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CHAPTER 1: LOOKING FOR JANE BRAKEMAN

Delia Gracewater bent her narrow shoulders into the stiff wind that greeted her as she rounded the corner of the fieldhouse. Before her, a baseball game was being hotly contested by the uniformed college girls on the field and lining the bench, their shouts and groans marking the progress of the game. The redoubtable Miss Borowski was pacing the sidelines, and it was to her that Delia directed her steps.

"Let's go! Show some hustle, ladies!" yelled the coach, scowling at the lowering sky. "Cooper, you're up after Parkinson."

"Miss Borowski," said Delia as she skidded to a halt next to the coach. "Excuse me, Miss Borowski, I need Jane Brakeman."

"So do I," said the coach. "She didn't show up. Left me damned short in the infield."

"Do you know where I can find her?" pleaded the dismayed little messenger. "She must come to the office at once. The Dean says it's awfully urgent."

"Is it?" said the coach with concern. "Wonder what's up. She hasn't got any relatives out here to come visiting."

A short pop to midfield by Parkinson made them both pause expectantly. A fumble, a weak throw, a bad catch, put Parkinson safe on first. "That should have been an easy out!" grumbled the coach. "Save your curtsies for the cotillion!" she yelled at the unconcerned shortstop.

Stepping up to the plate, Cooper spit on her hands and crouched into her batting stance, but a brilliant flash of lightning and a first spattering of raindrops made her look inquiringly at the coach. Thunder rumbled and the wind picked up.

"Here comes the storm. Just as well. Time to wrap it up!" said Miss Borowski, thinking now of tea and her warm fireside. She signaled to the field to come in. "Well, I hope you find Jane," she said to Delia. "She's a nice enough child and a good competitor."

Turning back to her team, she bellowed, "Come on girls! Get that equipment under cover. Fisher, Miller, stop your lollygagging. Stuyvesant, don't forget the bases!"

Delia positioned herself near the fieldhouse door and repeated her question again and again to the laughing girls running past her, but "No idea!" "That scamp!" "Probably roping cattle!" were their good-natured replies.

The catcher paused, cradled her mitt and mask and took pity on the earnest underclassman. "Try biology lab, Delia. Or Dr. Hancock's class. Or she might have gone to Professor Van Leyden's figure drawing studio," she offered. "She shows up for whatever class she likes."

"Thanks," waved Delia, thinking that it must be rather wonderful to be Jane Brakeman and do just as one liked! But would one get one's degree, she wondered? It was better, she thought, to do one's duty and get ahead.

With renewed determination, she began retracing her steps across the sloping lawns and up the network of gravel paths and paved drives that converged on Founder's Hall.

This immensely impressive edifice united under one roof all the practical and pedagogical functions of a college. The *Illustrated Weekly Society News*, while generally applauding the architect's reliance

on a French landmark for inspiration, had tartly opined that so formidable a structure was unnecessary to defend the purity of the young ladies it sheltered: Thanks to their education and (especially) their athleticism, these females were become like the Amazons of old - impregnable.

Entering Founder's Hall by a side door, Delia decorously shook the raindrops from her skirts and slowed her furious run to a purposeful walk that elicited inquiring glances from knots of gossiping teachers. Something was afoot. They knew it.

Dr. Hancock's Greek scholars, upperclasswomen all, were incurious and impatient with the interruption to their studies and bid her begone in classical epithets.

Nothing useful could be adduced from the rapt witnesses to the dissection in the biology lab, although the campus beauty, Lydia Laurence looked up, rather green about the gills, rolled her eyes and mouthed, "Ask Victoria." The young messenger nodded gratefully, gulped at sight of the poor twitching specimen, and took off again down the endless halls.

At the other extremity of the vast building, in a high-ceilinged, north-lit studio, a dozen young ladies were essaying sketches of a ragged urchin who posed, or more-truthfully, dozed, on a sky-lit platform in the middle of the room.

The venerable Professor van Leyden presided from his place of eminence - a thronelike chair on a dais. Though stiff with age and neat and precise in his bearing, the Professor advertised his artistic credentials with silver hair and homespun tie, both flowing with artistic abandon. He lectured as he sat, each aphorism as tired as himself.

A serious-looking older girl seemed to be functioning as a teacher's assistant, going from easel to easel and pointing out errors. She had the air of a judge, severe but fair, and something of the stern virgin about her, too. From time to time, she would bring a drawing and its author to the feet of the great master himself, and then he would pause in his droning disquisition, point at a flaw with magisterial authority, and perhaps sketch a correction with the pencil his assistant handed him. Then he would resume his ramble; the budding artist, buoyed or crest-fallen, would return to her work; and the long-faced, thick-waisted assistant would move on to her next victim.

Ever alert, this young woman caught Delia, flushed and out-of-breath, just as she burst into the studio, and quickly pulled her into the hallway. Delia's voice echoed in that now-deserted space as she wailed out her urgent message: "Jane Brakeman. The Dean needs her NOW!! No one has seen her for ages!"

"What's the Dean want her for?" demanded Victoria van Leyden - as granddaughter and factotum to the Great Man, some of his self-importance had rubbed off onto her.

"I don't know, Miss van Leyden. I was just told it was urgent." The child was saucer-eyed with the responsibility of her task.

"Deduce, Gracewater, use your brain! Did the Dean have an unexpected visitor? Was she perhaps reading a letter when you came in? Poking the fire? What was her pose? Her expression? Did she look pale? Agitated? Angry?"

Poor Delia was entirely at a loss to answer these rapid-fire questions. She had a horror of guessing wrong.

Victoria laughed a little at the youngster's discomfiture. "Oh, Gracewater! Don't look so blank! Oh, never mind, just go find Brakeman."

"Yes, Miss, but where shall I look?" cried Delia.

"Whenever she goes missing, odds are she's either shooting or riding. Try the barn or the rifle range. Rebecca de Steyne will want to know if Brakeman's in trouble. Jane's her special pet. Stop by the

Observatory after you've found Jane and let de Steyne know. Now hurry before you get struck by lightning. Better run."

Taking Victoria's terrifying injunction seriously, Delia hoisted her skirts and ran as fast as her young legs would carry her, past classrooms where windows were being shut and lights turned on against the coming storm; out into the wind again and past book-laden girls hastening to get under shelter; past the gleaming Palladian marble of the de Steyne Observatory – she must tell Rebecca on the way back, she reminded herself; past the high-vaulted bulk of the gymnasium and the vast roof of the covered arena to the modern, commodious stables of the equestrian center.

Once in the dry dusky shelter of the barn, Delia hurried down aisles of stalls where well-mannered hacks and hot-blooded jumpers came forward to regard her with silent curiosity. She found Paint, born and bred under a Western sky, standing snug in his roomy Eastern stall. The pony nickered a friendly greeting to Delia and nuzzled her open palm, hoping for a bit of carrot or apple, but there was no treat, and no sign anywhere of Jane.

"So she must be shooting," said Delia to herself, patting the little horse goodbye and resuming her quest. "At least, I hope so!"

A few minutes more brought Delia to the rifle range. There, sure enough, heedless of the impending downpour, Jane was holding six girls, a gardener and a groom spellbound with one of her tall tales, delivered with her distinctive low chuckle and leisurely drawl. She casually loaded her Winchester Model 1873 Lever-Action Repeating Rifle and cradled it as she went on speaking.

"As I recollect, that bear was little more than a baby..."

Jane paused, turned and sighted on the distant targets. As the thunder rumbled, she raised the gun, cocked the lever, squinted down the barrel and proceeded to shoot a perfect set of bullseyes.

Ejecting the cartridges, she grinned at her audience and continued her story.

"... I refer to this juvenile behemoth as a baby, though he was just as tall and nearly twice as broad as I was- - I was pretty scrawny at ten -- but I knew that that baby bear's mother couldn't be far off, and she'd be none too pleased with me. A branch snapped in the woods behind me, the ground shook with the heavy steps of a giant and I heard a blood-curdling growl such as would make a grown man's hair stand on end. I calculated my chances: my exposed situation and relative youth I considered to be somewhat of a disadvantage. I hadn't so much as a dog, a pistol, or a prayer, and it looked like a *grizzly* end to my days. When of a sudden I had what you might call a flash of genius....what is it, Delia? Are you all right?"

"Oh, Miss Brakeman! Thank goodness I found you! Hurry, please Jane! There's a telegram come and Dean says you must be told at once, only I'm not to breathe a word. Please come!"

Leaving her audience to speculate on the bear cub's fate, Jane quickly cased up her gun, handed it to an attendant with a request to see it safely to her room, and with long, loping strides, she headed to the Equestrian Center.

Moments later, she exploded out of the barn astride her tough little pinto pony. Neither horse nor rider had ever really taken to the constraints of genteel eastern equestrianism, and this unknown emergency provided a chance to ride as they used to, wild and free. As they galloped up the crest of College Hill, horse and rider paused for a moment; Jane gave a tug on the reins and the beautiful little animal reared and whinnied. An enormous fork of lightening silhouetted the pair against the black and yellow sky.

The same flash of lightning revealed Rebecca de Steyne eagerly observing the progress of the storm from the de Steyne Observatory, keeping well away from the dizzying balustraded edges of the third-story roof. The wind tossed her long hair and rippled the rich fabrics of her simple robes, girdled loosely in the Burne-Jones style. If she cared what the coming deluge would do to her gorgeous stuffs, she gave no sign. All her concern was for the fascinating contraption before her.

The enormous white dome loomed behind her, giving a bit of a lee in which the young inventor was deftly setting up a recording apparatus of her own devising. She was humming quietly to herself as she worked.

Light spilled from the roof door as it opened. Kitty Grey emerged, arms filled with what looked like a giant ear trumpet.

"Hurry," Rebecca urged. The younger girl struggled to get the bulky horn into position as Rebecca screwed it into place and aimed it towards the source of the sound.

"We're in luck, Kitty! This will be a cracker of a storm!" Stopwatch in hand, Rebecca counted the time between lightning strike and thunder crack. "Not long now," she said, and looked around at her arrangements with satisfaction --this addition of lightning and thunder to her library of atmospheric effects would put her well ahead of her competitors. But there was no time to waste. She knew for a fact Tom Edison was working on a similar theme. He had as much as told her so himself, cagey though he had tried to be. She prided herself on being hard to fool. Suddenly, her eye was caught by movement on the campus far below.

Training her brass pocket telescope on the broad prospect, she saw Jane galloping flat out towards Founder's Hall, obstacles be damned. Jane's fearless riding in the face of the storm was beautiful, terrifying, and Rebecca felt her heart lurch with apprehension. She had a horror of crises in general, and her anxiety in the present case was magnified by her affection for the young Westerner. Thrown together as roommates, opposites in temperament, the two had nevertheless formed a firm friendship. They were a sort of team, despite the contrast of their upbringings and the handful of years between them.

Kitty Grey looked up from her work and came to stand beside her. "What is it? What do you see? Is that Jane!? Whatever in the world is she up to, I wonder? Perhaps she's won the lottery!" "

No, said Rebecca, soberly. "This doesn't feel like luck at all. Something's wrong." She looked up at the magnificent storm, looked around at the preparations for her *coup d'theatre*, and back to the hell-bent rider heading for Founder's Hall. "We are all set up, Kitty. You make the recordings. You understand the protocol perfectly. I'm going to follow Jane."

Kitty didn't waste time protesting but turned at once to her machines as Rebecca felt her way carefully to the head of the circular staircase. Professor Mancini was examining a clutch of first-years on their grasp of metrical observation but looked up at the sound of Rebecca's clattering descent. Seeing the girl's agitation, the Professor came quickly to her side.

"What is it, my dear?" asked the old Professor. "Are you ill again? You are so pale!"

"I'm all right, thank you Signora, but something terrible is happening for Jane Brakeman. I don't know what. Something awful, I'm afraid." Rebecca struggled to extricate her umbrella from the tangle in the elephant-foot stand by the door. "I've left Kitty Grey in charge. Perhaps you could send someone up to help her? I'm going to Founder's Hall to discover whatever I can."

Wrapping herself in her cape, Rebecca opened the door and was greeted by the sound of thunder and the sight of Delia Gracewater, half-drowned and out of breath, toiling up the Observatory stairs, conscientiously fulfilling her mission.

CHAPTER 2: SAD NEWS DELIVERED

Miss Pearce, the Dean's secretary, looked up as the hall door opened and Rebecca de Steyne entered, cold and dripping. Georgian antiques and faded Persian carpets lent a welcome warmth to this outer office, furnished to reassure prosperous parents that although female higher education might be a radical concept, it was at least being carried out in an entirely conventional manner.

A magnificent view of the Observatory – a Van Leyden of course – dominated the wall behind the secretary's desk. M. de Steyne, an early supporter of the college, had underwritten the construction of the noble building which bore his name and he had endowed the professorship which Professor Mancini now held. Miss Pearce had been especially mindful of the de Steyne family's importance to the college ever since his daughter Rebecca had matriculated here four years ago. Now, that interesting young woman seemed most distraught.

"Miss Pearce," she cried, "Why is Jane Brakeman with the Dean? What's wrong? Please tell me!"

"I got the impression that it was a family matter, Miss de Steyne," said the secretary.

"A family matter? Jane's an orphan. The only family she has left is her mother's brother – her Uncle Henry. Oh, I hope it's not her uncle! Is Reverend Adams seriously ill?"

"No!" whispered Miss Pearce, sadly, shaking her head. "He's seriously dead!"

The storm raged against the long French windows of the Dean's study, raindrops creating a drumbeat that syncopated with the popping and crackling of the fire. The Dean's mouth was set in a grim line. She disliked delivering sad news, especially when it was so unsatisfactorily vague --a mere brief telegram from Lady Maud Frawley. The prime fact was of course, inescapable, and in truth, she thought the girl was receiving it better than many her age would have.

Jane had gone very still while she read, but when she raised her head, her light eyes were sharp as Swedish steel and her cheeks flushed red as her hair.

The Dean reconsidered her assessment of the girl as naturally tractable. This one was of the firebrand type, she was afraid. Admirable in a way but headed for trouble.

Jane began pacing while she read and re-read the flimsy paper in her hand.

"Why doesn't the damned woman write clearly?!" she exploded.

"My condolences," the Dean said levelly. "A most-tragic accident."

"Accident! Is Lady Maud trying to say that Uncle Henry was killed by a train? Why the devil doesn't the silly woman just say it? Not a derailment? What does that have to do with anything?" Jane had resumed her ferocious pacing. "Was it our train? Was it the DC&M? Why did no one tell me till now? When I find who's behind this, I swear on my mother's grave, I will make them pay!"

The Dean stood up behind her desk. "I'm very sorry for your loss, Miss Brakeman."

"Me, too." said Jane woodenly, pausing as she opened the door. "Someone will pay, that I promise you."

"Let's go" she said to the waiting Rebecca. They walked without a word through the long halls, and out to where Jane's patient pony stood.

"I'll be back in a bit," said Jane, untying him.

Rebecca nodded, her big dark eyes full of tears. "Oh, Janey, I'm so sorry!" she faltered.

"Never mind that," said Jane gruffly, as she mounted. "Go get out of those wet duds. Don't go catching cold on me again."

As she rode slowly across the sodden, gray, unlovely campus, Jane cursed the place, cursed God, cursed herself. Uncle Henry was dead, and it was all her fault. Why had she been so weak, so stupid? She should never have let them talk her into coming out East for college. If she had stayed home, Uncle Henry would be alive, instead of..... what death must he have met? It was unthinkable. Her pony reacted as it sensed its rider's pounding heart and suspended breath. This tenseness was the cue for action, it remembered, and waited for the command. But instead, Jane regained control of her fury and forced herself to come back to the facts. Her heart was broken. Her last close relative was gone, forever.

The familiar routines of getting Paint clean, dry, fed and bedded down carried on, while Jane's mind was awl with speculation, frustration, and above all, a crushing sense of loss. She couldn't remember a day since she was five that her uncle Henry wasn't a part of, and she was regretting every petulant reply, stubborn refusal, and rash act which had filled his tender heart with sadness or dread. She had been a selfish and thoughtless burden, ever since he had come out to Colorado after the War to live with her and her widowed mother. He had been father, teacher, friend for all her life. And just like that, he was gone?! Her anger once again communicated itself to the horse, who looked round in surprise at the roughness of her brushing. In the compassionate beast's eyes, she saw reflected the tolerant, affectionate eyes of her dear uncle, and suddenly she could hear his voice, speaking to her, comforting her, telling her to remember their wonderful bond and the loyalty and love they shared. He had had so much faith, infinite faith in goodness and love. Like a sweet child. And now he had joined his sister – Jane's beloved Mother - in whatever eternity waited for such worthies. Jane leaned her forehead against the pony's warm side. Father, Mother, Uncle, all gone. She was truly alone now. She sank down into the clean straw along the wall of the stall, put her head in her hands, and let the tears flow. Paint gently extended his handsome head and rubbed her hair and shoulders with low soothing sounds. In the stalls around them, the steady munching of hay and crunching of oats went on as ever, unbroken by the tragedy which engulfed one lonely rider.

The storm had abated by the time Jane got back to their rooms. Rebecca stood at the window toweling her dark curly hair, staring out at the slackening drizzle. A pot of coffee stood steaming on the hob. Jane poured a cup and stripped off her sodden outer-clothing. She wrapped herself in a robe and sat on her bed, spread with the Indian blanket she had brought from home. She sighed deeply, then sat up straight and raked the straight copper hair back off her face. Rebecca came to sit beside her. "If ever there lived a man who deserved to die peacefully at a ripe old age," said Jane, "it was my Uncle Henry! The kindest, gentlest person you ever met, Rebecca. Down to earth, for all he was an educated man, beyond what you meet with out west much. And a good pastor, loved by his congregation. What can have happened?! He didn't deserve to die! It's not fair!" She threw herself backwards on the bed and glared at the ceiling.

Rebecca walked back to the window. "The rain has stopped," she said. "It's clearing. Kitty and Lydia will be at the Observatory. Would you like me to stay here with you? Or would you rather be alone?"

"We should go to class. I'll come with you. I want to look at the stars." Jane sat up, dried her eyes, and started dressing.

As the pair approached the domed observatory, the familiar sound of a classical duet floated towards them. Inside, in the wonderful acoustics under the great vault, Lydia and the Professor were performing one of Lydia's compositions – Duet #30 for Guitar and Flute. Lydia's guitar playing was intimate and melancholy, and the Professor gave sensitive expression to the poignant flute melody. The song finished with a haunting series of arpeggios, and in the still that succeeded, Jane and Rebecca entered and took their usual seats. Kitty was closely studying her notebook. Her lips were silently moving, repeating numbers, as she checked and double-checked her calculations. Lydia put her guitar in its case and stood it in the corner, and came and sat beside Jane and took her hand.

The dome rotated and the great shutters rolled open to reveal a slice of rain-washed star-spangled night sky. Professor Mancini settled herself at the eyepiece and focused the specially-commissioned 12-inch telescope on a dull red glowing spot high above the horizon.

"The Satellites of Mars. We can't see them with this instrument, but their existence has been proven," she began her lecture. "It took the 26" refracting telescope at the U.S. Naval Observatory to confirm them, but the two moons are incontrovertibly there, orbiting Mars. Their existence was purely conjectural until August of last year, when Asaph Hall, helped by the brilliant mathematician Angeline Stickney, observed them. They have been given Greek names -- Phobos and Deimos--Fear and Terror, sons of the God of War."

The Professor seemed to be in a philosophical mood tonight. She had heard, of course, of Jane's loss, but hesitated to broach the subject. The girl would speak in her own time, she was sure.

"What are the sacred pillars of science?" she asked the group rhetorically. "They are of course not Fear and Terror, thank goodness, but rather Theory and Observation. We begin our quest with an open mind, blest perhaps with Imagination and Luck. We perceive a possibility or likelihood. But we do not *jump* to conclusions. We put our hunches to rigorous tests, through the accumulation of evidence, the rejection of bias, the confirmation of repeatable results.

"Ours is a noble calling. Driven to peer beyond the eye's natural reach, we are lifted above the mind's natural limits. What glory to be the discoverer of some new world! Since my father first held my eye to a glass in my infancy the quest to claim a piece of the sky has drawn me. I'm still determined to make my mark before I die! And should I die tomorrow, you girls must carry on for me!"

Jane shifted uneasily in her seat, and Rebecca looked pained. Death was a poor note to end on, she thought.

"Oh, my dear Jane," murmured the professor.

"He taught me to love the sky," said Jane quietly, focused on some inward vision. "I guess that's where I should look for him now."

Rebecca and Lydia looked close to tears as they gazed at their friend, and Kitty honored the occasion by carefully marking her place in her calculations, putting her pencil and book aside, and asking outright. "But what on earth happened, Jane? What are the facts?"

"There are no facts," said Jane sullenly. "There's nothing to tell. But you're welcome to what little I know."

Jane had the telegram with her. She pulled it from her pocket, found a bit of light to see by, and at her friends' urging, began to read it aloud with interjections. "*Sad news. Henry Adams deceased.* Maddening woman! Why say "Deceased?" Why not "Died in his sleep" or "Hunting accident" or "Heart attack." Something I can understand. *Thought to be accidental.* Thought by whom? What kind of accident?? How did he die? When did he die? *Did not cause derailment.* Does that mean there wasn't a derailment? Or does it mean there was, but my uncle's accident wasn't the cause?? *Funeral yesterday.* The bastards buried him without me! They could have waited. I could have been there in four days! *All well in hand.* What is Well in Whose hand, I wonder? *Bettermores told.* So, someone told some Boston lawyers before anyone told me. Wonder what they now know that I don't know. *Sincere condolences.* Well, that's mighty friendly of you, but you could have saved the empty words. Signed *Maud Frawley.*" And that's it. No facts at all, beyond the fact he's dead."

"Who is this Maud Frawley?" asked Lydia. "Whoever she is, she doesn't seem very *simpatico.*"

"Lady Maud Frawley is sister to the Earl of Rotherwhyte," replied Kitty, who often had unexpected facts at her fingertips.

"Is she?" said Jane, uninterested. "She's a damn pestiferous woman. I know that."

"I've heard you speak of her as partner of your mother and uncle, haven't I?" said Rebecca. "In the Spa project?"

"Yes," said Jane, not really attending as she read the telegram once again. "This not knowing is making me crazy." She stood and looked around for her jacket. "I have to get back to Brakeman's Halt right now."

"Here, have a cup of tea," said Kitty, thrusting her own cup into Jane's hands and pushing her back into her chair.

"There's no time to waste!" insisted Jane.

"Your eagerness is understandable," said the Professor kindly, "but action without preparation is seldom wise, my dear. You mustn't enter this new situation undefended and unprepared. There wants only a week till the end of term. I'm sure you may be excused your exams, if you choose. Take that time to ascertain the facts, consult with your family's lawyers, take advice from your true friends, and only then, return home equipped for whatever may greet you."

Jane drank thoughtfully from her cup but seemed unconvinced.

"He's already dead and buried," offered Kitty flatly. "Nothing you can do now." She didn't register the appalled looks on Rebecca's or Lydia's faces, or Jane's quick annoyance.

"Besides," said Lydia, "it wouldn't do for you to travel unchaperoned. The danger is too great."

"Please don't go yet, Jane," said Rebecca, impulsively embracing her. "My birthday is so soon. My birthday party. We were to have such fun! And now... Oh, Jane! I would miss you so much!"

Jane looked assessingly at her friend. Rebecca was three years older than Jane, immensely richer, yet – Jane thought – much more vulnerable and more lonely. Growing up on the frontier as the only child of a busy widowed mother, Jane had learned independence and self-reliance; the circumstances of Rebecca's upbringing had resulted, Jane thought, in Rebecca becoming resigned to physical weakness and dependency. But the warmth of the older girl's heart and the originality of her thought

had made Jane fascinated with her from the first. "At least," thought Jane, "her mind is wide-awake, even if her body seems half-asleep most of the time."

The Professor had been ruminating a decision, and now she spoke. "I am hoping to travel to Rawlins in Wyoming Territory to be present for the total eclipse of the sun. though I fear I am having difficulty securing a room, without which it would be madness to go. I am no tent camper, even for science. I read that half the scientific world will be travelling to the Rocky Mountains this summer! And I hear Mr. Edison has attached himself to the Draper Party. He's a worthy man, no doubt, but I somewhat resent a mechanic taking up a room that could be mine. If it all works out, perhaps you could accompany me by train as far as Cheyenne, Miss Brakeman, where I'm sure your friends can arrange an escort to take you the rest of the way to Dakotah Springs."

