” the woman spouted, bouncing in her seat with

excitement. “I figure we should be getting there real soon.”

Henny? What was that short for? Henrietta? *Oh great.*

“How do you figure?” Ginny had to keep it simple until she knew what the hell was going on.

“Looky out the window. Surely we must be coming toward Denver.”

“Denver?” Ginny whispered. *What the hell is in Denver?*

Turning toward Ginny, with a serious look on her face, the woman spoke desperately. “We will stay together, right? You won't be off getting married, leaving me behind, will ya?”

Ginny's eyes took on a bewildered look. Getting married? Again? Hadn't she been there and done that? The woman started looking like a deer in the sights of a rifle. Not wanting a crying woman on her hands, she said the first thing she could to reassure her. “Of course, we'll stick together.”

Releasing a huge hiss of air that the woman had been holding, she smiled. “I knew you would be a good friend, Henny. I knew it like I know my name is Priscilla Younger.” Nudging her elbow into Ginny's shoulder, she added, “But not for long, hopefully. I know we took a big chance coming out here, but what else could we do?”

“Indeed.” Ginny hoped Priscilla would continue to babble on and give her more information. She wasn't disappointed.

“I knew when we met on the platform in St. Louie, that we would be the best of friends. Maybe we can find men who live by each other. That way, we can stay friends after the weddings, and all.” Priscilla turned to her for confirmation.

“Yeah, sure. That would be great.” Ginny's head was spinning. Were they going to meet men to marry? Who does that?

Staring out the window, it came to her in a flash. At least, a few memories came to her. A man, walking up to her as she slept in an alley, claiming he could give her a better life. *Come with me,* he said, *and I will find a nice man to marry you. You can live on the frontier.*

How in the hell had she fallen for that? There was, of course, a catch. Ginny could remember the man telling her that if no man would offer for her, she would be sold to a brothel. She would have to pay off her debt to the owner, and then she could do as she pleased. *Yeah, right*, Ginny thought.

Fruitlessly, Ginny tried to search her memories for more information. She could only remember the man in the alley, and everything that had happened since. She had no idea where she was from, if she had family or friends or if she was rich or poor. Presumably, she was poor, since this offer was attractive enough to get her to sign on.

The more she thought about it, she realized that the man who made the offer had also given her the name, Henny. The body she now possessed, clearly had no memories beyond a few weeks ago. As if it weren't hard enough living someone else's life, now she got to live as an amnesiac.

Grasping the bridge of her nose with her two fingers, squeezing tightly, Ginny felt the pressure of her situation. She was a young woman, with no resources, heading towards Denver with another woman, trying to find someone to marry her or end up as a whore. Rubbing her face in her hands, she had only one simple question left. What had she done to deserve this?

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Priscilla continued her chatter all the way to Denver. Normally, it would have driven Ginny crazy to listen to it, but she used the time to consider her situation, as Priscilla rarely needed a response.

Finally, the train entered a large station. The weather was warm and humid, leading Ginny to believe it must be summer. The sky was azure

and there were few clouds about. The weather looked fine, unlike Ginny's newest situation.

They departed the train, each with one small bag and were swiftly directed toward a cart. It was then that Ginny realized how many women were participating in this “bride” auction. At least twenty women sat in the back of the cart, like some deranged hayride. It occurred to Ginny that women during this time period, with no resources, would probably be desperate enough to do this. Anything had to be better than starvation or exposure.

Thinking about the past, Ginny knew that the frontier was much like Alaska today: many men, way fewer women. With such odds, every girl out here would probably be picked. But what kind of life were they getting themselves into? Living in a home without running water, bathroom or electricity? Sounded like hell on earth to Ginny, who in her previous lives at least had servants to handle all the hard stuff. Here, she would be the servant, without many skills where she needed them most.

Ginny could cook and clean, but cared for neither. Not having a microwave would put a damper on her food preparation skills, as would no refrigerator or gas stove. Her expensive cookware, a Christmas gift from her mother, would be irrevocably destroyed in this environment. And what about washing clothes? Beating them against a rock and using lye soap, she assumed. *This is really going to suck*, she thought grimly.

Turning her attention to her surroundings, Ginny was surprised to see what a bustling city Denver was. She didn't have any idea exactly what year it was, but she always imagined the “frontier” being one line of buildings surrounded by a whole lot of nothing. Maybe she shouldn't get her history from old John Wayne movies or *Blazing Saddles*.