"Oh! Yes! That would be perfect!" said an excited Rebecca. "Stay for my party as we'd planned, please Jane! You're my best friend and it's my biggest day! My twenty-first birthday!" begged Rebecca. "It's only a few weeks. Spend them with me at the cottage in Foxden! You can hunt with mother and keep me company in my workshop. Please stay!"

"Do stay, Jane," said Lydia. "Stay for Graduation, Becca's birthday ball, and one last whirl with our own special crew. Rebecca and I will be gone next year, this is our last hurrah."

"Do whatever you like, Jane," said Kitty, "but be sure you get home for the eclipse. You'll have a perfect view if the weather is right. I've been plotting the coordinates of Brakeman's Halt relative to the transit and your ranch is right in the path of totality."

"Is it?!" said Jane. "Then, Professor, why don't you come stay with me at Brakeman's Halt and do your observations from there. I've got a big house, the sky's as big there as it is in Rawlins. Furthermore, I promise you no mechanics will get under your feet. Please consider it, Ma'am. I'd be much obliged to you for your company."

"A very interesting idea, Jane. I thank you. We shall see." The Professor looked appraisingly at the young girl, then, taking out her watch, said "That's enough for tonight, girls. Let's close up." The gears ground slowly and the closing shutters winked out the midnight sky. "Kitty," said the Professor, pausing as she turned out the working lights in the dome, "Leave me those coordinates."

The lack of moonlight which had been so helpful to their observations now became a handicap as the four girls walked back across the campus, arms linked in couples. The storm had wreaked a minor havoc, and the lawns and paths were strewn with downed branches.

"You'll be needing mourning clothes," Lydia called forward to Jane, who was gallantly supporting the hapless Rebecca who managed to stumble over every root or pothole. "Six weeks full-mourning required for an uncle," Lydia continued. "I have a dressmaker who could run something up quickly to get you started."

"Thanks," said Jane, "but I've got the weeds I wore for my mother. They'll do. I won't be wearing them every day."

"Will you take your exams?" wondered Kitty. "You should, you know. While the subjects are fresh in your mind. You don't want to waste a year!"

Jane shook her head. "It doesn't matter to me, Kitty. I have no ambitions to be a scholar. They only packed me off to school 'cause I was pining for my mother. And I only went along with it 'cause I was convinced it would make Uncle Henry happier. He was lost without my mother, same as me, and some folks – Lady Maud for one – got him worrying he couldn't bring me up right on his own. Then Maud got the Governor's wife involved and she set up this college thing and I put up a ruckus but

they got Uncle Henry to persuade me. The two old harpies escorted me to the station and shipped me and Paint out on the next train. I'll never forgive them."

"I'm very glad they did," said Rebecca with a choke in her voice.

Jane looked at her, surprised. She hadn't meant to hurt her, but she had to be truthful. "I will say that I found a lot here to love. I learned a lot, from classes and from you all. But it was still wrong of me to leave Henry alone out there. He wasn't cut out for it. It was never really his home. But it is mine, and I have to get back home and make things right."

CHAPTER 3: NEW YORK HEADLINES

The New York press, the next morning, seemed privy to some detail, all of it shocking.

“Rich-as-Croesus Preacher Meets His Maker Under Wheels of Own Loco!” – that line seemed to be working well with the working man, and the working man’s paper reported it with transparent glee.

“His Own Infernal Engine: Harvard Divinity Alumnus in Tragic Railroad Mishap!” stated the thinking man’s broadsheet respectfully. Henry Adams had a pedigree as long as the editor’s arm and had been at school with the publisher’s son.

“Colorado Shortline Shares Fall on News of Suspicious Death of Owner” read the financial rag. The article was accompanied by a rude cartoon of fat-cats salivating over a little mountain railroad, depicted as teetering on the edge of a precipitous canyon.

But in reporting the railroad line as belonging to the deceased clergyman, all these newspapers were incorrect.

A letter from Augustus & Julius Bettermore had informed Jane that father and son would attend her in Manhattan on a date of her choosing to read her uncle’s will. In the interim, Messrs. Bettermore hastened to assure Jane that she was now a very great heiress. The DC&M had only been held in trust by Henry Adams. Ever since her mother’s death, the *Dakotah City and Milltown Railroad* had actually belonged solely to Jane Brakeman, lock, stock and barrel, and now, it was entirely under her own control.

CHAPTER 4: GRADUATION DAY

Graduation Day dawned, as perfect a summer day as you could wish for. School, with its pressures and tests was over and Nature herself seemed to rejoice with birdsong and blossom.

Jane had sat her exams after all, not wanting to kick herself later, just as Kitty had predicted. Her attempts to gather more information about her Uncle Henry's death had yielded frustratingly little so far, but the first shock of loss was behind her and today, the relief of having done well in her exams, and of the school year culminating in this cheerful ceremony, buoyed her spirits.

In the common-room of the sunny set that she shared with Lydia, Rebecca and Kitty, Jane was walking on her hands, petticoats around her face, dusty boots to the ceiling, while spinning a preposterous yarn about a jackass, a rabbit, and an old prospector. Lydia's five pretty sisters, ranging in age from six to sixteen, were laughing and clapping at Jane's acrobatic turns, the littlest one trying to mimic them. Kitty, immersed in back issues of the *Annals of the Royal Astronomical Society*, seemed oblivious to Jane's clowning and deaf to the children's delighted squeals.

"I cannot conceive of how to make this monstrosity look flattering," lamented Lydia Laurence as she entered from her chamber, struggling to secure her mortarboard with an enormous long hatpin. "I worked hard enough for the right to wear it Lord knows!"

Kitty spoke without looking up from her studying. "Why did you bother?" she asked, but Lydia ignored her.

Jane dropped out of her handstand and shook her petticoats down with considerable satisfaction. She was proud of her body's young strength and agility.

Lydia was smiling at her admiring younger sisters. "You all look very nice!" she said, affectionately. "Let me see."

The children quickly stood at attention, lined up eldest to youngest, and basked in her approval, as she individually inspected their various sailor-suits, their blouses handsomely trimmed with braid, their patent leather boots and brass buttons shining. The nautical theme was a nod to their father's merchant-ship empire; the colors and embellishments echoed his fleet's livery. As advertisement of wealth, respectability and social standing, their parents considered every penny spent on the children's appearance a well-justified investment.

"You all look perfect," Lydia said, straightening the littlest one's sailor tie and giving her a little kiss on the top of her sailor hat. "Now run along and tell Mother and Father I'll join them after the ceremony."

Rebecca, unwontedly animated, crossed paths with the children as she almost ran up the stairs, and burst in to the common-room. "My parents are here at last. They're so late. What time is it? Can you give me a hand, Liddy? This sash thing." She was clutching her wrinkled academics and wrestling to put the blue riband over her head. Her white lawn dress and college-blue riband, when Lydia had settled it to her own satisfaction, marked the dark-haired girl as a graduate. Lydia settled the heavy academic gown across Rebecca's shoulders and pinned her tasseled cap at a brave angle.

"You look ready for battle," grinned Jane. "Ready for anything."

"I am. This is a big day for me. In so many ways. I'm so excited!" said Rebecca.

"Why were you late?" asked Kitty, glancing up.

"Oh, you'll like this, Kitty! Scholarships! The bursar was settling it with my parents. They are endowing a scholarship fund. I can think of three girls off the top of my head who would excel here if they could afford it!"

A brass band could be heard through the open windows along with the cheerful hum of the gathering crowd. Jane was leaning on the windowsill, looking out at the bustle below. White tents and white chairs on lawns dotted with urns of pink geraniums. Smiling underclassmen handing round trays of refreshments. Proud parents and grandparents chatting with alumnae and faculty. A smattering of college men, come to applaud their sisters or cousins, standing together defensively, like dull little islets lost among seas of gaily dressed, confident girls.

"Hurry up and get changed," said Lydia, glancing over at her unkempt friend's evident unreadiness.

"Can't. Nothing fits!" Jane grimaced. "When I was mourning my mother, it seems like I was a good bit shorter. Got any ideas?"

"You bet I do," said Lydia, leading the way to her room and rifling through her closet.

"We graduates are wearing white; and black mourning isn't required for a niece; but this gray skirt would do, Jane, and it has all these hem tucks we can rip out in a minute to make it long enough. Wash your face and hands. And your teeth. Good. Rebecca, brush her hair. Here are hairpins. Have you a clean petticoat? And a plain white bodice? "Let's just tuck this waist in a bit and use this broad sash to hide our improvisation. And now, with this grey silk waistcoat you should look very well."

Rebecca looked at Jane and cocked her head. "Wait a minute," she said.

She went to the room they shared, opened a cabinet, and came back with a beautiful old jet mourning pin, set with gold and seed pearls, and fastened it with a ribbon around Jane's throat.

"It's beautiful," said Jane, "I'll keep it safe."

"It belonged to a great aunt I was very fond of when I was a little girl," said Rebecca. "She bequeathed it to me, along with great long ropes of pearls and an *hotel particuliere* in the Marais! I would much rather have had her company again, than have her mansion and pearls!"

"That's because you already have a mansion and pearls," said Kitty as she went out the door. "You might think differently if you didn't."

"No," said Rebecca to Kitty's retreating back. "It's because I loved her."

"You graduates better get moving," said Jane. "Show time."

Left alone, Jane looked askance at herself in the mirror. Lydia had given the gray and white ensemble the finishing touch of an elegant little straw hat, perched on top of Jane's upswept red hair and tied under her chin with a gray ribbon bow. Jane hardly recognized herself. She tossed the fashionable straw aside, grabbed her cowgirl hat from the peg near the door, stuck it on her head. The chapel bells were ringing to signal the start of the festivities. Jane let out a deep breath and set off down the stairs.

Out on the lawn, Enoch Gray, down from Yale for the occasion, grabbed his sister's arm as she hurried to take her seat among the Juniors.

"Who's the *Beauty*?" he asked.

"I suppose you mean Lydia Laurence," said Kitty.

"Is she very rich?" he asked seriously.

"She's certainly heir to an immense fortune," said Kitty with some hesitation.

"Who's her family?" her brother asked. "Who's her father?"

"Rudyard Laurence," answered Kitty gravely.

Her brother looked aghast. "The shipping man? Kitty, he was a slaver! He ran a fleet of slave ships illegally. Got caught. Shifted to the tea trade and kept getting rich. Payoffs, bribes to officials. Thoroughly corrupt!"

"I know. Rebecca explained it to me. But we don't talk about it," said Kitty. "She's just Lydia. She's one of us."

"No, she's not!" said her brother. "For all her beauty and elegance, she will find few takers in the marriage department. A shameful alliance for any respectable family."

"But they're incredibly rich," said Kitty. "She can have whomever she likes."

"Well, it certainly won't be me!" he replied. In truth, had he chosen otherwise, he would have had little hope of penetrating the cloud of admirers who surrounded the delicate blonde. He couldn't pull his eyes away, and as he watched, she looked straight at him and laughed.

M. and Mme. De Steyne, released at last by the grateful Bursar, were ushered to their seats by a member of the baseball team under the colorful direction of Miss Borowski. They found themselves seated next to the Laurence's. They were slightly acquainted with Lydia's parents, having been introduced at official college events.

The couples exchanged greetings as the de Steynes took their seats. Madame de Steyne smiled at the five adorable sailor-sisters, seated in the row behind their parents, the older girls doing a fine job of keeping the littlest ones quietly amused.

Before any conversation could be embarked on, the band struck up the Processional and the serious work of the ceremony began.

Jane was excused by her bereavement from any of the duties her fellow underclasswomen were performing. She stood alone at the back, watching the crowd with her usual dry detachment. There was Victoria, arguing again with her stubborn grandfather. There was Kitty's brother, who looked like a boy she knew back home who wasn't half so wonderful as he thought he was. Seeing the de Steynes and Laurences sitting together, she reflected that aside from their daughters being friends, and both being rich, the two couples had nothing in common. Mr. Laurence was a big man, blonde hair and whiskers, red-faced, fleshy, but very good-looking. Mr. de Steyne was small, dark, clean-shaven, athletic, but undeniably plain. Mrs. Laurence looked like a barmaid in her Sunday best, fat, frilly, and self-satisfied. Mme. De Steyne was just what a woman should be. Jane approved of everything about her.

The Laurences seemed inclined to be friendly to Rebecca's folks, and Jane chuckled, watching their dumbshow, seeing opportunities for comedy in their mis-matched pairings. She immediately thought of retailing her observations to her Uncle Henry, who always got her jokes. It was like a door slamming in her face. His brain, his soul, wasn't there. The connection was gone. She would never, ever make him laugh, or hear his laugh, again. It was unthinkable and she walked away to hide her tears.

The program plowed ahead. The Valedictorian's speech was applauded, behests were announced and appreciated, the choir sang, and finally, the great moment came and sixty-seven young women joined the few of their kind who held college degrees.

M. and Mme. De Steyne smiled quietly and clasped hands as Rebecca crossed the stage. She grasped her diploma and looked for her parents out in the audience. Her mother gave a little wave. Her father tipped his hat to her. The Laurences, all seven of them, clapped and cheered boisterously for her as well, as indeed they did for all the graduates.

The littlest girl stood on her chair and oohed in wonder as Lydia wafted across the stage and received her sheepskin with the utmost grace and a sketch of a curtsy. There was a distinctly masculine under-note to the crowd's approval and hearing it, Lydia skipped a little step and beamed her beautiful smile and sparkling eyes out at her admirers.

Eventually, the last girl got her diploma, the benediction was read and the band struck up the Recessional.

"Well," said Mr. Laurence, standing and checking his pocket-watch. "I suppose you'll all want degrees now," he said to his quintet of pretty daughters. "Not me, Papa," said the littlest one, trying to stand on her hands. "I want to be in a circus." "Shush," said the senior sister-in-charge. "You'll go to college like the rest of us, won't she Papa?" An angry, whispered argument among the girls ensued which the proud father took no pains to quell but rather seemed to enjoy and encourage.

"We were very shocked you know," said Mrs. Laurence to Mme. de Steyne, who was still seated beside her. "Very shocked indeed when Lydia said she was going to go to a university. Her father said yes straightaway – he never can refuse her anything. I was more sensible. I told her it was very unladylike; men do not like a woman to be *too* equal. I begged her to consider the time she'd be losing – in her bloom – when she could have her choice of rich husbands – not that she will ever need a husband's money – Mr. Laurence has settled millions on her already."

"How did she persuade you to let her come to Vassar?" asked M. de Steyne, whose attention had been caught by the mention of the millions.

"She told us it was the fashion to educate daughters and that all the best people were doing it," said Mrs. Laurence.

"Yes, my dear Mrs. L.," said her husband, "and to your credit you immediately saw the value in it."

"Well, rich girls do tend to have rich brothers and well-connected cousins!" agreed the mother. "Your Rebecca is an only child, I understand, isn't she?"

Mme. De Steyne happened to be turned away at the moment, but M. de Steyne took up the conversation.

"When a girl brings money to a marriage, it is safest that the husband have no need of it, having plenty of his own." M. de Steyne, father to an heiress, had thought soberly upon the Laurences' point. "Furthermore, the contract must be written so that he may not dissipate her fortune and leave her destitute should he prove a gambler or drunkard or worse. To educate one's daughter is to give her weapons to defend against such evils. It is the best, most-loving investment a parent can make, to educate their daughters as well as they educate their sons."

The stout, fair man seemed uninterested, except on one point. "That degree will prove worth every penny if it nets me a son-in-law with a good solid business head who can give me a hand. She'll have her choice, but I'll make it for her."

"She's a very intelligent young woman," said Mme. De Steyne. "I have enjoyed her acquaintance. She is sensible and good-hearted, as well as lovely. She must be a wonderful model for all her sisters."

"ALL indeed!" said Mr. Laurence with a snort, turning to the row of good-looking young faces behind him. Mrs. Laurence slapped his arm affectionately, but leaned over and began talking to Mme. De Steyne confidentially, as if they were intimate friends.

"Six lyings-in – every time with my fingers crossed, but much good that did me! Better have kept something else crossed!! Never a boy! Between us, a girl or two is not an unwelcome thing –but six girls!! Poor Mr. L. insisted we keep trying. I think he positively enjoyed it! Now thank goodness, I'm past all that sort of thing."

Mme. De Steyne was relieved to see Rebecca, laughing and chatting with her friends, coming towards her through the crowd. How she loved her precious girl! How proud she was of her. The mother's heart overflowed with love and gratitude.

Jane stopped a little short of the family groups, but Lydia and Rebecca headed straight towards their doting parents.

"Daddy," said Lydia as she came up, "I want to go on the eclipse trip to Jane's ranch."

"Whatever you like, dear," he replied.

"Is your girl going?" asked a doubting Mrs. Laurence.

Rebecca's mother looked inquiringly at her daughter. Perhaps Rebecca had talked quite a lot about a special eclipse that July, but no trip was mentioned, she was almost sure. Sometimes she didn't attend to Rebecca's chatter if her mind was on something else. Truth be told, she didn't entirely understand the girl, with her enthusiasm for machines over animals, the workshop over the out of doors.

"I do very much want to go," said Rebecca to her parents. "There'll never be a better, more convenient chance to see a total eclipse."

"But darling," said her mother, "after your party, you were coming with us to see your grandmama in Bruges! And the Baron, your Cousin Antoine. There were several young men he particularly wanted you to meet. Intellectuals, but nobles, of course. And what about your plans for Paris and the *Exposition Universelle*?"

Rebecca hesitated. The *Exposition* was a powerful incentive, and she was very fond of visiting her father's mother, a tart and hilarious *grande dame* of the old school. And there was no denying that Antoine made the best wine in all of Champagne! The young men aroused a bit of curiosity, too.

But then she looked at Jane, confident, self-reliant, brave, but oh! so young! And so alone! And grieving, too. With no idea how to handle a fortune or run a company. Perhaps with enemies. Certainly with mysteries.

Rebecca affectionately squeezed her mother's arm and repeated, "I'd very much like to go to Brakeman's Halt. Jane would be so glad if we made it a party."

"And me!" said Lydia. "And a maid, of course."

"I can take Nanny with me to keep me company," offered Rebecca. "And Rhys Evans if he's willing to leave his shop and come with us. I'm sure to be safe and comfortable with them along."

"A wonderful idea, darling," said her mother, much-relieved. Perhaps in Colorado she might learn to love the active life at last! "It will be a splendid adventure for you. Of course, you may go."

"You'd better take the train," said her father. "I'll see that it's staffed and catered for you."

"Your train's standard gauge, I believe," said Mr. Laurence, betraying an unexpected knowledge of the de Steyne's personal land transport. "There's plenty of ways to get from New York to Denver, but only one route to get your custom cars all the way to Dakota City. You'll have to swap out your trucks and find a narrow-gauge engine in Denver if you hope to take your cars south on the Denver and Rio Grande. That'll run you a pretty penny. That damned fool Palmer should have gone with standard gauge right from the beginning. It's what's called a narrow gauge railroad, ladies," Mr. Laurence explained to the females. "Rails three feet apart instead of four foot eight and a half inches. Nonetheless, the line's doing good business, I hear. Freight and passenger. Foolish though, to not just lay standard gauge at once."

"I've read, Sir," said Rebecca, "that the three-foot gauge is very handy in the mountains, cheaper in every respect and more adaptable to the terrain." Mr. Laurence looked surprised at her boldness.

Jane had been kidding around with the sisters, but at the mention of the Denver & Rio Grande she snapped to attention. Train talk always caught her ear.

"My railroad has sixty miles of tracks," she said "counting my spurs and my sidings, and it's all narrow gauge – couldn't get around the mountains otherwise! No how, no way. You'll see," she said to Lydia and Rebecca. "It'll make your hair curl, steaming along on the edge of some of those drop-offs!"

"Now that your uncle is dead, who's minding *your railroad* while you're out gallivanting?" asked Mr. Laurence brutally.

Jane's eyes narrowed and she brought her gaze around slowly to the red-faced swaggering big man.

Lydia jumped in. "The men who ran it without her before, can run it without her for a few more weeks, Papa. Jane will be in Colorado soon enough."

Lydia's father continued to glare at the forthright girl. He knew her type. That ridiculous man's hat! That she made no attempt to soften her angular appearance infuriated him.

"Believe me," said Jane, "I want to be home as much as you could wish me there."

"But where will you go?" said Mrs. Laurence. You're much too young to be on your own. You must stay with us, Jane, till you all leave with the professor."

"Jane is staying with us at Foxden Farm," said Mme. De Steyne. "She has consented to delay her departure until after Rebecca's birthday."

"What a grand affair her party will be, I'm sure, with pictures in all the papers." Mrs. Laurence's eyes glittered hungrily. "Lydia's talked of nothing else! Her gown – Worth, of course – arrived just yesterday, brought by a French woman! It came on one of Rudyard's fastest ships – straight from Paris! How we all long to see her wearing it amidst the splendors of Chateau de Steyne!" The young sisters sighed deeply.

This naked play for an invitation was beyond Mme. De Steyne's ability to ignore. "Will you and Mr. Laurence be in New York on the 20th?" she asked Mrs. Laurence. "We would be delighted if you could join us."

"Will we?! Ruddy! did you hear that?" said a triumphant Mrs. Laurence. "Lydia, dear, we're going to see you be the belle of the ball."

“Surely, Mother,” said Lydia, “The *belle* will be the exquisite Rebecca de Steyne, the brilliant birthday girl!”

Rebecca, who was under no illusions about their relative beauty, thought she could kiss her exquisite friend for her compliment! She bowed like a beau to a debutante and asked for Lydia’s hand in the first dance. Lydia began singing the school song, and Jane and Rebecca joined in. Laughing students, sisters all, joined in a merry improvised dance, gathering the crowd in a chain of connection and celebration, all singing the school song in lusty young harmony.

CHAPTER 5: FOXDEN

Rhys Evans' Mechanical Repairs and Innovations opened directly on to the Albany Post Road, and like the blacksmith's forge that had been here for generations, the open front of the workshop revealed to the passing crowd a marvelous tangle of esoteric tools and jigs to repair almost any portable modern object. Workbenches held an assortment of kitchen conveniences which had gone awry. Another bench was set up for fine work – cameras, guns, musical instruments, jewelry, eyeglasses, music boxes. Gas lamps, sewing machines, ice boxes all awaited the repairman's attention.

The shop was a fairyland for Rebecca de Steyne, a place roaring with power and possibility and she had come home from college most weekends to work alongside the Welshman, learning these practical skills she loved. It was here she had devised the apparatus she was using to collect sounds for her library. Here, she and Rhys built prototypes of her inventions and registered them with the patent office. An array of bicycles, no two the same, indicated the focus of the *Innovations* part of the business.

At the moment, Rebecca was tending to the firebox of the little stationary steam engine. It huffed and clanked and put out clouds of vapor. Rhys was moving here and there adjusting the series of belts and pulleys that powered lathes and saws, sanders and polishers, drills and presses, fans and bellows, all of it controlled with the throw of a lever and the turn of a valve and a perfectly stoked fire.

She looked up from her work at the sound of a horsebox pulling to a stop in the forecourt and heard Rhys' friendly greeting. Rebecca wiped her sooty hands on her long workman's apron and pushed back a messy lock of hair. It was probably Jane, she thought, coming with Paint and Silver from the Scarborough train station.

Jane was dressed as a travelling lad, her hair hidden under a cap, and she was walking with Rhys and the burly driver as they inspected each corner of the van. Rhys had crouched down near the off-front wheel, and was peering under the chassis, checking the linkage. "Been riding rough ever since that dip outside St. Mary's," the driver was saying. "Bit worried. She's my pride and joy."

It's a very nice rig you've got, sir. You're right to take care of it. I heard a bit of racket as you drove up. The swing on that wheel could probably use attention," he said. "Looks like it got pretty badly knocked about."

"Hi, Jane," said Rebecca, coming to join her. "How's Silver?"

"As you can see, he's raring to be home," laughed Jane, as the placid, contented Silver munched a wisp of hay. "Paint, on the other hand, has had about enough of travelling around in boxes, haven't you boy?!" She gave him a friendly pat. "Foxden is just up the road. If you want to stay and take a look at that wheel, Paint and I can pony Silver home from here. Unless you want to ride him, Rebecca. You want to come with us?"

"No, thanks," said Rebecca. "I'd rather stay and fix the van."

Jane laughed. "I'll see you at the house, I guess."

She and the driver attached the ramp and led the horses out of the van. With the ease of long practice, Jane gave Paint a quick brush, and saddled him. Rummaging in the tack trunk, she brought out a rope halter and a twelve-foot lead for Silver. She mounted Paint, put on leather gloves, and with Silver in careful tow, set out for Foxden.

Enjoying the lush greenness of an Eastern summer, they ambled contentedly through a pretty village, over a old stone bridge, down a maze of shaded country lanes bordered by fertile fields and rich pastures, till at last, through the bars of ornamental gates, Foxden Hall could be seen in the far distance.

Where the drive branched, Jane followed the familiar route that led to Madame de Steyne's equestrian establishment.

The main stable yard was full of activity. A merry group of houseguests was waiting as grooms saddled them up for a pleasure ride, but they scarcely noticed the young working 'lad,' riding a pinto and leading a gray. They were an attractive assortment, she thought - joking, laughing, charismatic beyond the ordinary. Jane knew she would inevitably be meeting them all, but for now, she enjoyed her anonymity.

Jane handed Silver over to the head lad and dismounted. They'd already had a railroad trip, a van ride, and some road work today. Now, a good clean up and a meal were in order for both of them!

She fastened Paint's lead to a staple high on a post and set to work grooming him. As she worked, picking out the hooves and brushing off the road dust, she became conscious of the scrutiny of one particular couple. Though not young, and not beautiful, they had a striking magnetism that drew attention effortlessly.

The couple wandered closer, chatting knowledgably about the fine condition of all the mounts. "I could use a good lad like you," the man said to Jane, who chuckled and went on brushing.

"A lad for my theatre company, you see! I could use a girl like you who can play a girl playing a boy - Jacobean tragedy, Restoration comedy, the Immortal Bard! Think you're up for it? Or are you absolutely committed to a stable life? Grab your opportunity, lad-girl! Fame! Adventure! A dollar a week! Join our troupe and together we shall scale the hallowed Peaks of Olympus!"

His partner came up beside him. "Darling," she said, linking her arm through his. "She has peaks enough of her own to scale. She owns Colorado."

The man doffed his tall hat and bowed gracefully from the waist. "In that case," he said, "I double my offer!"

The woman batted him playfully with her crop and smiled engagingly at Jane.

How do you do, Miss Brakeman," she said. "We are guests, like you, of the charming Marie de Steyne. I'm Nelly Nolan and this silly thing is called Christopher Ingraham."

"I've heard of you," said Jane. She tossed her brush in her bucket, put it in the locker and untied her pony. "I'll consider your offer and let you know later, I reckon," she said, grinning. "I warn you; I drive a hard bargain!"

The celebrated actress watched as the girl led the pinto away to a quieter, more private barn.

"I suppose you've read the shocking news of her uncle's accident?" Nelly said. "And of the little kingdom she's inheriting?"

"She's awfully innocent," mused Ingraham. "I wonder what enemies lurk; what pitfalls await her?"

"There is an old plot for a new comedy, indeed!" exclaimed Nelly Nolan. "Write me a play, Chris! Write me a Western heroine like Jane Brakeman; you can play a dark, delectable, dastardly villain; we'll put in a couple songs, a twist at the end, and have us a hit! London is mad for cowboys!"

They laughed as they mounted their beautiful horses and with their actors' balance and grace set off after their friends.

Jane was taking her time getting Paint settled in his stall. She generally preferred his company and conversation to almost anyone's. He very seldom said a stupid thing, and never an unkind one.

"There you are, Paint!" a friendly voice called. "And Jane, too, of course. Hello, my dear." It was Mme. De Steyne, cheerful and energetic.

"Got here at last, did you, Silver old, boy!" she said, patting the gray gelding. "Back in your old stall, eh? Perfectly comfortable next to your college friend, I hope? Need another blanket, ring the front desk. Ha ha! Here's a carrot for a good boy! They both look wonderful, Jane. None the worse for the trip. Come walk with me and tell me all about it."

Jane came out of the stall and wiped her hands on her dusty clothes. Mme. De Steyne always put her at ease. A servant appeared out of nowhere, with a basin of water, soap, towel and brushes. Jane quickly washed her hands and face, while the servant dusted her from collar to boots. She took off her cap and shook out her red hair, her cheeks rosy from their scrubbing, her smile of contentment genuine. She loved her horse, loved all horses. Nothing could be better than being with them, caring for them, riding them.

"You're looking very pretty dear," said Madame approvingly, leading the way out of the barn. "How did the horses take that bumpy patch of the post road by St. Mary's? I've offered to fix it a dozen times, but the village won't hear of it. Slows traffic they claim, as if that were a good thing! We should make them pay for the bent axles!

Jane ambled along, matching Mme. De Steyne's much shorter stride. "Rhys is up to his elbows in it right this minute," said Jane, laughing at the older woman's perspicacity.

Mme. De Steyne smiled. "And Rebecca is, too, no doubt. I wish she felt for horses what she feels for their vans! Is it the oddities of heredity, or of upbringing, I wonder, that she is so completely unlike me?"

"I don't know about that," said Jane. "I'd say she has your kindness to strangers and your good heart. And your moral courage."

Mme. De Steyne looked surprised and pleased, then troubled. She was taking a route through the oldest part of the stables. Here cobbles were uneven, roofs sagged with age and rafters dripped with ancient swallows' nests. "I just wish Rebecca wasn't afraid of so many things," she said. "Her fears keep her from places and activities she might enjoy. Hiking in the Alps, the Grand Canyon, that sort of thing. She can't seem to get over it."

As they trod the shadowy aisle of the century-old barn where retired horses lived out their peaceful last days, long, dark faces and mournful eyes followed their progress.

Rebecca's mother resumed. "You've heard about her fall? Such very high towers in those old castles! And the moats of course. And her father being such a strong swimmer, thank God! And the rest of it... Afterwards, perhaps we all gave in too readily to our nervous fears," she said hesitantly, "but of course, she turned out so marvelously!! She's been very happy this last year. You've been a great help to her, Jane. We're so glad you're friends."

They had emerged onto a broad, sun-washed vista. White-railed pastures ran away over hillsides; trails meandered into shady creek beds. Everything was peaceful, prosperous, productive. There

were horses being led, horses being ridden, horses grazing in little herds, horses everywhere Jane could see!

"I love it!" said Jane with all her heart. "This is the life for me."

"Yes, isn't it glorious?!" exclaimed Marie de Steyne. "And look, here comes my girl!"

"Hello, Mother!" said Rebecca, coming and kissing her affectionately. "Hi, Jane. I see you found your way home all right. We fixed the van. Mrs. Cooper gave me a lift up from the village. "Apparently all the ladies have come to see your new stallion work."

The little knot of women who had gathered were Madame de Steyne's hunt-mates, confident and accomplished horsewomen all. Two were still mounted, smoking and comparing notes on yesterday's sport. Mrs. Cooper sat relaxed in her pretty pony cart, handing round glasses of iced champagne from a straw-filled hamper in the back.

In the round pen, a nattily dressed, French-accented trainer was lungeing a magnificent thoroughbred. The women leaned on the rails and set to dissecting every aspect of the stallion's conformation, temperament, and gaits. Suddenly the handsome bay stopped stock still and stood at rapt attention, every muscle quivering. A lithe and disdainful mare was led by, and as she passed, she regarded her admirer, whose fixed eye, arched neck, pawing of the ground and curling of his upper lip, elicited cries of approval from the horsewomen and a flicker of interest from the mare.

"Stallions!" snorted a very tall, handsome, athletic friend of Mme. De Steyne's. "Worse than men, if you can believe it."

"You know, I often wonder, do we really need men?" asked a woman in a very elegant habit and a striking top hat. "Or at least, why do we need to maintain so many? Wouldn't a few choice stallion-men do?"

"And a few gelding-men as clerks and parsons and things. Properly-managed geldings are the best sort of males," said Mrs. Cooper. "Good appearance, good manners, good company and not driven to distraction by a couple pairs of pretty legs."

"Your argument works only until you consider subjecting your own fathers or sons or brothers to your selection system," said Rebecca. "Or till you picture yourself unluckily born a male."

"As we have all here been unluckily born female and subjected to the reverse of what we propose!" The tall woman was incensed and burned with the flame of a martyr. "Heiresses auctioned or bartered for and then penned up for life! With no agency over our destiny? Turnabout is fair play!"

"Seems to me, ladies," began Jane in her drawling cowboy voice, "that with only a few stallions among you all, I reckon pretty soon your children would all be kissing cousins."

"Oh, dear," said Mrs. Cooper, refilling glasses. "Like the Mormons! That won't do. Ollie Bradford – my first cousin – he and I were in love when we were fourteen, and it was put a stop to right away. Bad for the breed."

"Not every woman needs to breed," said the tall friend. "And very few men should be allowed to!"

"Ollie was awfully sweet," reminisced Mrs. Cooper, "and quite good-looking, but he was a second son."

"Consanguinity is overlooked often enough when there are dynastic or financial considerations," said Mme. de Steyne.

"Well, money wins every argument, doesn't it, at least with men," said the modish friend. "And what money can't win, violence always can. Even women of our class are not exempt from its effects."

"That's another argument for gelding," said the implacable Amazon. "Quiets the beasts down a bit."

"You've just never been in love," said Mrs. Cooper, whose mind still ran on Oliver Bradford, who by now was a portly judge with gout, no doubt. "If you had ever been in love, you might think differently."

"I have too been in love! Half a dozen times! Handsome and well-bred, all of them. They're in my barn at home!" she replied laughing at last.

"Let's drink a toast to *Foxden's Romeo*!" said Mrs. Cooper, gaily raising her glass to the gallant stallion. "May he sire champions!"

"To *Foxden's Romeo*!" they chorused and drained their glasses.

Romeo had calmed down and settled into the serious work of responding to the trainer's prompts. It was time for Mme. De Steyne to enter the ring, take the lunge line and the long whip from the trainer, and begin teaching the spirited stallion that it was she who was in charge.

Rebecca took a seat on a mounting block with her back to the action. She put on a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles and pulled a newspaper out of her pocket. It was a racing sheet, Jane noted with amusement. Referring to the newspaper, Rebecca, in tiny shorthand script, was making notes in a pocket notebook with a mechanical pencil attached by a thin chain to a loop on her belt. She looked up and saw Jane grinning at her. Rebecca raised her eyebrows. "Are you laughing at the chain? I thought it was a good idea. You know I lose my pencil the moment I set it down!"

"Haven't I found it and returned it to you often enough? The chain is perfectly sensible. No, my surprise is because I didn't know you played the horses," said Jane.

"Just a friendly wager with the Butler, now and again," Rebecca replied. "I'm trying to work out his system."

"So, you do have some interest in horses," says Jane, "so long as they're fast and running at good odds!"

Rebecca swatted her with her paper and went back to her work.

Madame de Steyne's trainer was quite a superior sort of person, a very intense Frenchman from the *Cadre Noir* and of course an expert in all aspects of horse breeding, management, and training. Jane had taken pains to make a good impression on him during her weekend visits and he greeted her now and engaged her in conversation.

He had had an idea he wanted to present to her. Had she not told him that members of the English *noblesse* were settling in Dakota Springs – *la station thermale, la source minerale* in Colorado? These aristocrats would be used to a superior class of horse, he thought. Hunters, jumpers, thoroughbreds, warmbloods. He doubted there were many such horses for them to ride or drive in Colorado. The quarter-horses the cowhands used were not suitable. He advised Jane to start a breeding program at her ranch and to take a stallion home with her to begin the improvement of the local stock, which he imagined to be made up of wild horses, small Spanish horses and crosses with the heavy draft types that had pulled the prairie schooners of twenty years ago. He had definite ideas on what strain of blood would produce the soundest, if not the quickest, results. This started a long technical discussion between the young rancher and the old trainer that only an enthusiast could find tolerable. Rebecca,

who pretty quickly tired of standing about outdoors among horses, reminded Jane that they needed to change before dinner. They called a goodbye to the horsewomen and the two friends set off.

"You're so lucky," Jane said to Rebecca as they walked. "You're so lucky your mother is a horse woman. Mine was a businesswoman through and through, and though she'd never be unkind to any animal, I don't believe her heart was ever touched by the kind of love your mother feels for her horses."

"I wish she'd feel it for me!" Rebecca was truly distressed; her emotions were always fluid and transparent. "You'd be a much better daughter for her in every way! I'm sorry, but I don't love the horses. And without that, I can't seem to find the secret to being loveable enough."

"Oh, Becca, she loves you! She says so all the time. She's so proud of you. She thinks you're wonderful." Rebecca had worked herself up to tears, and Jane, who had shared a room with her since September, knew what was needed. She put a strong arm around her friend's shoulders and kissed the top of her head. "You don't have to love what she loves to be loved. You're pretty perfect already, you know."

Rebecca looked up into her friend's kind face. "Oh, Jane, I'm a selfish beast, feeling sorry for myself, when it's you who have lost everything."

"Not everything. I still have a ranch, a town, a railroad - all that my mother worked for, everything she built." Jane gritted her teeth. "I'll never be able to fill her shoes. What if I lose it all?!"

"You'll fill your own shoes," said Rebecca. "And you won't lose anything. I'll help. I'll stay out there with you for as long as it takes. We'll get to the bottom of your uncle's death. We'll get you set up so your businesses run like clockwork."

"You've no idea what a crazy, almost make-believe world it is out there," said Jane. "Everything's bigger than life. I didn't see it that way till I came here. Out where I come from, there's always real mortal danger right around the corner, whether from nature or man. It will be scary. You'll have to be brave."

"I know," said Rebecca. "I want to practice being brave. And I want to have your back, and I want to protect you."

"Hey, that's my job, protection," laughed Jane.

"I'm serious," said Rebecca. "My education, my connections, my wealth and everything my father taught me about how men do business, we are going to need it all when we get there."

"Agreed. But in the meantime," said Jane, "I'd murder for a bath and a shot of whiskey!"

The girls had been noted as they wove their way through the kitchens and back stairs of the sprawling mansion, and a maid was waiting, tea was ready, and a bath was running as Jane and Rebecca entered the room. The fashionableness of the gown and accessories laid out on the bed was the result of some timely and tactful bullying from Lydia, who'd convinced Jane that she owed it to Rebecca to dress up for the Foxden crowd. The maid offered to help Jane off with her stable-boy tweeds, but Jane sent her away with thanks and a friendly grin.

"Didn't want to scandalize the poor girl," said Jane as she shed her useful disguise. "My mother used to let me dress like a boy whenever I liked. It was practical, since I was always outside doing boy things. I think she came to feel it kept me safer as I grew up, to not look too girly. Dakotah Springs is as genteel as Mayfair now, but when I was little, it was a wilder west."

"If we didn't look so different from one another, we could say you were my brother, my chaperone, and we could go anywhere!" said Rebecca. "Don't let them throw those clothes away. But you'd better get in the bath before it gets cold. Shall I go? Do you need the maid?"

"Nah, stay and keep me company. I wanted to ask you something," said Jane.

Jane let herself into the steaming tub and Rebecca cuddled up on a divan.

"You're being so serious," said Rebecca. "Has my mother said something? What did you want to ask me?"

"I want to hear about the fall," said Jane. "If you don't mind. Were you badly hurt?"

"Yes. For a time, I was. And the worst of it is, it seems to have been all my own fault."

"That's ridiculous," said Jane. "You were just a baby."

"Yes, but I believe I was a very bold and enterprising baby - I wasn't born afraid of everything, you know!" said Rebecca, almost indignantly. "But I was opinionated. I was certain I knew better than the thoroughly professional woman in charge of me. One New Year's Eve, during a visit to our cousins, I was very rude before company and mama had to scold me and send me upstairs to the nursery, away from all the pretty cakes and music and laughter. I was very angry. Nurse sat me in the corner and lectured me as she warmed my horrible mush of a dinner on the little stove in the dayroom."

"Great story so far," said Jane, handing Rebecca the sponge. "Like a fairy-tale. Here, do my back, please, but don't stop talking!"

Rebecca perched on the edge of the tub and resumed her story as she worked.

"I sat in the corner feeling humiliated, and rebellious, too. After all, I was Rebecca de Steyne - a princess! Being held prisoner and treated very unfairly!"

"That certainly sounds like you!" said Jane. "What did you do?"

"I had recently mastered the secret to unlatching the gate that prevented my wandering from the nursery."

"Of course, you did," laughed Jane.

"Child's play, really, once I put my mind to it!" said Rebecca. "Anyway, I slipped out quietly and was lost to sight in that maze of opulent rooms before nurse noticed I was gone. She let out a wail and took off after me, calling my name, calling me many names! I led her on a merry chase.

"At last, I scampered up the stairs to the very top of one of Alphonse's towers - these chateaux have marvelous collections of towers -- sturdy, stone, battle-ready towers built for warring and tall skinny white towers with pointed blue slate roofs - just like in fairy tales, as you said.

Jane took the sponge back from Rebecca, who now seemed absorbed in reminiscence, the scene before her eyes once again.

"The poor heavy woman ran panting after me, up endless stairs, calling my name. I remember being delighted with the vast open sky and the magnificent vistas of the surrounding vineyards, the river, the forested hills. I ran from side to side of the battlemented roof, imagining myself an archer firing on the attackers far below, taking cover behind the merlons, firing through the crenels.

"The nurse emerged onto the roof behind me. I have to applaud the poor woman's dedication to duty. I could see her clutching the door for support, her face white with terror. She begged me to come to

her, as I laughed and dodged around the parapets. With a supreme effort of courage, she let go of the door and lurched across the leads and caught me. But as she struggled to lift me, I wriggled right out of her arms and went over the side and down, down, down into the dark moat sucking at the foot of the walls so far below."

Jane moved uneasily in the tub and the bath water sloshed from side to side.

"I remember the descent." Rebecca paused. Her eyes looked black and enormous and she shivered as she spoke. "I dreamed of it for years. The nurse's screams and mine still mingle in my dreams. The water was icy cold and covered in greasy slime. My velvet dress and petticoats were sodden, dragging me down deeper and deeper."

Jane's mouth was hanging open.

Rebecca smiled at her. "Don't worry, I'm here. As you see, I didn't die. My father saved me. He and Mama were on the balcony with Cousin Alphonse watching the fireworks when I dropped from the sky in front of their eyes. Papa dived straight into the moat after me. Mama fainted. She was carried inside, where she went into shock and lost the baby she was carrying. My little brother." Rebecca looked miserable, for all the flair with which she had told her tale. "She never could have another child."

"I'm really sorry for you, Becky, and for your mother." Jane was thinking about Mme. De Steyne's horses and her devotion to them, and she thought she understood more Rebecca's feeling that she was not the kid her mother wanted.

"For a long while, my mother needed to be kept very quiet and they wouldn't let even her see me in the state I was in. I couldn't walk, I wouldn't speak. Papa had to get back to New York."

"Who looked after you? What happened to the nurse who let you fall? Did they hang her?" asked Jane.

"Of course not!" says Rebecca, "It was Nanny! My same old Nanny. You know her. She protects me like a bear. In those early days after my fall, I don't know what I would have done without her!"

"This water's freezing," said Jane, standing up. She wrapped herself in the warm robe Rebecca held for her. "I wish I'd been up there on that roof with you, Becky," she said. "I wouldn't have let you fall."

Rebecca crossed the room and gave a tug on the bellpull.

"I'll go get changed and meet you downstairs," she said as she went out. "It was a long time ago, Jane. I'm better now. I'm fine."

Foxden was originally a modest hunting box, valued by Mme. De Steyne for its simplicity, fresh air and picturesque barns and stables. It was simple no more. The equestrian facilities were now among the most modern and finest in the county. The old house itself, the core of which dated to the mid-1700's, had been brought up to date and lavishly expanded by M. de Steyne to house his collection of 18th century British art. The resulting mansion, walls hung with Reynolds, Romneys and Gainsboroughs, was a showplace, and both husband and wife delighted in filling its fifty bedrooms with guests of all stripes.

The crowd tonight was jolly and light-hearted; there was not a hard-faced, sharp-eyed businessman to be seen. On Mondays through Thursdays, M. de Steyne slept in the city and Madame de Steyne's

heterogeneous collection of *interesting people* animated the music rooms, *salons* and gardens of Foxden. On weekends, however, the dining tables and terraces, smoking rooms and billiard rooms, gun rooms and tack rooms were filled with bankers, politicians, stockbrokers, titans of industry, high-ranking civil servants, and their decorous and ornamental wives.

Rebecca had been observing these two worlds – Bohemia and Wall Street - since she was a child. The business world fascinated her. The vocabulary, deportment, politics, and philosophy of businessmen had become familiar to her, as had the sometimes-extreme personalities of these high-flyers - their hypocrisy, greed and ruthlessness had ceased to shock her.

For the past few years, her father's weekend house parties had included eligible young men of suitable rank, prospects, breeding, education and wealth. Some had fleetingly pricked her curiosity. Though none had inspired a desire to know them more intimately, she had taken the opportunity of their courting to learn such inside secrets as are usually only shared among men; she'd been very interested indeed in the language of *proposals* – for stock offerings!

But today was a weekday and Mme. De Steyne's Foxden crowd was eclectic and delightful. There were many distractions arranged for the guests by the de Steyne's high-born and well-connected social secretary. There was of course, badminton and croquet on the lawns, card tables on the terrace, dancing to a popular orchestra's rendition of *La Paloma* in the conservatory, a golf pro giving lessons out on the driving range, cake icing demonstrations by a master pâtissier in the kitchens, the tinkling of glasses and the soft footfalls of servants passing continually with ever more marvelous things to eat and drink.

Under the trees, booths were set up where beautiful people could ask fortune-tellers whether their next play or book would be a success. Jane spotted Christopher Ingraham and Nelly Nolan at one of these. Christopher lounged idly while Nelly was in close confabulation with a gypsy-garbed woman who read the cards laid out across a velvet draped table between them. The actor-playwright spotted Jane and gestured for her to come over and watch with him.

"Hi," said Jane to Ingraham. "My friend Arlette reads cards. And palms, too." Christopher slid some coins across the table as the seer scooped up her cards.

Nelly stood up. "No romance for me, Chris," she said gaily, "but plenty of fame and fortune. Here, Miss Brakeman, do take my seat."

"What do you see for me Madame?" asked Jane, politely. The gypsy shuffled, recited an incantation under her breath, and cut the deck. She began laying down cards.

"Let us see what we have got: This is you, in the center – *The Fool* – just a child, setting out on a journey, full of faith; and here's *The Tower* exploding! Your world is turned upside down,; and here comes *Strength* – the union of power and gentleness. *The Chariot* is a good card – if you can harness your head and your heart and drive them with a firm hand, you will achieve victory in the struggle before you."

"It looks a handful, for sure," said Jane.

"A hard road, but a hero's path," said the seer.

"Thank you," said Jane, beginning to slide back her chair.

But the fortune-teller wasn't done; she turned over one last card - a radiant child on horseback – *The Sun* - the happiest card in the deck.

The acting pair, neither of whom was tall, hurried to match Jane's long strides as she continued on in search of Rebecca.

"Could you teach me a few horse-grooming skills I could use onstage?" asked Nelly Nolan.

"First skill is to have a horse onstage!" laughed Jane.

"Well, your skills as a lad were admirable and completely believable!" said Chris Ingraham. "Has it been horses with you your whole life?" he asked.

"Oh, yes! Well, not only horses, but nature, the outdoors, certainly," she said. "My mother didn't much care about riding – horses were livestock to her, and livestock was part of keeping the whole shebang running. But my uncle who raised me, was an avid student of natural history, so I took to it naturally, you might say," she said, grinning.

"And that's how you came to be a cow-hand?" asked Nelly.

"Well," said Jane, slowing her frantic pace as she got caught up in her story, "my uncle had his parish to attend to, first down in Dakota City and then in Dakota Springs and he preached in Milltown once a month, too. My mother was always working, so I had plenty of time to amuse myself, with the housekeeper keeping half an eye on me. I hung around the barns and paddocks every chance I got. Just horse crazy as can be.

"The ranch foreman had a grandson just my age - Little Johnny Engel...that was one wild little boy! He was the better rider, but I was always the better shot. His granddad taught the two of us to rope and ride and shoot. Half the stupid things I ever did were dares and double dares with Little Johnny Engel!"

The actress stopped in her tracks and repeated, with gestures: "Little Johnny Engel! That was one wild little boy!" Jane started at Nelly Nolan's uncannily exact imitation of her accent and cadence and motions. Christopher smiled with approval at his actress-partner.

Just then, their stroll was politely interrupted. "Mr. Ingraham, Miss Nolan may we take a photograph, please!?" A pair of well-behaved journalists were circulating through the crowd, creating the stories that would soon feature in the society pages. Guests such as this idolized acting couple were not averse to having their fans reminded of their good looks and popularity.

Nelly and Christopher fell easily into dramatic and romantic poses familiar to their followers. Ingraham and Nolan were not only international stars of the theatre, but their love story had captured the hearts of millions.

The camera kept flashing, as the matinee idol offered his celebrated Byronic profile, and the West End's sweetheart pursed her rosebud mouth and widened her ingenue eyes. A crowd had gathered to watch and stare at the handsome pair.