The roads were paved and there were many intersecting streets. To Ginny, it looked like any modern city, except that the buildings weren't as tall. *Are those telephone lines*, she thought to herself, looking up at the telephone poles with dozens of intersecting wires. She had to find out

the year, but didn't know how to ask without looking crazy or stupid.

The cart was taking the women out of the town limits, entering an area of woods. It seemed like they traveled for over an hour. When they arrived at a clearing, Ginny saw a dozen men standing around awaiting their arrival. The men were all different heights, weights and sizes. Mostly, they were short and unattractive, but who was Ginny to say, since she hadn't seen herself yet.

Her mega-hunk had to be in this crowd, but so far, Ginny hadn't seen a single man who would even come close to good-looking. At this point, she would settle for anyone who had all their original teeth. Many of the men were covered in dust, as if they'd rode night and day to be there on time. They wore worn flannel shirts, dirty denim, and everyone had a cowboy hat.

The man driving the wagon and the man who first approached Ginny, came around and unhooked the back of the cart. The women, trying to look their best, smoothed out their skirts and pinched their cheeks in an attempt to look more healthy. A line was formed just outside the back of the cart, when the women began to display their personal best attributes.

Ginny stood at the end of the line, next to Priscilla, who was making strange pouty looks with her lips. *So this is what it's like to be cattle at auction*, Ginny considered her situation. *All this to go home with one of these guys. Or, become a whore in a brothel. Fantastic.*

The men walked up and started sizing each women up. Feeling her cheeks going red over the humiliation of it, Ginny took on a defiant look. As if it wasn't bad enough to be put in a situation where you had no choices, then she had to parade around a bunch of dirty cowboys. The indignity was too much to bear, and Ginny could feel herself turning away when Priscilla took her arm.

"Henny, stop. Do you want to end up as a whore?" Her whispered plea reminded Ginny of what was at stake. Somewhere among these "gentlemen" was her mega-hunk. She just had to bide her time until

he showed up to rescue her.

“Remember our agreement...” Priscilla persisted. “Don't you dare go anywhere without me.”

“I know, Priscilla.” Ginny took a deep breath and began to examine the men anew. There had to be one among them that would fit the “romance novel” type.

As each man passed, Ginny noticed that their looks were nothing compared to their smell. Body odor and horse mingled freely with dust and dirt. Giving up on the men, Ginny watched the women. All the girls began to turn and twist, showing their best sides and sultry looks. It brought about a new feeling of anger thinking about the fact that these women's options were so limited that these men appealed to them.

Silently chastising herself, Ginny realized how shallow that was. Some of these men might make great husbands and caring fathers. Ginny had to remind herself that judging the package was not only empty, but usually not entirely accurate. With this new sense of righteousness, Ginny decided to give the men a chance.

One of the men stopped in front of her. He was about the same height, with a strong build like he was no stranger to hard work. With his hat on, Ginny could see wisps of greasy hair escaping the sides. His intense black eyes were taking in every inch of her and Ginny felt her blush coming back.

Suddenly, his hand whipped out and grabbed hers. In that moment, Ginny wondered if he would throw her over his shoulder, grunt a few unintelligible words and carry her off to his lair. Instead, he examined the stolen hand.

“You ain't never done a days work in yer life, have ya?” The odious man had the nerve to sneer at her.

“Excuse me?” Ginny put all the force of her sarcasm behind those two

words, which were completely lost on the man.

“Look at yer hands. Soft as a baby's ass. Did yer rich daddy put you out for fooling around with the coachman?” With that, the man let out a cackle, shortly joined by the other men in the group.

“I wouldn't touch you with a ten foot pole.” Turning towards the audience of men, he continued, “This woman be'd too much trouble. Probably wouldn't do a damn thing. Expect to be waited on, no doubt. Not to mention, she ain't likely too pure anymore.”

Ginny smiled. Before she could think better of it, she said, “Somehow, I doubt that would really be an issue for you. Seeing how the only women you've ever had were bought and paid for.”

The man's eyes got darker and meaner. He took a step towards Ginny, pushing his foul breath in her face. “You better watch that pretty mouth of yours or I just might come and buy some of you when you become a working girl.”

With a shiver, Ginny turned away first. The thought of that man touching her made her skin crawl. She had better find her mega-hunk soon, or she was likely going to have to try and escape the men who brought her here. And judging by their look, she wasn't likely to succeed.