"Avoid fame at all costs, Miss Brakeman!" cautioned Ingraham. "It is naught but vanity's snare."

"Not likely to be a problem," replied Jane, "with looks like mine."

"Did you hear that?" the reporter whispered to the photographer. "He called her Miss Brakeman. That's Jane Brakeman. The Cowgirl Heiress. She just became the richest woman in Colorado!"

"A picture, please, Miss Brakeman?" called the photographer. "Could we have one in character?"

"Yes, Jane, do!" said a familiar voice. Rebecca had found her and was smiling broadly.

“She needs a hat to be in character” said a young man lounging nearby in the crowd. “She can have mine, and my gun, too. It’s not loaded. I was just heading over to meet some fellows at the shooting range when I recognized you, Miss Brakeman, and stopped to watch.”

Jane clapped his wide-brimmed felt hat on her head and held her hand out for his gun. “Mighty kind of you,” she said. She swung the gun up to her shoulder and sighted down the barrel. The camera flashed. She handed hat and gun back, thanked the young man and turned to Rebecca.

“I’m famished,” she said. “Where’s the real food?” Rebecca laughed and the two bade goodbye to Nelly and Chris and went off in search of a square meal.

“She seems a nice girl,” remarked the photographer, already looking around for his next prey. “A bit plain, perhaps.”

“Not a beauty,” agreed his society-reporter partner. “But with her money and connections, worth a story, and we just got the perfect picture to illustrate it!”

She mimed the rifle shot. He grinned.

CHAPTER 6: INTRODUCING THE SCOTS

In a suite at the Albion, Alec Macallum was systematically working his way through a stack of newspapers heaped on a large round table, whose curvaceous legs were discreetly masked by a fringed silk shawl. Tall, good looking and about thirty, he read with a purpose and intensity that seemed out of place for the pages he seemed most interested in – the society pages.

“See here, Charles, he said, pointing to an illustrated article. “Isn’t this Aunt Maud’s friend’s girl from Dakotah Springs?”

An extremely-handsome youth, slim and fresh-complexioned, was scrutinizing himself in a heavy oak-framed looking-glass trying to match the gunslingers, outlaws and lawmen on the covers of dime novels he had arrayed nearby, tough-guy poses that would have made an old woman smile and a young woman melt in his arms, though neither of these effects were consciously aimed at. At 18, The Honorable Charles Kincaid, Master of Rotherwhyte was just so naturally-appealing that even his affectations were endearing.

“What’s her name?” asked the boy. “Perhaps Auntie M. has written about her.”

“Jane Brakeman,” said the elder cousin. “She’s an orphan, it seems, and she’s in New York right now, staying with de Steyne, the banker - the very same millionaire who’s paying for this trip.”

“Why should we be interested in an orphan?” Charles’ attention was still on his own posing. It occurred to Alec that if there were no mirrors in the world, his cousin would just switch to admiring his own shadow.

“Because she just became heiress to quite a little Empire, it would appear,” replied Alec.

“I am NOT here to bag a dollar princess,” said Charles, practicing a wide-legged gunfighter’s stance. “I’m on holiday.”

“You are not on holiday,” said his cousin sternly. “You’ve been sent down in disgrace from university and shipped abroad to make a man of you. At least that’s what I promised your father I would undertake. Life is not a continual joke. It’s time you learned to be serious about the family’s fortunes.”

“I am serious. I am a serious student of the American West. For who would be a mere man, when he could be a cowboy?” asked Charles, airily.

“The heir to one of Scotland’s oldest Earldoms can never be a *mere man*. As for being a cowboy, you’d better hurry. The West is changing. At the rate they’re pushing railroad lines through, planting towns along the way, the cowboy will soon be a thing of the past. For now, remember that your father’s cattle ranches abut on the Brakeman’s lands. Be nice to her. Her uncle was just run over by his own train. Bound to affect her mood, as well as her bank balance,” says Alec picking up a more sensationalist paper. “Good Lord! Here’s a woodcut imagining ‘the fatal moment.’ Bloody hell!” The illustration was of a man in a clerical collar, lying on the tracks, his eyes wide with horror as a locomotive in terrifying perspective bore down on him.

Charles came over to look and grimaced. “And they say the Highlands are wild!” he exclaimed. He was much more taken with the photo of Jane in her man’s hat and shooting stance. “She looks like she could be fun.”

“Yes, she does. I wonder what she’s worth?” mused his cousin Alec.

CHAPTER 7: READING THE WILL/SCIENTIFIC SHOPPING SPREE

“And so, you see, my dear, aside from these charitable bequests, which our firm have already fulfilled, the entire residue of Henry Amadeus Adams’ estate is left to you, Jane Adams Brakeman, of Brakeman’s Halt, Colorado. In addition, upon your eighteenth birthday last May, you assumed absolute control over your late mother’s assets, making you sole proprietor of the Dakota City and Milltown Railroad; majority shareholder in the Dakota Springs Development Corporation; owner of the Brakeman ranch; and the most-eligible young lady in all of Colorado!”

Augustus Bettermore beamed at his own wit, and handed the will to Jane, who immediately passed it to Rebecca. The girls were sitting side by side in M. de Steyne’s luxurious private office in the de Steyne Bank building. Rebecca put on her spectacles and started reading the document closely. Appended was a list of assets, which seemed to engross her. M. de Steyne himself sat quietly watching from an easy chair by the soaring carved oak fireplace.

When the Bettermores, longtime advisors to the Adams, had offered to travel to New York for the reading of the will, M. de Steyne had offered his premises for the meeting. Julius Bettermore, the scion of the legal family, had come along with his father both to learn the business and to reacquaint himself with a client he had last met when she was a child on a visit to her grandmother, and he a student at Harvard. He watched the two young women, their heads together, pointing at items in the list, and murmuring explanations and queries to one another.

Rebecca looked up and addressed the lawyers: “Is Dakota Springs “owned” or “governed”? Is it a town? or a resort?”

The senior Bettermore cleared his throat. “I can almost assure you that the ground that underlies all of Dakotah Springs is Brakeman ranch property. Homebuyers are, I believe, on 99-year leases; Miss Brakeman is everybody’s landlady – or perhaps the corporation is – and in any case, Miss Brakeman controls the corporation with her majority shares.”

Rebecca nodded. “I see,” she said. “And what do you know of the liquidity of these other investors? ‘Lady Maud Frawley, Colonel Sir George Benton-Bowles, Doctor David Enderleigh, Paul Shipworth, Edward Burnham’? You say that Jane is the majority shareholder? How are the minority shares distributed among the investors? What are the buyout provisions? Is the stock traded on the Exchange? What did it close at yesterday?”

M. de Steyne, from his armchair, made a slight motion with his hand, and a very professional young man from his firm hurried from the room with the shorthand notes he had been conscientiously taking. A woman stenographer continued recording the meeting in its entirety. Answers would soon be had, facts ascertained, she knew. Only the brightest were employed here.

Julius Bettermore couldn’t help grinning at the sight of a now grown-up Jane, who was regarding her college friend with obvious admiration. As Rebecca looked up from her reading, her eyes met those of the young lawyer. He quickly composed his face into more handsome lines and bowed. She tilted her head quizzically, and then smiled at him. He was smitten on the spot; Jane could see it as it happened! She felt no jealousy. Over generations, Bettermores and Adams had intermarried to the point where Jane and Julius were almost certainly related. Though he hadn’t her red hair, they certainly shared height, slenderness and a confident, relaxed air. Seeing the resemblance to her friend, Rebecca felt herself inclined to take a second look at the young man.

Julius’ father, perhaps feeling he had to give value for money, or perhaps to demonstrate to M. de Steyne that his daughter was not the only one in the room who could read an appendix, began enumerating what property Jane was now mistress of.

"From your mother, the Brakeman ranch in its entirety – thirty thousand acres of upland grazing and bottomland hay and forage crops, with water rights and mineral rights; Brakeman House itself, and all associated dwellings currently thereupon, including but not limited to barns, sheds, windmills, water tanks, wells, ponds, outbuildings, bunk houses, boat houses, foreman's house, farriers' shed, shearing sheds, forge, dairy, cattle sheds, cow barns, stables, coops, fences and pens. Also yours is any and all equipment, including wagons, carriages, pony carts, and all ironwork and mechanical devices such as plows, harrowers, reapers, balers, etc. The station shelter which gives the Halt its name is technically on the railroad's right of way, but of course with your ownership of the railroad comes the appurtenance of its right of way. You are now mistress of all the Brakeman Ranch's livestock including dairy and beef cattle, all horses, including the cow-hands' strings of working stock, draft and carriage animals, hacks, ponies, oxen and mules, donkeys, sheep, goats, pigs, poultry, and waterfowl. Your uncle's apartment at the Dartmoor Hotel in Dakota Springs is now yours, as are his personal effects therein, including furnishings, tableware, various medal, coin and stamp collections, musical instruments, books, art, botanical specimens, horses, dogs and carriages. You are designated his literary executor, and he seems to have intended that you collate and perhaps publish his sermons, lectures, letters, journals, sketchbooks, etc., etc. His assets – now yours - also included valuable real estate, including your late grandmother's house on Beacon Hill, the family retreat on Martha's Vineyard, several farms in Connecticut, etc. etc. It's an awful lot for a girl to handle, and I assume you will seek advice," concluded the cautious elder Bettermore. "Such a diverse and substantial portfolio will require careful, professional management."

"The railroad is key to it all," said Jane, who had been listening intently as the scope and weight of her responsibility grew upon her. "First thing," she said, "I'm going to make some investments in the railroad, more rolling stock, heavier gauge rail, better stations, newer engines, an expanded schedule."

"It might be wiser to wait before funneling any funds in that direction," said Julius, who had been doing his homework. "We're not sure the railroad is solvent. We haven't been able to examine the books of the DC&M. We sent an accountant down from Denver, but they were refused sight of the ledgers, by the gentleman in charge. We are somewhat wary of his probity."

"Duncan Campbell?" marveled Jane. "He's as straight as they come."

"I believe our representative was turned away by one Mr. Mitchell Donnelly, presenting himself as General Manager of the railroad."

"I've never heard that name in my life," said Jane. "I don't like the smell of this. Who else is cheating us, I wonder?"

"Our man got complete cooperation from the bookkeeper for the Dakota Springs Corporation," said Julius. "All above-board, a thriving, growing well-managed enterprise. Well-off British invalids are seemingly flocking to the place; they're even calling it *Englishtown*. The climate is said to be especially beneficial for complaints of the lungs. But of course, with this rapid development, the Corporation is spending money to make money, which means they're often skating on the edge. They depend upon the freight and tourist railroad revenues to underwrite the construction of the town's necessary amenities."

"Then I reckon I was right in saying the first order of business when I get home, is to find out what's going on with the DC&M." Jane was sincere. "Not just The Springs, but the whole district depends on us running trains from the lumber mills and camps up in the mountains, down to the D&RG railhead in Dakota City. There's crops along the route that wouldn't get to market, kids who wouldn't get to school, mail that wouldn't get delivered if it wasn't for my train. If the mines hadn't petered out, my folks would've built the rest of the route, all the way up to Crooked Creek. Now, there's only an old

stagecoach road. Now, that would take your breath away, Rebecca! Drops that a mountain goat would shiver at."

Rebecca did in fact shiver. What was her friend thinking!? To scare her like that?! A question for another day. For now, she thought, the Bettermores, father and son, had given her plenty to occupy her mind.

She was watching these worthies saying their adieus and packing their briefcases in preparation for catching the 5:10 to Boston, when she was distracted by the great doors opening and admitting a slim aide and a shaft of unaccustomed sunshine into the dimly-lit intimacy of the banker's office. Confidences made in this room stayed in this room, the dark, convoluted woods, heavy beams, light-smothering velvet drapes seemed to imply.

The secretary delivered his message to the banker, whose eyes betrayed his excitement. He turned politely to Augustus Bettermore and his son. "Sirs, if you can stay a moment, I promise you a sight worth your time. A courier has just arrived with an exceptional treasure. If you would care to see it, we'll have the man in at once."

The Bettermores accepted their host's kind invitation with ready alacrity.

M. de Steyne was alight with anticipation. "You will all recall, I'm sure, that in 1401, Florence held a competition for a second-set of Baptistry doors. The subject to be attempted was the Sacrifice of Isaac, in bronze relief, with a stated number of figures and symbolic elements, all in the shape of a quatrefoil. Only two of the competition entries remain. Some years ago, I was able to acquire Ghiberti's winning bronze, and today, Brunelleschi's quatrefoil joins its more fortunate rival."

"Oh, Papa!" said Rebecca. "I know how much you've longed for it!!"

"Yes, my dear, and Mr. Macallum of the Fitzwilliam Museum is outside with it now," he replied. "Let's have him in."

Much to Rebecca's surprise and - Jane noticed - Julius Bettermore's consternation, the fusty old museum curator they had expected, turned out to be a vigorous Scot of perhaps thirty or thirty-two, with broad shoulders, a handsome, craggy head, sandy hair, and light blue eyes. Adventure, rather than scholarship, seemed more natural to one of his ilk, she thought. Her father made the perfunctory introductions, and the Scot set about carefully unsealing the precious package he had hand-carried across a continent and an ocean. The bronze was meticulously inspected and admired by the knowledgeable messenger and connoisseur client, while the Bettermores surreptitiously checked their watches.

At last, when Alec Macallum turned all his attention onto her and Jane, Rebecca felt that his magnetism must have gotten him far in life. He spoke directly and simply and with a wonderful command of language. The burden of his story was that he was nephew to this same Lady Maud Frawley of Dakota Springs, Colorado, and would soon be visiting there, along with his cousin, The Honorable Charles Kincaid, and looked forward to assuring his aunt that her charming young neighbor appeared in superb looks and health."

Jane's anger and frustration with that Lady did not allow her to make a civil response, and so she made none. She could see that Rebecca was taken with this Hibernian.

"It's my daughter's birthday in a few days," said M. de Steyne, still engrossed in the Brunelleschi masterpiece. "Several of our guests will be glad of a private view of my pair of prizes. I shall steal them away from the ball, to share my own glee."

"Leaving us short of dancers, Papa!" laughed Rebecca. "Do you dance, Mr. Macallum?"

"I do, in the Highland manner." He smiled charmingly.

"Ah," she said. "Then dress in the Highland manner, come to my ball, and Jane and I shall have a Fling with you, yes, and all our friends will, too!"

"You are very persuasive, ma'am." He bowed to the banker's daughter and smiled at the Colorado heiress.

Noticing Julius Bettermore bristle with jealousy, Jane thought of the nature of stallions. Competition was in their blood, but one filly was much like another to them, distinguishable only for how useful they were in one-upping other men.

"And your cousin will be most welcome, too, of course," said M. de Steyne. "My congratulations, by the way, on your address in persuading the Principessa to part with her prize. You live up to your reputation, Mr. Macallum."

"In truth, Sir," answered the Scot modestly, "the offer you authorized me to make was so very generous that it took but little persuading (after a night or two together at the casino), for me to convince the heir. It was he who convinced his aunt, the Principessa. I'm told she cried in parting with it. But it paid his debts, and more."

Rebecca smiled to herself. This was the way she was accustomed to men conducting business: a veneer of utmost politeness, and cut-throat tactics underneath. She wasn't attracted to this adroit professional, but she was intrigued by his methods. She looked at Jane to see if she was equally amused and was shocked at the clear picture of dejection and exhaustion the girl presented.

"We're going shopping," Rebecca announced loudly. "Goodbye everyone. Come, Jane."

Jane was still and quiet in the coach. It was odd, thought Rebecca, to be the one who was not downhearted. If anything, her own spirits were buoyed by the knowledge that she had performed well in the will reading, that Julius was attracted to her, and that handsome Alec McCallum was coming to her party. She knew that when Jane was ready to talk, she would talk.

Like a wizard in a play or an alchemist in a children's book, the shortsighted, stooped old man absent-mindedly flapped a feather duster along rows of laboratory glassware. He appeared to be telling himself jokes as he worked, for he mumbled and cackled and danced a step or two when he thought he'd landed a particularly good one. He was his own best audience. His fur-trimmed, motheaten coat flapped up the dust, too, which danced in shards of sunlight and silently resettled on jars of jewel-colored liquids, fragile glass beakers, pipes, retorts, microscopes, meters, and all the bric-a-brac of the various sciences.

His routine was interrupted by a series of peremptory raps on the street door. He opened it to the sight of an impressive footman helping two fashionable young ladies alight from an elegant coach, a conveyance such as these narrow streets of crooked shopfronts seldom saw.

"Miss de Steyne," the old man said happily. "An honor."

"I'm flush, Mr. Silberberg!" said the dark-haired girl as they entered the shop. "Papa's given me *carte blanche*. I've come to outfit a little laboratory, a workshop on wheels. Will you and Stella do it for me? It's all a bit of a rush, I'm afraid."

"But of course, my dear, as always, your devoted servant." Jacob Silberberg smiled and bowed. "Do what, dear?" he asked.

"I'll be right with you, Becca. Will you hold Bertie, please Grandad?" asked the efficient-looking woman who came out from the back room, baby on her hip. "You're getting so heavy!" she teased the gurgling tot as she handed him to the doting old shopkeeper.

"He's beautiful, Stella. I'm so happy for you and Sam. Stella was two years ahead of me at college, Jane. She took the Prize for Chemistry. One of our brightest!"

"I don't know about that, Becca. But it's awfully kind of you to say so," said the young mother simply.

"Stella Silberberg, Class of '76, meet Jane Brakeman, class of '81, my roommate this past year. We're taking Papa's train to Jane's place in the Rocky Mountains. The whole astronomy club is coming with us for the big eclipse"

"Nice to meet you, Jane," said Stella. "That sounds exciting. How can I help you two today?"

"Rhys and I are outfitting a car to serve as a lab and a workshop for whatever we may encounter on our way!" Rebecca pulled a rolled-up sheet of drawings out of her umbrella. "Lucky it didn't rain!" she laughed, as she spread the vellum out on a countertop and put on her spectacles. "Here, have a look at these plans. Perhaps they're too ambitious?"

"Well, I see it will be a tight fit," said Stella. "How much flexibility do we have?"

Jane contributed her special knowledge. "There are special considerations: we have to be prepared to run standard-gauge cars on narrow-gauge tracks for part of the way. That will mean remounting the cars on narrow-gauge bogies in Denver. That's why I'm recommending keeping the heaviest weight towards the centerline and over the axles rather than around the perimeter."

"An interesting challenge," said Stella, as she jotted notes.

Rebecca picked up the conversation again. "In the interests of speed, feel free to cannibalize my lab here in the city, but keep lists and order replacements for anything I take for the train. Rhys Evans will be in town tomorrow to work with you. He knows better than I what he might find a need for in the wild, wild west. Order anything he asks for."

Stella knew Rhys well – together they had fitted out Rebecca's Manhattan lab and workshop at the Chateau de Steyne. Visions were already forming of what would be needed. This would be fun!

Jane had drifted away as the talk got technical. Rebecca had a funny idea of shopping. This seemed more like work, to Jane. She walked amid the apparatus of scientific investigation and couldn't shake the feeling that there was a mystery, too, somewhere in her uncle's death. Things like this didn't happen to quiet parsons. She stared blankly at the display case in front of her. Magnetometer. Sort of a fancy compass, wasn't it? She wished it could help her find her way home. She had to stay focused, so she didn't think too much. Get past Rebecca's dance, get on the train, get home, and get to work.

CHAPTER 8: HORSEWOMEN

A very kind impulse of Mme. de Steyne's had led her to invite Jane on a quiet morning hack. The day dawned warm and cloudless, and the shade of the leafy lanes was welcome, even at so early an hour. Jane rode an eager and interested Paint, his nostrils wide and intelligent, eyes ever alert. Her broad-brimmed felt hat shaded her eyes, and her lasso and rifle were slung from her tooled high-pommeled saddle as if she were about to patrol the open range instead of pace decorously along this bucolic, manicured, suburban ramble. Astride her beloved pony, Jane felt more at home than she had in ages.

Mme. de Steyne expressed great curiosity to know more of Brakeman's Halt, its history and environs, and in response Jane spoke proudly of her family's accomplishments and of the joys of growing up active and out of doors. At first, her tales brought forth pictures of her happy childhood, till she of necessity spoke of the loss of her father, her mother, and now, her uncle. Then, a bitter edge colored the girl's usual laconic delivery. "I'll do alright on my own, I reckon," she finished.

"If you saw a man you liked, the right man, he could take much of this burden off your shoulders," said Mme. de Steyne. "He would be company for you. Give you children. A family of your own."

She had never had a real family, thought Jane. Not one with a motherly mother, a real live father instead of a kindly uncle, and lots of brothers and sisters to fight with and play with and turn to in a pinch. For a moment, the idea of creating, of being part of, such a family was very seductive, till she set to trying to picture the man who could be worth giving up her freedom for. Certainly, no man she had ever seen yet. And surely she was much too young to think of having a child when she was little more than one herself! Yet she saw it happening every day, fifteen, sixteen-year-old girls, sold off to grizzled miners to keep house, cook, and warm the bed. Horrible thought!

"I'll keep my eyes open for a suitable match, shall I?" offered Mme. de Steyne.

"I'd rather you found me a suitable stallion! If anyone is going to breed, it won't be me!" said Jane, hoping her smile removed all offense.

"I'll keep my eye out for both!" laughed Mme. de Steyne. "Ah, here's our cantering place. Let's see how this boy moves." She kicked up the thoroughbred and left the pinto pony in the dust, till Jane, with a whoop and a holler took off after her at a gallop.

Soon, they had passed out of the area of charming suburban villas into an area of hayfields, farmhouses, barns, and fenced pastures. A gang of boys hollered and waved their hats as the ladies passed. The youngsters were hanging onto a gate and daring each other to taunt a peacefully grazing young bull. At the sound of their whooping, the bull looked up and sniffed the air and then snorted loudly, which sent the boys into paroxysms of enthusiasm. The disgraced-ex-racehorse shied and danced sideways a bit at the racket. He was only four, Mme. De Steyne explained to Jane. A talented but temperamental racer. She was riding him today to judge whether he could be turned into a reliable hack.

The ladies' talk turned inevitably to the subject of horsemanship and of horses in general. Jane recounted how when she was a child, she had picked her pinto from a herd of wild mustangs and mavericks, and of how the head wrangler had broke him and trained him.

"Now *there's* a man I would have married! When I was about six!" Jane laughed, remembering those happy days, feeling better than she had in a long time.

"What is going on back there, I wonder?" asked Mme. De Steyne, turning in the saddle to look back down the lane. Her thoroughbred was clearly agitated. Even Paint gave a snort and a toss of his head.

"I'll go see," said Jane, wheeling her pony around and setting off at a lope. "Wait here."

It was the young bull, set loose by the hollering pack of boys, who were chasing it down the lane. Jane had seen plenty of bulls in her day, and this was by no means the worst, being on the young side. But it wasn't going to be a picnic, she could see that. Roping him and bringing him down alone would be impossible, Jane knew. The beast was trotting along the lane, stopping to graze a bunch of roadside flowers, seemingly more curious than perturbed. Jane wasn't fooled, she'd seen these creatures explode. She doubted they could outrun him. Just in case of trouble, she reached for her rifle - ready-loaded, from force of habit - but the boys, though far behind, were still right in her line of fire. She patted Paint's neck and talked low and calmly. "Easy, boy. Let's back up, real easy. That's right. Don't neither of us look him in the eye."

Behind her, she could hear the thoroughbred's anxious protests, as Mme. de Steyne worked to control him. Jane wished she could tell her to just run for it, to escape, but she knew her friend's mother would never abandon her to the bull.

The boys came rollicking up the lane, howling in full voice, announcing their view of the quarry.

Jane could see the grazing bull's whole demeanor change as he turned to face his tormentors and fixed the foremost with his eye. The boys stopped dead in their tracks, then scattered, jumping fences, climbing trees, whooping with delight as the monster lowered his head, pawed the ground, and bellowed in blood-curdling fury!

That was the final straw for Mme. de Steyne's nervous thoroughbred. It screamed, reared, and fell over backwards. Mme. de Steyne was thrown breathless to the ground, the terrified horse so close beside her screaming and kicking as it struggled to get up.

The bull cumbrously turned and redirected its malevolent gaze at the shrieking racehorse.

"No, you don't!" shouted Jane, working Paint between her friend and the bull. "Here, Toro, nice bull, take a look at this!" She waved her lasso, hooted, danced her pony in front of the bull's face in tiny half steps, trying to strike at its nose with the butt of her whip. She caught a glimpse of the thoroughbred, which had made it to its feet and stood trembling. Mme. de Steyne still lay on the ground at its feet, conscious but dazed; if the spooked animal stepped backward she would be trampled!

Mme. de Steyne reach for a stirrup and dragged herself up by the saddle leather, collected the reins, got a foot in the stirrup, and grimacing with pain, hoisted herself into the saddle, swaying with weakness, while the horse skittered beneath her, bucking and shrieking in terror.

The bull huffed and pawed the ground, winding up the immense power inherent in its muscled quarters, thrusting shoulders, deadly horns and battering ram head. With a mighty roar, it charged past Jane - and dropped dead in its tracks as her bullet penetrated the vulnerable spot under its shoulder - the Achilles heel that led straight to its heart.

"Thank you God!" Jane's relief hit her like a warm flood. It hadn't been a shot she was sure she could make. She sheathed her rifle and spurred her pony to Mme. de Steyne's side, jumped down and got the shivering horse under control.

"I'm all right," said Mme. de Steyne. "I've been thrown before, God knows, though not in front of an angry bull; but the fear I felt for you, my dear, was the worst of it! What wonderful riding. And what a magnificent shot!"

"I'm sorry I had to shoot him. He was just doing his job." Jane looked sadly at the poor bull. "Fool of a farmer to put him in a field with a gate to the lane."

"I'm afraid that's one of my farms! Don't be angry. That must be one of my own bulls." Mme. de Steyne looked philosophical. "At least we won't have to wait here for his owner to arrive. We'll leave a message at the next farmhouse."

The thoroughbred was too exhausted to protest as Mme. de Steyne carefully led him past the cooling carcass of his late tormentor, and the two horsewomen set off homewards for a much-needed cup of tea.

Rebecca was leaning back in a padded green leather swivel chair, in the well-lit, modern office *cum* laboratory of *Evans Mechanical Repairs and Innovations*. It had been part of her investment in the business to build this addition behind the old forge *cum* garage. Up front, the shop engine huffed its white steam and black smoke, and the heavier, dirtier work was done. Back here, wooden floors, brick walls, and huge steel-framed windows heralded all that was clean, practical and convenient. And perhaps just a little luxurious.

Rebecca's neat boots were propped on a tapestry stool to make a lap for Rhys's little Welsh puppy. With its short legs, outsize ears and adorable expression, it was very easy to love and spoil. It jumped down as Rhys entered and frolicked over to welcome him. Rhys picked it up, gave it a pretend scolding, and put it in its little pen, where it promptly fell asleep. He took off his tweed jacket, hung it neatly on a peg, tied on a lab apron and began shelving bottles, putting tools in racks and drawers, generally restoring order. Rolling some sheets of drawing paper up into a tight cylinder, he wrote out a label in his neat, draftsman-like hand, fastened it with a bit of blue tape, and placed the roll upright in a tall box holding dozens of other labeled drawings.

"Bit of work for the Patent Office," he remarked to Rebecca.

"Indeed!" she said. "All very worthy, very boring inventions and improvements." She came over to look at the ingenious working models that Rhys had made to accompany the drawings. "Let's think up something exciting. Tommy Edison is getting way out in front of me in sound reproduction! And I still can't forgive myself for letting Elisha Gray get his patent in first on the harmonic telegraph! I'm sure he stole the idea from me that time he came to dinner!"

Rhys was laughing. This was a twenty-year-old girl – well, almost twenty-one – fancying herself in fierce and equal competition with the great inventive minds of the age!

"To be fair," said Rhys tactfully, "you've been too busy in real life to be dreaming things up. It takes solitude. One of Mr. Edison's chaps told me the great man goes off by himself every day, for hours, into his little office, and when he comes out, there you are, a new idea for the lads to play with. You don't have that kind of time, at least, not lately. And you don't have the lads!"

"I don't need lads, I'll have lasses!" said Rebecca. "A workshop full of the best female mechanical minds - young and old - inventing the future. That's my dream!" She looked around the workshop as if calculating a vast expansion.

"Doesn't have to be a dream, you know," said Rhys. "You could put it in motion tomorrow if you wanted to. Nothing to stop you."

"I know. I've tried to get Jane interested in the lab, but she doesn't care for the bench work of science. Keen enough on the flora and fauna, though. And she knows the night sky like the back of her hand. I admit she loves engines, but only when they get to be the size of locomotives. That's like saying you only like cats when they get to be the size of tigers."

"Her uncle's influence, you say, the botany and wildlife part?" Rhys took off his apron and reached his jacket down from the peg. "She'll be lonely without him, revisiting their favorite walks. She'll be very glad of your company, Becky."

The puppy woke up and stretched and yawned like a fox kit, and Rebecca couldn't resist going to it and lifting it out of its pen.

"I just hired that secretary friend of the Scotsman. Mrs. Ickes. Perhaps she'll turn out to have some mechanical aptitude and be my first protegee."

"I think she'll be far too busy keeping your accounts, answering your correspondence, making your appointments, arranging the flowers your admirers will send, and scolding your dressmaker for inattention to detail. You are a stickler for detail, don't I know it."

"I'm sorry. I don't mean to find fault; I just see things and can't not see them every time I look!" Rebecca frowned at herself. "I'm very grateful to you, Rhys, for taking on Mary Little's work. I didn't want to leave town with these patents unfiled."

"I still don't understand what happened to her," said Rhys.

Rebecca shook her head. "It's all very strange. She was running ordinary errands for me in town when she was most-unaccountably tripped up by some spiffy character sporting a bowler and twirling a cane. He tipped his hat, hooked her ankle, she says, yanked, then ran! Down she went. Her leg is quite broken, I'm afraid. And she has a bump on her head the size of a pumpkin."

"The world is full of rotters, that's for sure," said Rhys.

"You'll have my back out there, won't you?" said Rebecca. "On the trip?"

"You bet," he said, unlocking a cabinet and showing her a beautiful, pocket-sized, lightweight gun. "And you won't be defenseless."

Rebecca took the little pistol from him and examined its works. "Very neat, indeed," she said.

Rhys looked pleased and relieved. He had half-expected resistance. "I've put a safety on it, so don't worry about shooting your foot off. I don't expect you to waltz with it in your pocket, but otherwise, I advise you to keep it on you - day and night. Heiresses make good targets. I'll bet that now that she's known to be rich, Jane never leaves home unarmed."

"I suspect she never did," said Rebecca. Her roommate had taken excellent care of all her firearms, and the sight of Jane cleaning her arsenal was a familiar one. "This is a neat little piece. It slips well into a pocket," she said, her action matching her words.

"And out again," added Rhys, "though I hope you'll never need to put it to the test."

CHAPTER 9: THE BIRTHDAY BALL

"She makes a good princess," said Jane to herself, as she watched Rebecca who stood with her parents - smiling, curtsying, resplendent in her beautiful ballgown and priceless jewels, receiving the congratulations of an endless succession of guests.

Jane looked around, spotting a few familiar faces in the growing crush of splendidly-dressed females grouping themselves into decorative little pastel clusters, like bunches of flowers in the gilt and mirrored vastness of the brilliantly-lighted ballroom of the Chateau de Steyne. The men were for the most part undistinguished and to Jane, indistinguishable, one from another, in unvarying uniforms and un-heroic bearing. They couldn't compare to the men she rode with, worked beside, back home. But she was happy for the de Steynes. The cream of New York society had turned out in their hundreds to wish her friend the best of birthdays. Giddy, hopeful girls; self-conscious, love-struck boys; dignified bankers, confident dowagers, complacent bishops, mercenary mothers, social climbers, fools and philanthropists all streamed in, paid their compliments, and mixed, united by this celebration of their own extreme prosperity. Showing off their manners, their jewels, their husbands, the anonymous women in the crowd looked happy enough, thought Jane. But this could never be the life for her. What a waste of money. A waste of a life! She couldn't wait to get back home.

With impressive sonority and impeccable accent the handsome giant guarding the door announced *La Professoressa Signora Isabella Mancini*, and Jane saw Rebecca light up with happiness as she greeted her.

"How beautiful you look!" Rebecca exclaimed, taking both her teacher's hands, and kissing both her cheeks. Of all her guests, this was the person Rebecca most delighted in seeing. This distinguished old woman, her silver hair set off with an aigret of trembling diamond stars, her velvet gown a deep midnight blue - it was she who had opened Rebecca's mind to the glorious mechanics of the universe, and Rebecca loved her for it. His daughter's obvious fascination with the subject had led M. de Steyne to donate the wonderful observatory where she had blossomed, losing so many of her fears under the astronomer's wise tutelage. Now, he bowed gracefully over the professor's old hand.

"You honor us with your presence, my dear Signora," said M. de Steyne. Then, speaking in rapid, fluent Italian, he inquired about preparations for the trip. "Had she everything she needed? She must not hesitate to ask for anything that would make their trip to Colorado more pleasant."

The professor assured him that the *major domo* of the train had arranged everything perfectly. "M. de Steyne was only too generous! Too kind!"

He bowed again. "She did him an honor by her acceptance. It would be much more comfortable for her and the girls, safer and more suitable in every way."

The beautiful old Italian smiled. "Thank you, my dear friend. And I, in turn, will guard your jewel, as if she were my own."

Signora Mancini saw a comfortable Louis Seize chair by the fire and claimed it. From here, she thought, she could do her *observations* and make her *calculations*.

Jane detached herself from the column she was supporting and ambled over to the fireside and amiably greeted the dignified old astronomer.

“Won’t you sit with me?” said the Professor, patting the seat beside her. “Let the mad world come to us. We will defend our island of calm.”

Jane sat and stretched out her legs and leaned back. It would be a long night, she thought. It was only seeing Rebecca so happy that made it endurable. Meanwhile, the drone of guests being announced still went on, even as the music played and the dancers whirled by in a dizzying haze.

“Ah!” said the Professor, lightly touching Jane’s hand. “Aren’t those Lydia’s parents just arriving? Rudyard and Lavinia Laurence. Yes, and there she is. Lydia. How I shall miss our concerts! She will be lost to music and science alike, I fear. One of these men will inevitably claim her. House, servants, children - her guitar will gather dust, as will her fine mind. Her beauty is her destiny.”

Jane thought that Mrs. Laurence had not been far off when she said Lydia would be the belle of the ball – she was immediately surrounded by the most powerful and self-confident of the men, with radiating circles of lower-status and younger men in ranks behind, pretending to chat about sport and the City, but each man, young or old, glancing compulsively at the lovely, laughing, ethereal girl and waiting their turn.

New York’s top society orchestra was playing airs from Gilbert and Sullivan’s brand-new London sensation, *H.M.S. Pinafore*. The dancers swirled in frothy clouds around Rebecca as the ceremonial abated, and she was at last free to enjoy her own party. The birthday girl half-danced through the crowd, being kissed, congratulated on every hand. Introductions were made, her favor was solicited for this or that dance. Someone handed her a glass of champagne. Someone handed her another, a toast! Suddenly, she was buoyantly happy. Everything was light and gay. Her mother looked relaxed and regal, her father as elegant as any man in the city; and she was not displeased with her own looks, till she caught sight of Lydia and any vanity she may have been feeling was humbled. She knew the girl and loved her, but in truth, Lydia was too much! A veritable goddess, dressed in the height of fashion, and yet still exuding innocence and approachability. No heavy diadem of outsized gems and weighty gold repelled the hopeful swain. Instead, a circlet of tiny silk flowers glowing with real pearls crowned Lydia’s flax-pale hair, which fell in lovely waves around her delicate face. Her dress was a misty haze of pale blue and violet gauzy layers, but the ripeness of her figure was perfectly delineated, and poet and peasant alike saw in her the dizzying promise of happy fecundity.

“What a wonderful, beautiful, feminine girl!” thought Rebecca. “What gifts! Beauty without cruelty; intelligence without acerbity; vulnerability without victimhood. Lucky, lucky Lydia!”

“Poor, poor Lydia,” thought Victoria, watching a simplistic battle of conflicting desires playing out across the face of Kitty’s humdrum brother. She saw him visibly longing to approach Lydia, inching forward, then just as transparently pulling himself back, turning away with noble revulsion, grabbing a champagne from the passing waiter, downing it theatrically.

“Does she ever get a moment’s peace, I wonder?” thought Victoria. “How does she tolerate these dull, ordinary men turning themselves into romantic heroes - in their own minds at least?” Steadied by his champagne – the first man that ever was - Kitty’s brother now boldly began weaving his way through the scrum, towards the radiant girl. Victoria shook her head in disbelief. “She attracts them like flies, but she doesn’t appear to work at it at all. It’s the width between the eyes, perhaps. The carriage of the shoulders. I need to paint her until I’ve caught it.” Her mind’s eye was floating through poses, settings, costumes, themes, styles, props, when her grandfather interrupted her by tugging at her sleeve, a habit she was coming to resent, as it became more and more constant and insistent. His hearing was going, but his eyes were plenty sharp still, and he had spotted a striking pair of young men in formal Highland dress enter the ballroom and greet the hosts. They were an immediate sensation. The ladies purred almost audibly, and the gentlemen almost growled.

"Look, girl - a pair of Caledonians in full kit. Do you know them?" The painter looked in vain for his granddaughter's reaction. "Have we got any genre pictures on the books? Adds color and novelty to a scene. Shall we ask them to sit for us? Shall I go over now and ask them?"

"I doubt you'd have any luck," said Victoria, stung into replying. "The pretty boy is the Honorable Charles Stuart Kincaid, heir to the Earldom of Rotherwhyte; Alec Macallum is the name of the handsome older cousin; he works for the Fitzwilliam Museum. He did a job for the de Steynes. Anyway, the two Scots are leaving for Colorado tomorrow. Their aunt, Lady Maud Frawley lives in Dakotah Springs. She's partners with the Brakemans somehow."

For a painter to make a comfortable living, he must not succumb to idealistic fantasies, and waste his talent in pursuit of dreams, but must be always thinking of the next commission, the next helpful referral, the next satisfied client. This was a truism Professor van Leyden was concerned his rebellious granddaughter come to accept. Her talent was exceptional, he thought. He didn't want her to waste it on Art.

"Dakota Springs," said the old painter, thoughtfully. Professor Mancini has spoken of the Brakeman girl's spa as her destination. Quite a coincidence."

Jane Brakeman, still sitting beside the Professor, had recognized some passing revelers as glamorized versions of their usual Foxden selves. The staid stockbrokers' wives had warmly embraced the aesthetic of superfluity, their gowns and coiffures a riot of elaboration. The eccentric crowd from Mme. De Steyne's weekday *salons* were especially vivacious in this opulent setting, their high spirits and loud voices raising the level of excitement for even the stodgiest of M. de Steyne's weekend guests - well-fed, boastful men whose gruff laughs, conspiratorial murmurings and cigar smoke drifted in from the terrace. Hard, grasping, driven men, competing for land, for claims, for gold and silver. The kind of men she would soon be facing. She'd known they existed - the west was no fairy-land - but her mother and her uncle had been like a wall between her and that world. Her home had been her haven. A sudden longing for the cleanness of the mountain air, the majesty of the peaks, overcame her and she turned her face away and shut her eyes tightly.

"My dear, Miss Brakeman? May I introduce to you Charles Kincaid. He is nephew to Lady Maud Frawley of Dakota Springs, with whom I believe you are acquainted."

It was Mme. De Steyne, with that cousin of Alec Macallum. Jane had seen him on his entrance and written him off as a pretty boy. Fit for a ballroom. Nevertheless, she let the pain drain out of her face before she turned with a properly polite greeting. Anything less, and she'd never hear the end of it among the gossips of Englishtown.

"Now, there's a scene!" old van Leyden said, as a charismatic couple come through the grand doorway, posed dramatically to draw all eyes while their names were being read, then descended the staircase with utmost gallantry and youthful, elastic grace.

Jane, on seeing Nelly and Christopher arrive, excused herself from the desultory conversation she'd been having with the Scottish boy, and hurried across the room, with the first animation she had felt all night, to greet her friends, and walk with them as they went in search of Mme. De Steyne. They had come straight from the theatre, which excused their lateness, they hoped. Nelly's spirits were still elevated from the performance, and she chattered and laughed as they walked through the crowd. Didn't Rebecca look attractive! Look, there was a man staring at her right now! Was he following her, trying to overhear their conversation? How odd. *Methinks he has a lean and hungry look*. Well, let him look, all the world's a stage, after all. When was she leaving for the West, the actress wondered? Were her stable lad clothes ready for the trip? Was her pony going on the train with her? Perhaps

they'd meet in Colorado. She and Ingraham and their troupe had bookings throughout the frontier states and territories, including playing at mile-high Denver and two-mile-high Leadtown. They'd be gasping for air at ten thousand feet, she wagered. It would be a wonderful adventure. And then of course, on to the golden streets of San Francisco!

It was amazing, thought Jane, how much more fun, more free, the actors' lives seemed. Mobile, expressive, unburdened. What were their responsibilities? what weighed on them? Not 30,000 acres, not a railroad, they didn't have a whole town hanging around their necks!

Nelly stopped to autograph some admirers' dance cards, and Christopher and Jane walked on. "We had a terrible house again tonight, losing money hand over fist," Ingraham confided to Jane, smiling as they threaded their way through a star-struck crowd. He wasn't so much handsome, Jane thought, as charismatic. "I think perhaps *Merchant of Venice* was an unwise choice," he laughed. "Railing against wealth is not much in fashion this season. And yet my impresario needs paying, all the same. The cost to keep the troupe on the road is not one whit the less. We still must eat from time to time." His eyes twinkled and he smiled at her gaily. Jane smiled back and reminded herself that responsibility didn't always come with real estate attached. And that actors' faces didn't always reflect the true states of their minds.

Victoria's grandfather smiled, too. "The celebrity couple of the hour," he mused. "And it appears your rustic young friend is on intimate terms with them both."

Alec Macallum was also feeling quite pleased with himself: M. de Steyne had claimed his assistance in the promised private viewing. In the library, amidst a gasp-inducing collection of rare and first editions, the two exquisite bronze masterpieces were brought out of the vault, viewed side by side by the gathered connoisseurs, merits compared, his opinion solicited, scholarly points noted, prices guessed at, preferences declared, drinks consumed, hands shaken, and Macallum's back slapped fraternally by these rich, powerful, influential men.

Back in the ballroom, he surveyed the dancers. Ah, there she is, he thought. Macallum was as susceptible to Lydia's charms as any other man, but from long experience on confidential missions, he was adept at keeping his eye roving, while regularly revisiting any scene which included the captivating girl. There was his friend Mrs. Ickes – she had gotten the job as secretary, then, he noted with approval. There was the de Steyne girl herself, dancing with Charlie, good-naturedly attempting to learn the steps of the Highland Fling. There was Rhys Evans, a mechanic, Rebecca had called him an inventor, a de Steyne employee, sticking close to the daughter, perhaps a bodyguard. He too was seemingly on the watch for trouble. There, in the arms of the boring brother of her schoolfriend, was Lydia Laurence. What an excellent dancer she was! He wondered if she knew the Mazurka. Or the Polonaise? He must dance with Rebecca de Steyne, of course, and then he would see what he could do to make an impression on the Laurence girl.

Rhys, looking very natty in evening wear, was flushed and winded after his wholehearted participation in the Highland Reel. He joined Nanny, just as she was cautioning the new temporary travelling secretary.

"The most important thing, to my mind," Nanny was telling Mrs. Ickes, "and I'm sure the master's and mistress' minds, too, is to keep the men away. She's got the curiosity of a magpie and the sense of a hedgehog and when it comes to men, she's a babe in the woods. Her parents will arrange a suitable husband when the time comes. Meanwhile, we shall have to be very wise for her, but among us three, we shall manage it." Mrs. Ickes nodded as if Nanny were an Oracle and smiled deferentially at the Welsh mechanic. Nanny went on. "She's a headstrong girl, ever since she was a baby, and she blows hot and cold, as whimsical as the wind. It's good that Mr. Evans will be along on the trip. She listens to you, doesn't she Mr. Evans?"

Rhys laughed. "Yes she does -- when she wants to!"

Nanny's attention was distracted by the sight of a tall, lean, saturnine man, seemingly angling to hear what Rebecca was saying to her partner. "Look at that fellow, moustache like a villain in a pantomime, staring at her. Up to no good, I'm sure. Or else a reporter. You've got to watch out for them, too. Disguises, they'll use. Anything to get close. Mr. Evans, perhaps you might just give him a hint?" The Welshman nodded and made his way to the man's side. Nanny saw a few words exchanged, and the lean man headed for the door, Rhys following close behind. Nanny nodded her approval. "That's how it's done," she said to an admiring Mrs. Ickes.

Rebecca, her Fling behind her, was content to pace out a slower figure with Alec Macallum, but conversation proved more difficult and less interesting than she had anticipated. His attention seemed elsewhere, everywhere, anywhere but upon her. At the end of the dance, he suggested a stroll on the terrace. Rebecca, hopeful still to untangle the mystery of this man, began the conversation.

"Your job seems very interesting," said Rebecca. "Is transporting art your primary activity?"

"Not at all," he said vaguely. "I work in a general capacity."

"For whom?" asked Rebecca.

"For collectors, museums, dealers, governments, whatever's needed."

"I should think it must be dangerous and exciting to have priceless, irreplaceable treasures in your care," said Rebecca.

"It is a job, like any other," said the Scot carelessly, then, seeming to remember himself, added, "But it was of course a great honor to be of service to your esteemed father."

"Of course," said Rebecca. It was clear Mr. Macallum's attention was being hijacked by a little drama playing out nearby.

A distraught girl, tears of anger and disappointment staining her cheeks, was practically spitting at Lydia Laurence, that beauty being for once without her circle of admirers.

"He broke our engagement!" the pretty-enough girl wailed. "He says he's in love with you!"

"Who is?" asked Lydia, "I'm very sorry, but I have no idea who you're talking about."

"Liar!" the wronged young woman hissed. "You deliberately stole him from me!"

"I am not in the market for any man, and I try my best never to converse with a man who is taken. But men lie, and they persist. I will not take responsibility if your man was one of these."

"You know he is!" The heartbroken girl's voice was shaking. "He said he asked you to marry him!"

"I have had, so far this evening," began Lydia wearily, "seventeen proposals from young men, six propositions from old men, thirteen unsolicited kisses, countless pats and squeezes from total strangers. If your man was one of these, consider yourself lucky to have escaped being tied to him for life."

"You're a horrible person!" the girl sobbed.

"I'm so sorry for you, my dear," said Lydia kindly, "but I do like beautiful clothes. I do like dancing and having fun among my friends. I won't be young forever. What would you have me do?"

"Don't smile, don't laugh so much, don't come to balls!" said the furious jilted girl. "Get married and stay home!"

Lydia threw up her hands, and shaking her head, went back to the ball.

Alec was rapt. He loved a challenge, and this particularly desirable girl had steeled her heart against men who pursued her. He would be seeing plenty of her in Dakota City, he reflected. There was no hurry. He turned his charm back on and smiling at Rebecca, offered her his arm. A client was a client, after all.

Rebecca understood perfectly. She thanked him and they parted just inside the doors.

Lydia's spirits were tranquilized a little as she watched her parents going down the set. They danced very well together and seemed genuinely attached. If only her mother weren't so ambitious for her, and her father's business wasn't so shady. She saw Jane and Kitty sitting by the Professor and went to join them.

"I can't wait to get on that train!" she said. "It just happened again, the angry girlfriend scene. I want to go where there are no men!"

"I have bad news for you, Liddy," said Jane, chuckling. "There are one or two men in the west. In fact, there are a whole passel of lonely men. And not nearly enough pretty young girls to go around."

"Oh, no," groaned Lydia.

"At least you won't be expected to dance with them all," said Kitty, who had been doing some research. "They'll be busy mining and cattle driving and store keeping and robbing stagecoaches."

"Speaking of dancing," said Jane, "we used to have dances down at the Stagecoach Inn. Wonder if they're still doing them? Whooping and stomping and hollering a plenty. Once I even got Lady Maud and Franca Frawley and Colonel Sir George Benton-Bowles to come along to the hoe-down and they said they'd never had so much fun in their born days!"

"George Benton-Bowles?" repeated the Professor, very much interested. "A soldier, you say. What age man would that be, I wonder?"

"He's a very old man," said Jane. "More than fifty, maybe more than sixty!"

"Is he married to Lady Maud?" asked the old Italian.

"Oh, not at all," said Jane. "They're friends and partners with me in the Dakotah Springs project. He's not married to anyone – except maybe, Mr. Wiggins, from his regiment."

The Professor raised her brows.

Rebecca, approaching the fireside group, heard the end of Jane's explanation. "Mr. Wiggins? Sounds like a kitten," she said, taking a low stool at Jane's feet, and resting her arms and head on her friend's lap.

"More like a faithful old hound," laughed Jane, patting her friend's head. "You'll meet him soon enough. Wiggins was the colonel's batman in Afghanistan. They have tons of good stories. Lots of action. You'll see!"

"I'm glad we women are all travelling together," said Lydia, looking round at her friends. "Just the Professor and the four of us."

“And me, too, I hope?” said the husky voice of a figure looming behind the close-knit knot of astronomers. “Can I come on Becky’s train and stay at Jane’s house?”

“Hello, Victoria,” said Rebecca. “Thank you for coming to my party.”

“Happy Birthday, Beck.” It was said without enthusiasm. Victoria van Leyden, dark, strong-featured, ill-at-ease in her ball-gown, looked miserable.

“Hello, Miss van Leyden. Please take a seat.” The professor assessed the young artist. She was familiar with the growing pains of intelligent girls. “This is somewhat sudden. I hadn’t realized you were interested in astronomy.”

“Well now I have to be! Like it or not. Grandfather says I have to go along to document the expedition. I know I don’t belong, but he won’t listen to me! You don’t know him like I do, Signora Mancini! He is a great man, but he expects to be obeyed. At least by girls! He won’t take no for an answer.”

The old astronomer thought for a moment. “Professor van Leyden has your best interests at heart, I am sure,” she said. “He is concerned that you earn a certain renown, to advance your career, and perhaps he thinks of the commissions which you may encounter in your travels. And I have no objection to your joining us, if our hosts, Miss de Steyne and Miss Brakeman agree. But surely, to *document* the Expedition itself, it would be better...photography would be....”

“Exactly!” Victoria countered vehemently. “I’m a painter, not a stupid camera. I am so sick of that stupid, stupid old man!”

Jane and Rebecca looked at one another, had a silent discussion of the pros and cons, and nodded almost imperceptibly.

“Welcome aboard, Vicky,” said Rebecca, reaching to shake Victoria’s hand. “It’ll be fun. You’ll love it.”

“I’m going to hate every minute of it,” Vicky muttered. “I hate the West. There’s nothing there for me.”

CHAPTER 10: EN ROUTE TO COLORADO

For over fifteen hundred miles, at big city stations and humble rural halts, the handsome private railway cars in the de Steyne livery had commanded respect and deference. Having wired ahead, the chef was at each stop greeted with the choicest delicacies of the region – fish and game, cheese, butter and eggs, flowers, herbs, and the freshest fruit and produce. The girls sometimes stepped off the train to stretch their legs and breath the local air. Time permitting, Jane led Paint to a patch of grass and let him graze while the train was coaled and watered. At such necessary stops, Nanny and Rhys were fiercely protective of the five finely-dressed young ladies, discouraging contact with the passengers or crews of the ordinary trains which pulled them and herding the girls back to their own luxurious string of cars, placed at the very end of the train, where security could be maintained and where the noise, smoke and cinders of the straining locomotives were as far away as possible.

Though it was their occupants who excited most curiosity and whose destination was cause for so much speculation, the de Steyne private railway cars were noteworthy objects in themselves, true masterpieces of coachbuilding. Inside, the de Steyne cars presented a Pasha's paradise, as was the fashion of the time. Rebecca felt cozy as a coddled egg in this familiar fantasy world: her father's taste in travel ran to priceless old Persian rugs, sinuous brass lamps, deep-cushioned couches, fantastically-carved mirrors, extravagantly-fringed hangings – in short, M. de Steyne's taste in travel – and Rebecca's, too – ran to being absolutely smothered in luxury.

It was a very pleasant way to travel, thought Signora Mancini, yawning as she woke from a rejuvenating nap and resumed her writing. A short daily update to M. and Mme. De Steyne had been her first duty. Then a letter to her sister in Bologna, and one to her niece in Budapest. A postcard to the Dean. Another to the Bursar. And at last, she was at liberty to pull her journal towards her and let her thoughts ramble skyward. The eclipse beckoned.

Victoria, for whom this deluxe mode of transport was a novelty, reflected upon it with an artist's eye. The essence of each car's purpose had coalesced in her mind and been translated as pencil, charcoal, or watercolor sketches: Jane grooming her Pinto in the baggage car. The Professor, dozing over her writing desk in a shaft of sunlight in the Salon. Rebecca and Rhys in the lab car, caught at the very moment of some great discovery, their ingeniously fitted-out workshop a mass of implied detail. Kitty lying in her bunk in the sleeping car, lit by a hanging lamp behind her, puzzling over some thick German treatise on eclipses. Lydia curled over her guitar, strumming to the rhythm that the drivers made. The Chef and his staff intently at work in the miniscule kitchen. The servants, Lynette, Nanny and Mrs. Ickes, gossiping as they went about their work. Profile sketches of the various conductors and station masters, humble or grand, who had hooked them up and sent them on their next leg, attached to whatever train was fastest and best or going where Rebecca and Jane's whims took them. All these scenes were captured in Victoria's notebooks and sketchpads. Here, for example, was the Chicago River, iron railroad bridge, masts in the far distance, steamboats in the midground, tall warehouses looming along the banks. It wasn't bad, she thought. They had had quite a long stopover in Chicago, a city rising vigorously from its ashes, but reeking of its stockyards. Rebecca had had business there which had kept them some days, well-enough spent sightseeing and visiting the notables who solicited their company. Lydia had enjoyed the necessity of dressing well, and she and Lynette had had their heads together for hours in advance of each appearance. She should have taken a sketch of that, she thought.

But they had left the relative sophistication of Chicago behind, and for the last long while, the never-ending plains had been boring Victoria to death. The plodding wagon trains depressed her spirits. The unmanly hunters, shooting deer, antelope, bison, from the train's windows, and leaving the poor creatures to rot, broke her heart. The sad-eyed natives, debarred from their traditional ways and remade as "Christians" confirmed her view that this frantic push west was a sick and culpable assault on an innocent land. As their train relentlessly plunged westward, the sun went down and her window became a mirror, reflecting a disturbed and gloomy visage.

CHAPTER 11: A NIGHTTIME FORAY

Jane held her breath and eased open the door to the corridor. A sliver of light leaked in, and Rebecca tossed her head restlessly, seemed almost on the point of waking, then settled back to sleep with a pretty sigh. Jane had dressed in the dark, pulling on the same loose trousers, shabby jacket and cap that had fooled everyone in Tarrytown – everyone but the actors, she grinned, as she recalled Ingraham offering her a job as a stable lad, knowing all the time she was really a girl. Tonight, the coil of rope at her belt and her soft, silent moccasins were accessories to a more serious mission. She padded down the carpeted aisle, past the beautiful stateroom the Professor was sharing with Kitty, past Lydia and Victoria's less-palatial cabin, past the washroom, till she reached the little foyer at the far end of the car, pushed open the door, and stepped out onto the narrow-railed platform.

What she was about to undertake, she had accomplished many times on her own railroad. But the DC&M's three-foot-gauge trains were mere house mice compared to this ferocious, pouncing cat of an transcontinental express. The ground rushed by beneath the platforms of the loosely-coupled carriages and Jane wisely let her body adjust, yielding to the rhythm of the rocking, shuddering cars. The long train stretched in front of her, generating its own thunderous roar and howling wind. She stood there poised for a moment, excited by the sky, by the speed, by the sense of powerful forces streaking though the night, through the world, through her life. The laboratory car lay just ahead of her. Rhys was in there, asleep probably, but she knew he'd still have an ear open for trouble. He'd hear if she tried opening the gun safe. No question but he'd try to stop her. She'd have to go over this car, not through.

Strong, agile, and fearless, she climbed nimbly up the ladder and stole softly along the length of the lab car roof. She dropped to her belly and crawled the last few feet to the edge. She was right to be cautious. In the shadows below her, she heard Paint kick his stall and snort as the baggage car door opened, and Rhys – not asleep after all! – came out and closed and locked the door behind him. Jane inched back out of sight. The scrape of a match, the smell of tobacco, a cough. She composed herself to wait. She knew he never finished a whole cigarette. At last, she saw the burning butt flicked aside, heard the lab door opened and closed. The sound of the latch. Rhys was back in his quarters, presumably for the rest of the night.

The train whistle shrieked as they rocketed through a one-horse town. The noise was good cover. She backed up to get a running start and sprang across to the roof of the baggage car, stayed in a crouch and looked around her. She knew this roof well. She had taken the trouble of learning a lot about the de Steyne rolling stock. The cars were built to the highest standard, both of comfort and safety. With fire an ever-present possibility, and running water a necessary luxury, every de Steyne car carried a water tank securely bolted to the roof, checked and topped off at every stop. It took Jane but a moment to rig her rope around the base of the water tank, confirm her knots would hold, then let herself down the side of the car as it raced along. You can't grow up in spitting distance of Pike's Peak and not learn a thing or two about rock climbing, she thought, lowering herself carefully to the sliding hatch over her pony's stall. That evening, as she made up the stall, she had unlocked it, and now, buffeted by the breeze, she walked her feet along the side of the care to set herself swinging, built up momentum and kicked the window open. Paint stuck his head out the window and Jane patted him as she hung from the swaying rope with one hand. "Move over boy," she laughed, wriggling through the window. The pony pushed playfully at her back as Jane rooted around in the hay-filled manger. There it was, the metal box, the chamois-wrapped bundle, the dull gleam of her spare revolver.

Back on the roof, the car danced beneath her feet as the train thundered across the unvarying plain. The big locomotive's headlamp was a mere speck of light, far in the distance, like a comet spewing black smoke and red-hot cinders. It's a bit like hell, she thought. And thinking of hell, she thought of the devil, and thinking of the devil, she thought of the menacing Mr. C.C. Cornelius.

She had spotted him on the day they left Chicago, lurking in that city's vast rail yards. The de Steyne cars were being shunted into position at the very end of an express train. Rebecca had been in close conversation with Rhys and the Yard Master, so Jane had wandered away from the group and was watching the big locomotive being run out of the roundhouse and slowly rotated on the turntable – it was a beauty! – so much more impressive than her own narrow-gauge engines back home. She saw Cornelius lurking near an engine that was slowly being fired up, but he was plainly no engineer, fireman, or brakeman. He wore a suit more like a storekeeper or a small-town judge, something you'd hardly notice, and a hat you wouldn't remember. But she was sure it was the man Rhys had strong-armed out of Rebecca's birthday ball. A low character for sure, and what in the world was he doing here, spying on Rebecca again, angling closer to where the heiress stood talking with the two men?

"Hey!" shouted Jane, "Hey, Mr. Cornelius!" The man had looked round at Jane, panicked, then turned and ran. Crossing pair after pair of tracks at a walk is a challenge; running across them at speed is a job for an acrobat, but the man took it on, stumbling, falling, and scrambling back up as Jane gained on him. She loved a good chase.

Rebecca's screams and Rhys' shouted entreaties had slowed her down, as did her own second thoughts. What could she do with the man if she caught him? In this dress? She'd be lucky not to break her neck. She had returned to her friends and the villain had gotten away.

At least her pursuit had called the group's attention to the man, and Rhys and Rebecca both agreed that it was the exact same interloper from the ball, the fellow Nelly Nolan said had a *lean and hungry look*, the man Jane herself had seen spying on Rebecca's conversations, the man who claimed he was a friend of the Brakemans, the man who ran when you called his name! A suspicious man, for sure, they all agreed.

Rebecca had seen him again today when they stopped in Omaha. As she watched from behind the curtains of the salon car, she'd seen him step onto the platform from a carriage far forward and walk straight back toward her. She'd gotten a good long look at his face. It was the same man, she swore. He'd stopped at the Newsagent, bought cigars and the papers, and got back on the train. The train had made no other stops since then.

So he's on this train, Jane thought, as she ran along the roofs of a dozen darkened cars, hurtling through the night. But where? She was betting he'd be in one of the cars where the lights still burned. Not among the sleepers, but among the drinkers, the smokers, the gamblers. He looked that kind of man.

At the next ladder, she descended, and quietly pushed open the door to a second-class carriage. She moved through the swaying car, peering into the faces of rough, raucous, disreputable men, hoping she looked enough like a boy to go unmolested.

She had passed through several cars without spotting anyone she recognized, till her progress was arrested by the stinking fug coming from the club car. Through windows nearly opaque with smoke, she spotted him and dodged back out of sight. Surely that was him! She'd recognized the long, gloomy features, the drooping moustache, the scheming, devious air of the man from Rebecca's party. This was Mr. Cornelius. She stood just outside the door and kept her face averted, then took another peek. Her quarry was not alone. Two tough-looking men – brothers, by the looks of it – were following his words intently. Mr. Cornelius gestured with his fat cigar at a point on the map spread out before him. One brother nodded, but the other shook his head and pushed back his coat and fingered his gun instead. Mr. Cornelius half-rose from his seat and stabbed a finger at the gunslinger's chest. Insubordination! Jane edged further into the window and strained to see. Suddenly, one brother nudged the other and pointed to the end of the car. Jane had been spotted! Cornelius slammed his hand down on the table and his curse was audible even over the roar of the locomotive. The brothers started towards her. Jane turned and ran.

She dashed through a half-darkened car, burst onto the platform at the end, clambered up the ladder to the top of the car, and ran swiftly down the long train, jumping the gaps between the cars, racing backwards towards the last four faraway cars of the train -- Rebecca de Steyne's cars.

Slumbering drunks hardly stirred as Cornelius and the two brothers barged through car after car, swearing and threatening god knows what. It took a few coaches before the pursuers realized their prey wasn't on their level. The gunslinger brother climbed laboriously to the top of the ladder. His head popped up over the edge and he spotted the runner a few cars ahead and shouted down to his brother to head him off. Then he braced himself, took out his gun and started firing at the fleeing figure, who was forced to dodge and duck and crawl. The gunman climbed further onto the roof of the car, slipping and clutching for handholds, and began an unsteady but relentless chase, firing as he could.

The still of night became bedlam as the shooting and shouting woke the whole train. Women screamed, babies cried, men cursed, and heads started popping out the windows as the gunslinger's heavy boots pounded on the roofs above them.

The shooter's aim wasn't bad, thought Jane, considering he probably hadn't much practice firing while running atop a speeding train. It didn't occur to her to shoot back. She'd never shot a man and didn't want to start now. But she wished to god the baggage car was nearer! At last, thank you Jesus, here it was, and she grasped the rope she'd left tied and lowered herself to Paint's window and swung in and fell exhausted and winded into the hay. "Sorry, Paint!" she said to the startled pony, scrambling to get up and lock the hatch. Suddenly, the starry square of night was blotted out by a grotesque face, a face filled with murderous fury and frustration. "Where you gonna run now, boy?" he sneered, clinging to the rope, aiming his gun at Jane as she crouched in the hay. "I got him!" he yelled to his compatriots, who had reached the door and were pounding on it. It was too much for Paint. He reared and kicked at the gunman's outstretched arm. The enraged man shifted his aim to the screaming pony's rearing head and pulled the trigger. The gunman's shot went through the roof as the weapon spun out of his hand with the force of Jane's bullet, and he went flying, falling off the side of the train and down the embankment.

Jane choked back a sob and hugged her pony's neck till her heart slowed down. Fists were pounding on the baggage car door, voices demanding entry; at the other door, she could hear Rhys, shouting for help as he struggled with the lock. Jane fastened the hatch window -- she didn't need any more surprise visitors -- and pushed past Rhys the minute he got the door open. Shoving her gun into his hand, she warned: "It's Cornelius and another guy, and they may be armed. I'll be right back. Remember, there is no boy!"

The pounding grew louder than ever. Rhys unbarred the door and, gun in hand, confronted the distraught brother and the very grave Mr. Cornelius.

"Oh, it's you." Rhys sounded disappointed. "Good evening Mr. Cornelius. How can I help you gentlemen?"

"Ah, Mr. Evans, we meet again," said the saturnine man. "I believe a member of your party, a boy, has something to discuss with me. Could you please tell him I am here and at his service--or perhaps it is you yourself I seek, sir?" said he, peering closely into Rhys's face.

"Depends what you're looking for," said Rhys, meeting the taller man's gaze. "I sincerely hope you're not looking for trouble."

"No trouble," said Cornelius. "Just give us the boy."

Jane had run straight through the lab and now she exploded into the sleeping car. The girls were in the corridor, the professor was somber, and Rebecca looked white with fear. "Get in your rooms right now, don't open for anyone," said Jane brusquely as she passed without answering their questions.

"What have you done?" cried Rebecca. Jane grabbed her arm and shoved her into their stateroom. "Give me your nightgown, quick," ordered Jane. She locked the door and started stripping off her socks and shoes, pants, and jacket. "Hide these under the mattress," she said. She unpinned and tousled her long red hair, rubbed her face with a wet rag, and struggled into the gown Rebecca handed her, batting away its ridiculous ruffles and cascades of lace. "Lock yourself in," she commanded. "Barricade the windows."

With slippered feet and innocent rosy cheeks, Jane returned to the baggage car and went to her thrashing, neighing pony, crooning to him, ignoring the two angry men who still stood in the doorway, demanding entry, deterred only by the gun in the little Welshman's hand.

"Perhaps, I might just have a quick look round," said Mr. Cornelius offering to push past Rhys. "I suspect he's here and you've just overlooked him somewhere."

"Here, girlie!" the thug snarled at Jane, "where's my brother? And where's that lad of yours? Give him up or you'll be sorry!"

Paint thrashed and snorted in his tight confines; Jane shrank into a corner and started whimpering, wailing like a frightened child.

"Leave her alone," Cornelius ordered. "It's the boy we need. Or more likely it's Mr. Evans himself. Picture him out of that nightshirt and with a cap."

The ruffian gave up bullying the girl and returned his attention to the little Welshman. "Yeah," he drawled. "He does look familiar. He won't use that gun I don't think."

The ruffian shoved his chest into Rhys' face, forcing him aside. Jane, who had seen her share of fights, didn't think Rhys - even armed with a gun - was a match for the big man. And like her adversary, she doubted that Rhys would pull the trigger on a man close-up. She looked up at the bullet hole in the ceiling. These brothers didn't hold their fire, she knew. Her own gun could be taken from Rhys by either of the desperate raiders. She couldn't let that happen. She couldn't put him and Paint in danger. She'd defend them both. She knew she could spring like a mountain lion and climb like a goat. She had a sharp hoof-pick ready in her hand. There was a pitchfork over against the wall. She waited her moment.

Screened by the big man, Mr. Cornelius stepped farther into the car and started searching behind the stacked trunks, haybales and chicken coops. His voice was raspy, sort of a whisper, but very polite. "I'll need to see the other cars, please. The workshop. The sleeper. The Saloon." He didn't make it sound like a request. He was headed confidently towards the door to the lab when it slammed open.

"Trespassing! With witnesses! These are private cars!!" Rebecca, wrapped in a magnificent dressing gown and every inch a de Steyne, stormed into the car. Behind her were Kitty and Lydia and Victoria, armed with umbrellas and hatpins.

"Out!" Rebecca commanded. "Both of you, or I will have you arrested at the next station. I've already telegraphed ahead for the police. The train will stop wherever I tell it to. Mr. Evans, please eject these trespassers. And take their names!"

Jane couldn't help smiling. Rebecca was magnificent, and the startled pair shrank back instinctively in the face of her authority.

Mr. Cornelius didn't change expression, but the tough thug whined out a salty mixture of blame and excuse. "You set him to spy on us," he complained, pointing to Rhys.

"I've no idea what you're talking about, and I doubt that you do," said Rebecca. "Mr. Evans, did you spy on these gentlemen?"

"No, Miss de Steyne. I was sound asleep in my quarters all night till I heard the commotion and found these *gentlemen* pounding on the baggage car door."

"There you are, Sir," said Rebecca to Cornelius. "I have never known Mr. Evans to lie. You have your answer. Go to bed."

"What about the lad?" asked Mr. Cornelius, soberly. "The boy you're hiding in your cars."

"On my honor," said Rebecca, "there is no boy in any of my cars, and no male aboard tonight except Mr. Evans."

The clickety clack of the tracks, the squeal of the wheels grew louder in the tense silence that followed. At last, Mr. Cornelius tipped his hat, gestured to his companion, and the two set off back down the long train.

And with that, Rebecca swept out of the car, doing a very fair imitation of her father's aunt, Lady Catherine de Steyne, of Bruges.

Jane, exhilarated, triumphant, followed her into the laboratory car, but before she could speak, Rebecca whirled around on her. "You fool!" she cried. "I don't know where to begin. I'm too angry to speak to you."

"I could tell he was a bad guy, Becky. I was sure of it." Jane pleaded with her friend. "And you see I was right! I found him plotting with those outlaws. I'm sure it was about us. They had a map!"

"Maybe they were land agents, or prospectors, did you ever think of that?" Rebecca's alarm was making her bold. "Maybe they thought you were jumping their claim?"

"Prospectors who are so frightened by a harmless boy that they run after him, shooting!?" Jane was indignant. "How stupid do you think I am?"

"I could have lost you!" wailed Rebecca. "I think you're very stupid!"

"I was only trying to protect you," said Jane sullenly.

"By dying?" said Rebecca. "You say the west is dangerous, but you're the most dangerous thing in it!"

Jane threw up her hands and went to change.

Rebecca was grateful for the fire warming the Salon car where the girls had gathered. The Professor had made tea, and they all sat huddled round the pot, murmuring quietly. Rebecca pulled a fur blanket over herself and curled up in a deep chair. The temperature had plummeted after dark as their route sloped up through the plains towards the mountains. The rosy velvet curtains were drawn, soft light glowed through the stained glass of the arched ceiling, but even in this haven of calm and comfort Rebecca's heart still pounded, her pulse still raced. The possibility that Jane's playacting could have gotten them all killed shook her to the core.

The Professor checked her watch, looked round uneasily, waiting for Jane to appear, waiting for her to explain.

But Jane was in the baggage car, her back propped against one door, her shotgun pointed at the other. She hadn't told anyone about the man she had shot in the shoulder, but she thought of him every time she looked at that bullet hole in the ceiling. She reckoned he'd survive, but oh, boy, would he be mad!

The car lurched and shivered as the train labored onward, oblivious to the private dramas playing out on its many stages.

CHAPTER 12: DAKOTAH CITY STATION

"Well, we're finally in the Wild West," said Victoria van Leyden late the next morning, gazing resentfully at the high plains landscape passing outside the saloon car windows. "There's nothing to do, nothing to see, nothing to draw. I knew it would be like this. I've never been so bored in my life."

"Unvarying," agreed Lydia Laurence glancing up. She put down her illustrated newspaper and came to sit beside the disgruntled artist. "But oh, so beautiful! All sky and grass."

"It's been nothing but sky and grass out this window for the past month, I swear." Victoria would not be comforted.

Jane, coming in and pouring herself a cup of coffee, seemed determined to ignore the events of the previous night. "Once we get up to my place and get you on a horse, you'll be fine, Vicky. Dakotah Springs may be the official Spa, but it's Brakeman's Halt that can cure you. Plenty to do up there."

"Yes, let's put civilization behind us and find happiness in rusticity," said Lydia. "I for one am longing to dance at the Stagecoach Inn! Picture how lively a scene that must be!"

"If you're saying us plain, hardworking folks know how to have fun, you're darn right!" said Jane.

"These cowpokes'll dance you off your feet. Just wait'll they get a look at you, Liddy! They'll wear out your shoes in one night."

Lydia looked half pleased, half apprehensive, but overall excited. This new freedom made her a bit giddy. The other girls were too used to Lydia being singled out for her beauty to be offended.

"But first," continued Jane, "I have business in town. We'll put up at the Dartmoor for a bit. Pay some visits, take care of some things. You ladies won't be bored. There's a heap of interesting folks in Dakotah City and a whole passel of English curiosities up at the Springs."

"That's right, Vicky," Rebecca chimed in. "Weren't you curious to meet the mysterious Mr. Wiggins and the handsome old Colonel with the double-barreled name? We mustn't underestimate the fun of taking tea with Lady Maud," she continued drolly. "A feeble old Scottish gentlewoman handing round cakes will be anything but boring."

"Her nephews will be there," said Kitty. "The Scotsmen."

"Will they?! Wonderful," mused Rebecca. "I can see it all now -- Mr. Macallum will fall in love with two or three of us; the Professor will fall in love with the Colonel; and Jane can keep the young Laird as a pet."

"For my part, I want to fall in love with a very romantic outlaw," said Lydia, pleased at the daring of this thought.

"Stop acting ridiculous, all of you! said Kitty testily. "We're here for the eclipse! We're here to work. And to help Jane. We didn't come all this way to dance and fall in love. Astronomers from all over the world are coming to Colorado for the eclipse. What if we meet them! How can we expect them to take us seriously if we behave like typical girls?"

"Typical!" scoffed Victoria. "None of us will ever be typical. Too late. But if it's any comfort to you Kitty, I bet I don't fall in love with any man!

None of the others would make the same bet.

At Cheyenne, the de Steyne carriages had been expertly split off from the main transcontinental route and turned south onto the Kansas Pacific Line. It was odd, after so many days of pushing ever Westward, to have the sun beside them instead of before them. For the first time, the girls saw the Rockies rising out of the endless plain with an abruptness and a majesty that even Victoria could not dismiss.

Jane had seen the mountains with profound gratitude. A couple more transfers and she'd be riding her own rails at last.

At Denver, in the dual-gauge yards of the Denver & Rio Grande, she had watched as the solidly-built de Steyne cars were lifted off their wheel-sets by a steam-powered crane and set down like matchboxes onto trucks fit to the narrow three-foot gauge that was so handy in the hills. It was all narrow-gauge country from here on. Not just the main line of the Denver & Rio Grande, but the tracks of all the independent short-lines that served the boomtowns, that connected the mills and mines, quarries and logging camps, rails that ran alongside rocky riverbeds, zig-zagged through sheer-walled canyons, edged carefully along shelves cut into crumbling cliffs – these twisting, precipitous routes were all engineered and laid to the narrow gauge. Her own father had surveyed many of those routes, Jane knew, before the war, before he died, before she could remember.

Since her midnight excursion and subsequent fight with Rebecca, Jane hadn't been her usual self. She had felt everyone was being unfair. She'd told her story to the Professor and then to the girls and Rhys, as straight as she could, not dwelling unduly on her own heroism. Yet they were all acting like she was the problem, not Cornelius! The man was a mystery, a menace. He had claimed acquaintance with her family; that gave her a right to question his motives. Her Uncle Henry Adams was dead, and who knew how? Who knew who his enemies – now her enemies – might be? She'd used the best and only means she had to get some answers. She didn't think she'd done anything wrong. As for the men themselves, they were gone. Rhys had confirmed that Cornelius and his friend had indeed disembarked at the next station and hired a carriage, probably to search for the missing brother. The policeman waiting on the platform had eyed them closely but had made no move to stop them. Jane hoped – but didn't trust – that she'd seen the last of them.

Rebecca, feeling responsible for the exquisite coachwork of her father's beautiful cars, and conscious of the fragility of many items in her workshop car, had watched the truck exchange with bated breath. She had looked forward to having her lab car with her at Brakeman's Halt, though now she wasn't sure how long she'd be staying there. Though she'd heard her explanation, she'd seen no sign that Jane acknowledged the madness of her deliberate provoking of dangerous men. No sign of maturity whatsoever. The few years difference in their ages had never seemed starker.

"Oh! We're here!" cried Lydia, reading a prominent sign along the tracks. "*Welcome to Dakotah City.*"

Kitty referred to the guidebook in her hands. "*Dakotah City, Colorado. Established 1859. Elevation 6005 feet. Situated at the foot of the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains.*"

"So high, but so flat," said Victoria glumly. "In sight of the sublime, but content to crouch at the feet of greatness."

"The roads are steep enough in Dakotah Springs, if that's what you want, Vick. But here in the bottomland is where all the fun happens," said Jane, perking up more at each familiar sight. "It's for miners and cowhands - folks looking for a bath, a haircut and a good old drunk. That there's no hills to climb stumbling home is part of its attractions. And seriously, it's where all the real work gets done."

"It seems a cheerful, go-ahead kind of a place," Rebecca said, as the train chugged through the mostly brick newer districts to the railroad station in the heart of Old Town.

"This part's still got a bit of Wild West left to it," said Victoria, interested in spite of herself. "I wonder how long that will last before it gets spoiled like everything else?"

"Long enough for you to have some fun, if you set your mind to it," said Jane, as the creeping train whistled its way into the extensive yards of the Dakota City station.

Jane eagerly hopped off the still moving train and trotted alongside it on the platform, greeting old cronies, laughing, and waving. Beside her the iron beast's brakes squealed, noisy bursts of steam shot out, leaving her momentarily knee-deep in fog. At last, the great rumbling drivers came to rest, the steps were let down and passengers began pouring out. A dozen or more obvious tourists, foreigners, it sounded like. A surprising number of prospectors considering the mines were played out. The usual travelling salesmen. What looked to be a whole acting troupe, the red-haired prima donna giving orders to the sad-faced, aging tragedian. A mother shushing a crying child. A shabby parson who tipped his hat to her as he passed.

Reaching the baggage car, she slid open the hatch – the hatch that had been her salvation, and greeted Paint, the true hero of that horrible night. The pinto stuck his head out, showed his teeth in his delight, neighed a friendly hello to his own equine acquaintance and sniffed the mountain air with obvious approval. "We're almost home," Jane said, patting him and kissing his nose.

With a pretty bit of fuss, the Professor, Kitty, Lydia, and Victoria alighted, happy to be set free temporarily, adjusting their bonnets, and looking around to get their bearings. Railroad Square was bordered on three sides by the commercial buildings and arcaded boardwalks of the original gold-rush era town.

"Are any of them tea shops? I'd love a drink a cup in something that wasn't moving!" said Victoria, stretching her back and shaking out her rumpled skirts.

"*The Station Hotel is the most commodious eating place in Dakota City,*" read Kitty, consulting her trusty Baedeker. "*The Saloon Bar is justly famous for its sarsaparilla ices.*"

"Yum" said Lydia. "I've no idea what that is, but let's go see."

"Are you coming with us?" asked the Professor, looking at Jane and Rebecca.

"I'm going over to the DC&M Depot," Jane said, preoccupied. "I've got to figure a few things out."

"I'll stay with the train while we transfer the cars to Jane's line," said Rebecca.

"Bring me an ice" said Jane. "Make mine root beer."

Laughing, chatting and tending their skirt hems very carefully in the dusty street, the three well-dressed Eastern college girls and their distinguished guardian set off across the Square, eyed and admired by more than a few.

The Dakota City Depot of the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad was an impressive modern complex whose elaborate ticket and freight offices, passenger platforms and loading docks were busy at all hours it seemed. Jane's own short line – the Dakota City & Milltown Railroad - rented space for its own locomotives in the lofty, cavernous roundhouse with its high clerestory windows and great sliding doors. Was it her imagination, or did her locomotives and rolling stock look much worse than she remembered? Where were the shining lanterns and gleaming brass she used to love to help polish? Who were these strange, sullen, idle men, smoking and spitting into the pit?

A neat stone building nearby housed the modest headquarters, ticket office and freight dock of her own line, the DC&M. She poked her head into the waiting room, looking in vain for the expected familiar faces, but the ticket seller, and freight agent were as unknown to her as she appeared to be to them. She had wired ahead. It was odd no one was here to meet her.

She came back out into the sunshine, to air so pure and a sky so blue it made her grin despite her worries.

The de Steyne cars, along with several freight cars had been shunted to sidings where a small horde of men and women began eagerly claiming their long-awaited goods from flatcars and box cars and tank cars and gondolas. Rugs, lamps, mirrors, sofas, paintings, pianos, desks, cabinets, fine wines, exotics fruits, luxury fabrics - the riches of three continents poured off in abundance, destined to pollute with gaudy excess the new mansions of suddenly-rich prospectors, and decorate with less opulence but presumably-more taste, the libraries and drawing-rooms of the already-wealthy Britons who were establishing their own rival colony just a few miles around the bend.

Rebecca had been keeping a thoughtful eye on Jane's wanderings, when she saw the girl whoop with joy and throw her arms around a thin man who seemed to relish the overture. Jane grabbed him by the hand and hurried him over to where Rebecca waited on the step of her lab car.

"Miss de Steyne, may I present Mr. Paul Shipworth of Burnham & Shipworth, the architects who are creating Dakota Springs out of thin air!"

"Thin air," the nice-looking man raised an eyebrow and smiled, "and pounds and pounds of gold dust."

"And half the forests of Colorado," said Rebecca, gesturing at some massive timbers being swung off flatcars by teams with pulleys and ropes.

"That lot's Norwegian, actually," Paul replied, as they walked along beside the train. "Well-seasoned. We're planning on constructing something rather special with that. Now here's our local lumber - this next flatcar is loaded with railroad ties, fresh from the forests and sawmill at Milltown - the terminus of your line, Miss Brakeman. Well enough for mine shoring, railroad ties, and ordinary construction, but not for the finest carpentry. Jane of course already knows it well, but you might enjoy seeing the sawmill in action, Miss de Steyne. Very exciting, I always think. All those buzzing blades and thunderous hammer blows. Noisy, though. Ah, well, the sound of progress."

"I've lately become interested in the mechanics of sound," offered Rebecca, jumping on her hobby horse at the slightest encouragement. "And I am interested in mechanical and industrial process of all sorts, as well as in traditional craftsmanship. Sound reproduction is just my current obsession! Tommy Edison got the jump on me, while I was cramming for my final exams. I should very much appreciate a tour of your works, sir, if that is permissible, before we all go up to Brakeman's Halt."

"I would be honored, Miss de Steyne. If tomorrow morning around eleven o'clock is convenient for you, I can make sure Edward will be free to join us. He spends most of his time in his studio, designing or meeting with clients. It's my good fortune to have the active, lively, running-around parts of the job! The freight yard, the workshops, the construction sites, I'm always on the fly from one to the other! I should go crazy cooped up, tied to a desk or a drafting board."

"Me, too! I'm just like that, Paul!" Jane jumped back into the conversation. "Paul, you can't imagine how horrible it was to be continually kept cooped up! There were hours and hours of just sitting still in class (which is very different from sitting still in the brush stalking a deer), and if I hadn't had my good old Paint to ride every day, I should have gone mad or run away!" Jane's attention was diverted by some bustling activity across the yard. "Oh, look! There's Arlette Beauclaire and her girl Betty Simple! Look what a lovely load of carpets and fabrics they've got on that wagon!" Jane waved vigorously, as she called - "*Bonjour, Madame Arlette. I'm back! Je reviens! Je suis de retour!*"

The Frenchwoman waved a greeting, but hurried on her way, her assistant scrambling to prevent a bolt of petal-pink brocade from rolling off into the dusty street.

Jane turned back to address her friend. "We shall have her 'round Rebecca, and we'll all get measured for new riding gear, sturdy country clothes. Oh, good! Here come the girls now. I hope they remembered our ices!"

The girls had not forgotten Jane's treat, and expressed their delight at the introduction to Paul Shipworth, who needed to hurry off after the wagon with his goods, but their attention was clearly

distracted. Jane licked appreciatively at the dripping root beer confection while glancing quizzically at the four women, who seemed strangely dreamy.

"What happened to you girls in that hotel?" Jane asked between licks of ice. "Sarsaparilla?"

"We met a man who was.... What would you say it was about him?" wondered Kitty, who liked certainty. "How would you describe it?"

"It doesn't need a name. It just is." Lydia sighed contentedly.

"The effect was mostly produced by the eyes, I think," said Victoria, a sketch forming in her mind's eye. "And his bearing, which was quite impressive for so little a man."

"Not little at all!" Lydia defended indignantly. "His was a very elegant height, I thought. Just right! How well his suit became him!"

The professor looked amused. "Yes, no doubt, engineering in action. As the English say, 'The tailor maketh the man.'"

"But what exactly made us all react as we did?" insisted Kitty. "I don't usually see men very clearly. It's as if I'm wearing the wrong spectacles. Men never seem quite in focus to me. I don't think I saw this man any more clearly, but I certainly *felt* something – electro-magnetism, I shouldn't wonder!"

"Perhaps it's the Colorado air," speculated Victoria. "It is preternaturally clear."

"My dear young ladies! It's sex, pure and simple. He exudes sex. Of a most dangerous kind, I think, for it comes cloaked in a gentlemanly demeanor." The professor had had an adventurous heart in her youth, and could have said much on this subject.

Rebecca pondered the Italian's words thoughtfully. She hadn't given much attention to sex thus far. She had been prompted to consider it during various encounters with handsome boys, but like a candlewick that refused to take the spark, she'd never known fire; and without that, what was the point? Why not just stand out on a roof in an electrical storm? Guaranteed satisfaction!"

"Really, Becca, you should have been there," urged Lydia, patting her heart and fanning her face. "His name is Mr. Philip Sydney, like Sydney, the poet. *Astrophil and Stella!* The star-lover and the star! He moves like a lover. With eyes that could ravish you, eat you, body and soul."

"Miss Laurence, please mind your language," the Professor snapped, though it was she who had put a name to Mr. Sydney's magnetic appeal.

You can't grow up in the country and not know the facts of life, but Jane had as yet not been instructed in *romanticism*, for who should teach her? Not her sweet uncle, not her sensible, preoccupied mother, not the engine drivers or cow wranglers who were her closest friends until she left for school and met Rebecca. Rebecca who was mad at her.

"Will someone please tell me what we're talking about?" asked Jane, pouting a bit.

"I think our friends have come face to face with a mysterious man they would like to know better," said Rebecca.

"Oh, I *know* him all right," said Lydia. "Or at least I know his type. Though he is quite a good example of the type."

Kitty weighed in, helpfully too: "Maybe Jane does not have your extensive experience of men, Lydia."

"I do too! I know Philip Sydney already," exclaimed Jane, surprising them all. "At least Uncle Henry knew him. He wanted to buy my railroad."

"And what was your answer, my dear?" asked Signora Mancini.

"I said it wasn't for sale, and never would be." The girl was not so much indignant as amazed that anyone could ever think otherwise.

"Good thing Mr. Sydney didn't ask you in person, or he'd be driving your train right now." Victoria muttered dryly. Jane looked puzzled, but the other girls laughed.

He's probably not my type," said Jane.

"Oh, I'm afraid he's everybody's type," said Lydia with a little sigh of recognition. "That's the problem!"

Just then, Rhys came through to say that the de Steyne cars were now coupled to one of the DC&M's engines, and it was time to get back on board, and continue on to Dakotah Springs, at last on the tracks of Jane's very own railroad. Their stop in Dakotah City had proved far more interesting than Rebecca had anticipated. Promising herself a closer acquaintance with this vibrant, polyglot little city, she climbed back onto her father's opulent train, but not without a questioning glance back at the Station Hotel, where the well-tailored Mr. Philip Sydney had worked his fascinating magic on four of the most-rational women in America.

CHAPTER 13: THE SCOTS MEET THE GIRLS' TRAIN

A greater contrast could not have been imagined than that between the town they left behind and the one that lay before them. If *Dakotah City's Old Town* was ribald, go-ahead, unbuttoned chaos, *Dakotah Springs Englishtown*, as the locals called it, was adamantly proper, peaceful and predictable. Teatime never varied, visiting cards were received by imperious butlers, London-style bobbies patrolled the gas-lighted streets, slapping their nightsticks into their open palms with reassuring 'thwaps'; men with perfectly-furled umbrellas strolled to congenial lunches at the Club; everything that makes one think "Ah, this is England at her best!" was laid-on with a trowel. And it was working! The demand for new housing, new attractions, hotels, services was keeping Burnham & Shipworth and the army of artisans they employed, busy round the clock. Money was being made again, hand over fist, at long last, after the financial disasters of the early '70s. The banks were some of the grandest buildings in the brick-paved High Street.

The town was the result of the Yankee ingenuity and enterprise of Jane's mother, Philadelphia Adams Brakeman. *Dakotah Springs* had from the first been conceived of by the ambitious young widow as a profitable business venture, its success tied to the railroad that could serve it on its route to and from Milltown. Tailoring its appeal to mildly-indisposed but lavishly-funded English gentry, it was promoted as a delightful pleasure resort in a miracle-working climate with an awe-inspiring setting and advertised as such by Philly Brakeman's friend, the indefatigable Lady Maud Frawley herself.

This canny noblewoman, being a sister of both Alec's mother, Lady Mary Macallum, and of Charles' father, Ian Kincaid, 5th Earl of Glenrothes, was thus Aunt Maud to both young Scotsmen. Intelligent and extremely capable, she oversaw the management of the Earl's thousands of acres of rangeland. Dressed for the occasion in buckskins and boots, she had gone one year on the round-up, gathering experiences she would romanticize and parlay into press coverage that helped sell building lots in downtown *Dakotah Springs* to the right sort of people.

That the *Springs* catered only to 'the right sort' was a given. Churches, and pastors to shepherd them, were among the earliest priorities. The medical facilities were superb – all the doctors handsome, with credentials from top establishments here and abroad. If claims of cures were perhaps exaggerated, it was only to be expected from patrons so thoroughly satisfied with their experience. The town carefully excluded anything likely to draw the unwashed masses. A strict morality was the norm. There were no saloons, no poker games, no dancing girls. For these earthy luxuries one would have to travel the relatively short, but metaphorically vast, distance to *Dakotah City's* riotous *Old Town* district, where every pleasure, every vice, was catered to. For certain seemingly-substantial and decent *Englishtown* husbands, that track was well-worn.

In the chaste environs of *Dakotah Springs*, the sale and consumption of alcohol in public bars and restaurants was categorically-prohibited, a fact Alec Macallum commented upon as he poured Charles a second glass of an excellent claret. The private clubs were another matter, of course, and it was in one of these that Charles and Alec were enjoying the inevitable beefsteak lunch, after which they repaired for coffee to the club's dark-paneled library, imported - moldings, cases, books and all - from some impecunious minor noble's estate. Barely-dry portraits of newly-minted millionaires alternated with full-length figures of lush beauties who, having once graced the local stage, had condescended to marry said twice-fortunate men.

"Do you think she'll remember me?" asked the younger cousin, gazing up at a nearby oil of a lavishly-endowed and lightly-draped mythological figure.

"I'm going to take a wild guess and assume you're speaking of Miss Brakeman, and not this gorgeous creature on the wall. Charles, my dear boy, how often does she meet a nobleman? Of course, she'll remember you. It's only been five weeks since you last saw her." The older cousin was lighting his pipe and relaxing with a brandy-laced coffee in one of the club's most-hideous armchairs, constructed entirely, apart from its hairy hide-covered cushions, of the structural parts of what must once have been a charming family of elk.

A handsome and distinguished elderly man entered, nodded cordially, if arthritically, to the good-looking youths, and settled himself with a newspaper in a sunny alcove.

"The Colonel. He'll be thrilled with these feminine additions to our society," said Alec quietly. "Have you noticed how avidly he follows the movements of all the young ladies visiting the Springs, especially when they are courting?"

"Horrible old man!" said young Kincaid. "He's too old to be thinking of sex or romance!"

"Of romance, perhaps not; but of sex, well, I can scarcely believe there's a man or woman alive who ever stops thinking of that." Macallum looked serious. "We'll be there ourselves, one day, old chaps for real, if we're lucky. Let's hope the ladies will still look kindly at us, when that day comes. Meanwhile, he's one of Aunt Maud's best friends here at the Springs – best not to underestimate him."

But Charles could think only of his imminent reunion with the captivating cowgirl he had failed to captivate in New York. "It's time to go, Alec. I don't want to be late!"

"Oh, my," said Alec, laughing, "you are a changed man!"

A pleasant walk brought them to the railway station, whose medieval arches, mock fortifications and vaulted ceilings antedated the technology they accommodated by some hundreds of years and introduced the arriving visitor to the antiquarian theme of the entire spa.

A bright green-and-yellow horse omnibus, newly imported from London, was idling in front of the building. Its driver sat on the box, joshing gallantly with the plump, comfortable pie-seller, but paused as Alec and Charles approached. and stopped to admire the attractive horse-drawn double-decker 'bus, craning their necks to chat with the driver.

"Good day," called Alec. "Isn't this the new Thomas Tilling 'Knifeboard' 'bus?"

"It is that, sir," replied the Cockney coachman, touching a knuckle to the brim of his hard bowler hat. "Might you 'ave come across one in London, sir?"

"Yes, I did, Spring of '76, I think it was," said Macallum, smiling. "Though this is a particularly fine example of the breed."

"He keeps it neat as a new pin, he does, inside and out," chimed in the pie-seller woman.

"I'd do it even if they didn't pay me to, as she deserves it, she does." The Londoner's outsize pride was a credible facsimile of the endearingly sincere attachment of a London cabbie to his own coach; even supporting roles were brilliantly cast in this fantasy resort, noted Alec with tolerant amusement and grudging admiration for his Aunt's vivid imagination and conscientious follow-through, two qualities not often aligned.

Charles, who thought of himself as a fine judge of horseflesh, was assessing the heavy and handsome team harnessed to the coach.

Noticing his interest, the coachman volunteered, "This 'ere wagon weighs a ton, but they draw 'er easy as pie."

The shriek of a whistle half-mile away heralded the imminent arrival of their friends. Alec reached up to the omnibus driver, who had taken up the reins. "Take particular care of the group of ladies who are coming in on this train, if you would. Here's something for your trouble. Good day to you."

With easy grace, the two lanky Scots made their way through the Perpendicular-style waiting room to the Romanesque platform, dodging meandering handcarts, preoccupied tradesmen, fugitive infants, affronted matrons and a blasé reporter from the local paper, all loitering for a sight of the special train and the rumored return of Jane Brakeman, orphan and heiress, with a coterie of lady astronomers.

At last, with much tootling of whistles and clanking of wheels, the shabby engine pulled the attractive little train of de Steyne carriages to a wheezing halt. Kitty and Lydia unglued their noses from the windows and headed for the doors, each in her way prepared to take Dakotah Springs, and the scientific community, by storm. Victoria, with an angry frown that was more nerves than active ill-will, snapped at anyone who impeded her progress. The Professor took her time, and moved with dignity, as befitted her years.

Jane looked round at the tracks and buildings with a new, proprietary interest, cut short by a stab of grief at her uncle's absence. Rebecca came to stand quietly beside her on the rear observation platform.

"Let's not fight each other," said Jane. "Let's save it for whoever killed Uncle Henry." She looked down at Rebecca and smiled sadly, ruefully. "I'm sorry I scared you."

"Thank you," said Rebecca, her eyes glistening. "Welcome home, Jane."

Macallum was there, elegantly offering the ladies a hand down, which Jane declined, as she hopped off onto the platform and headed to the baggage car.

"Ahoy there!" shouted Charles who in his excitement at seeing her forgot for a moment which role he was playing. (He had been much impressed by the sailors on the liner which brought them to New York.)

"Ahoy?! You mean 'Howdy!'" retorted Jane.

Charles smiled broadly at Jane, who had gained even more stature in his eyes, by being now in her element. He fell into an elegant, negligent cowpoke pose, his thumbs hooked in his belt loops. "Why, howdy, Miss Jane. Mighty pleased to see yuh round these parts."

"You've been practicing," said Jane, who was striding along the platform. "Excuse me, I've got work to do." A ramp had been let down from the baggage car and she ran up it and led her faithful pinto down to where Charles stood watching.

"What a good traveler you are, what a good boy," she crooned to Paint, checking his legs and feet, nuzzling the pony's long velvet face, and giving him a approving pat and a treat she pulled from her pocket. "You'll sleep in a familiar barn tonight, at last. And tomorrow, we'll take you home!" Charles thought she looked utterly charming.

"May I ride with you? Go riding?" asked the eager young man. "Aunt Maud has given us absolutely brilliant horses, and I've been riding Western-style for weeks now. I'm quite good at it, I think!"

"I don't doubt it a bit," said Jane, grinning at his enthusiasm. He was easier to take outside a ballroom, she thought. A normal boy. "Sure," she said. "We'll go for a ride someday." Handing her pony to the waiting groom, and with a few last words for Rhys, who was staying with Rebecca's train, she joined the other girls, who were themselves attracting no small share of curious attention.

Macallum was supervising the loading of the women's luggage onto a wagon from the hotel, till it set off under the watchful eye of Rebecca's nanny and Lydia's maid, then hurried over to the gathered clutch of pretty young scholars.

"Welcome to Dakotah Springs," he began, '*where perfect health is just a breath away*', as my aunt's advertisements proclaim. Our customs and rituals may seem strange, exotic at first, but in no time at all you will have become natives, as this man – so notably already has! Formerly naught but the heir to the Earldom of Rotherwithe, a poor, dejected creature - Behold him now – Kincaid --the Complete Man of the West! Charles, demonstrate, please. Regard, ladies, if you will, his confident swagger, -- nicely done, my Lord-- the set of his *sombrero*, the jingling spurs to his *vaquero* boots, the crossed holsters, and bright *bandana*!"

Charles tipped his hat back on his head, squinted his eyes, chewed on a straw, spat, and shifted from one slouching pose to another.

“Bravo! Well-done Charles!” were the cries as the happy girls clapped at the good-natured juvenile.

“Well enough if you’re playing a *bandito* in a farce,” said Jane. “And you look good, no denying. But tomorrow we’ll get you some real, useful togs that you can do an honest day’s work in.”

Charles was too happy enjoying being the focus of Jane’s attention to mind the implied insult to his ensemble.

“In the meantime,” continued Macallum, “Our Aunt, Lady Maud Frawley, insists that we bring you straight round for tea.”

“She can be clear enough now, when I’m on her doorstep,” muttered Jane in an undertone to Rebecca. “I haven’t forgiven her for that horrible telegram. But no sense holding a grudge – in public at least.”

“Very wise,” replied Rebecca, the girl raised in mansions on two continents. “You say we’re going to be meeting every day and since it’s small town – a small English town at that! – we may as well meet as friends.”

Lydia had wandered over to where Jane and Rebecca stood talking, and she caught the end of their conversation.

“Propriety gets you far with the English,” she said, sighing. “I wish Mama could be persuaded to remember that. She says that Englishmen don’t understand the American girl and that’s why they are so eager to marry her. She exhorts me to be whimsical, of all things, and attempts to appear so herself, though she’s as businesslike as Papa when she wants to be!”

The girls were enchanted with the horse bus and vied for the seats with the best view. Jane had climbed nimbly onto the box and claimed the seat next to the coachman. The bus was very square, like a small boxy room with large windows, holding 12 passengers plus seating for as many as fourteen people on the roof! The wheels and undercarriage were a creamy yellow, and the coach body and spiral staircase to the roof were a bright, fresh green. All the glass sparkled, the brass gleamed, and the paint shone. The side panels were splashed with tasteful advertisements, while the rooftop sidings displayed the name of the conveyance, its tariffs and termini.

Charles stood at the horses’ heads, stroking their necks and whispering in their ears. Jane watched him from her high seat and liked what she saw. When all the ladies and their attendant men were comfortably disposed inside and atop the bus, the driver whipped up his team, and the busload of happy laughing girls and gallant men rolled away from the elaborate Gothic monument-in-miniature that was the Dakotah Springs Station of the Dakotah City & Milltown Railroad.

What was a homecoming to Jane, was novelty and adventure to the other women. Dakotah Springs was designed to please the eye of a sentimental aesthete, and it hit the mark. Their route led first up the High Street, where construction on the principal commercial and residential buildings was mostly completed but building crews of all kinds could be glimpsed in the lanes that ran up the sides of the valley. The American college girls were amused by the unrelenting Britishness of the spa. Bobbies, prams, umbrellas and all, it was English as could be. Even the hairy middle-aged giant, glimpsed over the privet from the top of the bus, doing calisthenics in his singlet while his respectable mother painted dainty watercolors *en plein air* beside him; the beautiful curly-headed boy with the roll of drawings under his arm, dawdling before a haberdasher’s window; the brisk cook, with her basket on her arm and her kitchen maid trailing behind with a hamper, all was as strange as it was familiar.

“It’s so English!” were the girls cries. “Oh, my god, it’s so cute!” “Everywhere I look, I want to live.” “Alms houses turned into flats!” “Look at the castle – the Dartmoor Hotel– high above the village!” “What a charming storybook world.”

Rebecca noted that every amenity was tailored, not just to the most-fastidious British taste, but to a fantastically-exaggerated romantic interpretation of that taste. Streams meandered, ivy clung, roses nodded over ancient garden walls. Streets and squares were truly charming. The verdure was refreshing in that dry thin air, and the views of that majestic peak were sublime.

"It's all like a stage set, feigning antiquity and not a stitch of it over six years old," Rebecca marveled out loud. "It's every century of Merrie Olde England, here in Colorado! It *is* quite good fun, actually. I always think a holiday resort ought to be both comforting and stimulating, familiar *and* foreign!"

Victoria, too, was closely observing the newly-built "Olde English Village", and professionally considering how the effect was achieved and how it could be rendered on canvas. Nearest the station, Gothic features predominated; the High Street was Georgian; around the village green, the Tudors were having their Merry-Wives-of-Windsor way; and finally, in tasteful and elegant Queen Anne Square, finely-detailed red-brick terraces reigned.

A village-wide rhythm of gables and chimneys and an agreement on materials and scale gave a pleasing unity to it all. Victoria mentioned this to Rebecca, who heartily agreed. She knew of Edward Burnham, of course, but had never known he worked on such a broad canvas! An entire community from scratch was an achievement indeed, especially for a man of his years. She calculated he must be in his seventies. "There's plenty of variety, yet it makes a harmonious whole. I look forward to meeting Mr. Edward Burnham. I shall enjoy talking to him." Rebecca continued the thought, silently: "and I shall enjoy questioning him about the death of Henry Adams."

For it must be admitted that the mystery surrounding that reverend gentleman's unsuitable death had come to be uppermost in the young New Yorker's mind, as it was in her cowgirl friend's.

CHAPTER 14: CHEZ MAUD

By Macallum's arrangement, the horse bus departed from its regular route, and took the girls and their friends to the Frawley *rancho*, forty acres of grazing land along the creek on the outskirts of Dakota Springs, leased to Lady Maud by the Brakemans. An old adobe structure already stood on the land and had been cleverly expanded in a very sympathetic style. The result was a delightfully airy yet sheltering home built around an arcaded courtyard. Strings of dried chilis dangled from the rafters. Huge mottled-green pots overflowed with purple-leaved trailing plants. Rose and plum and apricot-colored walls glowed in the filtered sunshine; a lilac-shadowed pathway led to vivid blue doors which, pierced with tall windows and crowned with the crest of the Earl of Glenrothes, revealed deep cool shaded rooms within. The girls were instantly bewitched by the beauty of this lovely house, and just as bemused at first sight of its owner.

It was Lady Maud Frawley's conceit – and an effective advertising tool – to embody a Cowgirl-Aristocrat. She was a handsome woman whose manners proclaimed her every inch a Victorian Lady, but she was dressed as if she had just come in from rounding up strays. One first noticed her high-crowned, putty-colored hat, and then her pearl-handled six-shooter worn holster well to the front for an easy draw. Her shirt was fawn with white buttons closing the front placket. A large, checkered kerchief was knotted round her neck. Her long sleeves were tucked into fancy gauntlets, with stars embellishing the leather cuffs. Her buckskin skirt was a marvel of engineering; cut on straight lines without bustle or crinoline, its hem and the borders of the central panel were exuberantly fringed and dotted with buttons from belt to high-topped, high-heeled tooled-leather boot. With the unbuttoning of a mere twenty or so fasteners, a woman could ride astride without outraging propriety.

She came forward eagerly as the girls were shown into the courtyard by her handsome Scottish nephews.

"Welcome, welcome, all of you! Oh, my poor dear girl," Lady Maud began, throwing her gauntlets on a side table and taking Jane's hands in her own. "And poor Henry! Whatever shall we do without him?!" Her sincerity was unfeigned. Jane was too affected to reply, but submitted to an embrace, though her ladyship never stopped talking through it.

"How fatigued you all must be after your long journey. You've come to the right place to recuperate - Dakota Springs, *where perfect health is just a breath away*, as they say!" said the enthusiastic noblewoman, who as we know, had written the slogan herself. She was a manager by nature. "Franca, my dear child, show the girls where to put their hats. Charles, would you ring for tea, dear? Young people are always hungry, are they not, Professor? Alec, did you arrange with the driver to be back after tea? Delightful. So very many young people. You shall all be very good friends in no time, I am sure!"

Without a word, the scowling young woman who had been sitting in a rocking chair and avoiding looking directly at the visitors, stood up and exited through the blue doors without looking to see if she was being followed. Victoria seemed annoyed, and Kitty and Lydia shared a look of enquiry, but Jane, who clearly knew the house and its occupants well, gestured to Rebecca and led them all after their sullen guide.

Lady Maud took a deep breath as she turned her attention to welcoming the distinguished astronomer. "There. Franca will show them. Won't you come to my room to wash your hands, my dear Professor Mancini?" she said, leading the way. "The Springs is honored by your visit! Quite an addition to our provincial society! An astronomer. A professor. A real Italian Signora! *Bellissima!* You will come to know us all, I hope: our distinguished colonel, Doctor Enderleigh and his wife and his mother – a rather remarkable woman; our darling architects, Paul and Edward and their little protégé; Madame Arlette sometimes joins us – a Frenchwoman, but quite civil; and of course, though he's often away, Sydney, the railroad mogul drops in when he's in town – a very successful man – you must meet them all *subito*."

"*Sei troppo gentile*," demurred the professor in purest Florentine to gratify the expectations of her eager hostess. "You are too charming! I mustn't forget I've come to work." She laughed, as she dried her hands on the towel the maid was proffering. "And I mustn't neglect my girls, my charges. Their parents would never forgive me!"

"Yes," Lady Maud said, almost sadly, "girls can be a trial."

"But so rewarding!" smiled the Professor.

The two impressive ladies processed through to the *hacienda's* high-vaulted salon.

The five college girls were posed in perfect stillness, tightly grouped together, as Lady Frawley's granddaughter focused a bulky camera apparatus on them and muttered angry commands. "The blonde one, move your body six inches to the left. Good. The plain one, give me your left profile. The tall one, come around and sit on the floor in front of the sofa. Jane, don't be an idiot, put that fire poker down. The one with the big eyes, look straight into the camera. Look sad. Okay. Good. Don't move."

There was a flash of powder, the photographer gave the all-clear, and the girls relaxed into smiles and conversation and came over to join their professor and their hostess. Victoria walked around behind the camera and stood looking critically at Franca's equipment. Franca maintained a stony silence. The painter walked back to join the conversation around the fire.

"Mr. Macallum," she asked, "do you consider photography an art?"

"In an artist's hands, I think it can be," he replied.

"But it takes so little effort. I doubt that it deserves to be classed with painting or sculpture," the artist continued.

"By your reasoning," Lydia interjected, "a long poem, as having taken more labor, is by definition superior to a short poem."

"The short poem might have taken just as much effort to perfect as the long one," reasoned Kitty, who liked to be fair.

"Isn't it the *intention* that makes it art?" asked Rebecca. "I do believe that the person focusing the camera, arranging the subject in the frame, devising or discovering the most-evocative lighting, developing the print with specific effects in mind –that person is undoubtedly an artist – if art was her goal. It is not, to my mind, the medium – or even the resulting product - that makes something a work of art; it is the intention. I am presently establishing – Rhys and I are demonstrating - that crude and barely-in-tune scratchings on wires under tension can become art, if electromagnetism and audio reinforcement are combined with the digital manipulation of the metal string." Preposterous as her idea was, her enthusiasm and her smile were contagious. "Seriously," she laughed, "come to the lab and we'll demonstrate. It's very exciting!"

Tea arrived, with plenty of comforting shortbread and scones, and as Lady Maud handed her a cup, Jane raised the subject that was on all their minds, but that only she could broach:

"Will you tell me about that day? How did you all come to be up at the Halt?" asked Jane. "I thought Uncle Henry had moved to town."

"Well, it was my birthday, you see." The guests all murmured their birthday compliments and begged her to go on. "Quite a large, round number it was, too, and your Uncle Henry proposed we celebrate at Brakeman's Halt."

"That's just like him!" said Jane sadly. "He thought of what *you* would enjoy."

"True! I love the place! And I loved, we all loved, your uncle," said Lady Maud.

"Who exactly made up the party?" asked Rhys. "Were you all to stay overnight?"

"Well, the party was made up of our own particular set, for the most part: The Rector of course, Colonel Sir George Batten-Bowles, Mr. Philip Sydney, Edward Burnham and Paul Shipworth, Doctor and Mrs. Enderleigh, and Madame Arlette Beauclaire.

"We were to travel by train together up to the Brakeman *rancho*, just for the day. There were to be splendid meals under the trees, a trail ride, a bit of shooting, that sort of thing. I was in quite a holiday mood as we all gathered at the station: my granddaughter Franca and I were so excited we were first to arrive; but the rest soon assembled as we waited for the train.

"I can hardly believe the Colonel ventured forth without his faithful batman!" said Alec, who had seen enough of the old military man's establishment to realize that man and master were joined at the metaphorical hip.

"Very true! Ha! Wiggins and Fergus had gone up in the wagon the day before, to air and provision the Halt, which in truth had been empty for some time. Once Jane left for college, Henry generally stayed quite happily here in town in his flat at The Dartmoor."

"It's a beautiful suite of rooms," Jane interjected. "I'll put up there until we're ready to leave for the Halt."

Maud Frawley was eager to get on with her tale. "I felt a *frisson* of excitement in the air that day. Sir George was being most attentive to Madame Arlette; I thought Mr. Sydney was making rather broad efforts to ingratiate himself with Franca." She looked around for her granddaughter. "Sydney failed to bag you, eh, my dear?" she shouted at Franca Frawley, who replied from where she slouched against the wall near the French window.

"No trophy for his wall, Grandmama." Franca took a deep inhale on her cigarette, and breathed it out heavily. "Though I look forward to shooting *him* someday...with my camera!" she hurried to finish, grinning happily as the others looked startled. She had achieved the effect she intended. She relapsed just as suddenly back into sullenness.

"Mr. Sydney is a most remarkably attractive man," contributed Signora Mancini, and perhaps glad to turn the conversation from so melancholy a subject for poor Jane. "Rebecca, you in particular will be interested to observe him. I think he will be to your taste."

"Yes, Becky, he's absolutely yummy!" said Lydia, licking her own luscious lips.

"The world seems determined that I should be impressed with Mr. Sydney," said Rebecca. "I shall contain my enthusiasm till I have the evidence of my own senses."

"Well, *sense* him you shall, Miss de Steyne; yes, and dance, and smile, and laugh with him too, if I know young men and ladies! He has been in San Francisco on business, ever since poor Henry died, but is due back at any moment," concluded Lady Maud. "You shall certainly meet him here at the party tomorrow night."

After tea, the group spilled out into the courtyard and broke up into smaller groups. Jane and Charles, the youngest and most enthusiastic, made a natural pair, and together they headed off to the paddock to inspect the Frawley livestock. Victoria the disgruntled painter and Franca the chain-smoking photographer, circled each other warily, probing for a topic on which they could disagree. Kitty was mentally cataloguing Lady Maud's cactus collection; Lydia was happily admiring an old Spanish guitar she had discovered. Alec Macallum and Professor Mancini had found a shady bench under one of the arcades and were talking shop.

Maud Frawley, the businesswoman, was well-aware of the value of the de Steyne connection and especially solicitous of Rebecca's good opinion. She herself took the girl on a tour of the house and grounds, and inadvertently gave Rebecca the opening she had hoped for, when she pointed out a piano that Henry Adams was fond of playing.

"The Reverend had a very sensitive touch," said the old cowgirl.

"I would have very much liked to have known Jane's uncle," said Rebecca. "She speaks so lovingly of him."

"He was a very dear man, but soft...soft-bodied, soft-hearted, soft-minded – very cultured, very educated – but too dreamy for the frontier. His older sister – who was an extraordinary woman! God bless her soul! – protected him. Probably had all his life. Gave him a job –two jobs really, built him a church to pastor, and handed him a child to educate. And she made certain he had a substantial share in the Dakotah Springs Company when it was founded. Ah, here we are."

They had reached a vantage point that revealed a scene of such peace and beauty and nobility that Rebecca could not believe that one who could appreciate such a setting could be guilty of any crime or moral failure. Yet she had set herself the duty of investigating the facts of Jane's uncle's death.

"Dakotah Springs has proved a sound investment for you all, then?" ventured Rebecca.

"I don't know about 'sound'," smiled Lady Maud. "Some might have called it risky in the extreme. But the risk is paying off... or will soon."

"For Jane, especially?" asked Rebecca, silently invoking her father's maxim: follow the money.

"Jane Brakeman is now almost certainly the owner of both her mother's and her uncle's shares of the Dakotah Springs Company – two full shares with voting rights and veto rights. She will be a most-consequential person in our little universe. Her friends must take very good care of her. Or find her a husband as soon as possible! The ranches, the railroad, the spa, all will make her a very wealthy girl," judged the shrewd Scot. "Provided the reputation of the Springs is not sullied, we shall all do very well indeed!"

"I did see accounts of the accident in all the New York papers, when I was there," said Rebecca. "It was horrible for Jane. And I'm sure it was very bad for the Springs!"

Lady Maud looked thoughtful. "I'm not sure that a *good* murder is actually *bad* for business," mused the tireless booster. "If the victim is a well-born person, it *can* add a bit of glamour to a place. Henry Adams was a good-looking man, a Harvard man, and I know that Franca has provided photos of him to several papers who were willing to make suitable donations to my museum project."

Rebecca recoiled from this cold-eyed perspective on Henry Adams death. Might Maud Frawley have killed to ensure the success of her real estate investment? It seemed far-fetched, but Rebecca was determined to keep an open mind – which is to say, a skeptical one -- and kept on digging.

"You spoke of a trail ride," Rebecca resumed. "Did Henry Adams go? Did everyone go?"

"A few stayed behind. Let me see...Alice Enderleigh had one of her very painful headaches and felt that the glare of the sun and the jouncing of the horse would be more than she could bear. I don't wonder! Ridiculous to be wearing a high-necked, long-sleeved frock, on such a hot summer morning! David Enderleigh was very keen to have his ride, I sometimes think the man is *too physical* –all those calisthenics –and he seemed to have no sympathy at all with her indisposition. I wonder that, being a doctor, he can't cure the poor woman! Very uncomfortable for the rest of us. We couldn't very well leave her alone without company! At last, Madame Arlette volunteered to stay behind and so the Doctor was able to have his ride after all.

"Paul and Edward rode on ahead of us all, a bit less jolly than usual, I thought. There was what I'd call an *atmosphere* all 'round. The Colonel seemed dull, deprived of the Frenchwoman's conversation, though I'm sure I don't know what he sees in her or can find interesting in her endless gossip! He rode by Franca but after a few desultory attempts at conversation, they appeared equally-contented to ride in silence. I was more fortunate in my choice of companion. I had insisted that Mr. Sydney ride by me. He was charming company, pointing out the excellencies of the route, and the shortcomings of our fellow excursionists very entertainingly. Quite the wit! I felt quite a young woman again!" The

elderly cowgirl nodded archly. "That left the Rector and the Doctor, who rode more-or-less together, till, the Rector's horse going lame, he was obliged to dismount and make his way back to the Halt on foot. I saw the doctor's face as Henry left us. Dark and angry. He seemed inclined to turn back himself until Sydney chided him, then he shook up his horse and came to join us."

Rebecca looked at Lady Maud closely. "Why do you think the Doctor looked angry?"

"I have no idea." The Scotswoman replied with a certain finality. "None whatsoever."

"What was the situation when you returned to the house?" persisted Rebecca.

"When we got back, I was -- forgive my French -- knackered! I'm a marvel for my age, but I am "my age" after all. I went straight to the room where they had put my things, and I had a nice lie down. I don't know what anyone else was doing. When I came downstairs, it was to go straight in to luncheon, which had been laid out in the great hall, instead of *al fresco* as we had planned. A heavy mist had rolled in. Visibility nil. We didn't want to sit down to our meal until Henry arrived, but he never did. It rather spoiled the fun! Eventually, we had to give up and hurry down to the little station. We all boarded the train for the trip home and hadn't gone much past the lake and the first turning, when...." Her voice faltered. "Forgive me, my dear, but I don't feel equal to talking about that horrible accident. Perhaps another time. Shall we join the others?"

Rebecca was too well-bred not to take the hint. There was more to this story, she was convinced, but her investigation would have to wait for a more-propitious time.

CHAPTER 15: THE DARTMOOR HOTEL

The Thomas Tilling Horse Bus presented itself outside Lady Frawley's *rancho* at the appointed time. Professor Mancini, tired from the long journey, thanked her hostess, gathered up her covey of young ladies, and escorted by Alec Macallum, they set out for The Dartmoor Hotel.

Kitty and the professor had chosen to sit inside, quietly comparing notes on expeditionary tactics and logistics, ignoring the views while they pored over charts spread across both their laps. From the top of the double-decker bus, Jane waved greetings to almost everyone they passed. She seemed as familiar with the hurrying baker's boy as with the dowager-duchess-types parading on the brick-paved walks. Lydia, her blonde tresses tossed by the wind as their driver whipped up the horses, posed pale and abstracted, tallying the impressions she was making, counting a tipped hat as two points, an envious feminine glare as three, and one open-mouthed gawker who tripped off the sidewalk as five points. "If one is going to be stared at," she thought, "one may as well get some fun out of it."

The Scotsman, in accordance with his battle plan to conquer Lydia's defenses, paid rather more attention to Rebecca than usual. Rebecca – no fool – ignored him and set herself to looking around attentively at this new-born town that had become Jane's inheritance and responsibility..

The more Rebecca saw of Englishtown, the more she approved of the delightful scheme and the more she admired the entire team that was bringing it to life. The heart of Dakota Springs had been graced by nature with several stands of fine old trees; Edward Burnham and Paul Shipworth, the Estate Architects, had been careful to preserve these evidences of antiquity. Two cheerful creeks flowing out of the mountains and joining just above town, added freshness and variety, their banks tastefully-manicured or artfully-natural, just as the scene demanded. And behind and above it all, jutted the proud Peak itself, magnificent whether wreathed in clouds or stark against the azure sky. It was a beautiful setting, as restful as it was healthful. Rebecca, for whom fragile health had been from so young an age a sad fact of life, felt some stirrings of optimism as she breathed more deeply than she ever dared in coal-choked Manhattan. "No wonder Jane exhibits such vigor!" she thought, smiling at the recollection of her friend's physical agility, her confidence and strength.

"What did you think of Franca Frawley?" said a husky voice in Rebecca's ear.

"Lady Maud's granddaughter? I liked her, Vicky. What about you?" The misanthropic painter seemed to want to be drawn out on this subject, Rebecca thought.

"I don't even know her. She's all right, I guess. Awfully tied up in that photography thing. All she wanted to talk about. She says painting is too slow. Things changing too quickly. Got to catch them as they happen."

"I like her even more now!" said Rebecca sincerely.

"Wants me to go to the Indian camp with her." Victoria sounded offended. "She photographs the women."

"Will you go?" asked Rebecca, who was finding this line of thought very interesting indeed.

"Have to go. Said I would. Said I would sketch. Could be all right." Victoria took out a cigarette and began to try to light it.

"Vicky!" cried Kitty, leaning out the window of the 'bus, her attention drawn by the first faint whiff of tobacco. "You don't smoke! That Franca Frawley is a terrible influence!"

Victoria was about to retort when Jane jumped up and ran down the stairs from the top deck, pointing excitedly: Professor, Look! Look Kitty! The Dartmoor Hotel. Isn't it great!?"

A turning in the steep, winding Main Street had revealed looming above them the spectacular fantasia of chimneys, gables, and half-timbering that was The Dartmoor Hotel, Dakota Springs most-prestigious hostelry. Designed by Edward Burnham to make the most dramatic use of a natural promontory above the town, the Dartmoor Hotel was perhaps the highlight of his long career, the culmination of his theatrical, antiquarian esthetic.

"It's lovely, of course, and a little frightening, towering over the village, but why on earth is it called *The Dartmoor*?" Rebecca wondered aloud. "Not a moor in sight!"

"Why? Indeed!" responded Alec Macallum, eager to get in the conversation. "And why *Dakota* Springs, for that matter?"

"I am coming to think of the Western Frontier as a work of theatre, a play in progress," said Rebecca. "A myth in the making, perhaps."

Macallum agreed. "It is a Prospero's realm, indeed, where make-believe is more than welcomed – it is absolutely encouraged, celebrated!"

"One could be whatever one claimed to be," Lydia said thoughtfully. "A pauper might pass for a prince, or a princess for a pauper."

"Or a mountain for a moor," laughed Macallum.

"Or a scoundrel for a saint," mused Rebecca, thinking of Philip Sydney's reputed charms.

"Or an Earl's sister for a rough-and-ready cowgirl." Macallum went on. "Or five of the most-beautiful young ladies in New York City for ink-stained star-gazers."

Rebecca couldn't help laughing. "You're good at this game, Mr. Macallum, this make-believe."

"Yes," agreed Lydia. "You are surprisingly good at it."

"Why surprisingly?" he responded quizzically. "Do I seem unimaginative?"

Lydia smiled. "I thought you were a scholar and an investigator of sorts. Not a dreamer."

"Did you not consider that I might have dreams like any ordinary man?" said Alec with pretended pathos "Scholarly dreams, to be sure, such as differentiating the later works of Cranach the Elder from the early works of Cranach the Younger, but ambitious dreams nonetheless, and besides, how do you think an investigator ever finds anything out?"

"They determine what really happened, by marshalling facts, and reasoning to irrefutable conclusions." Rebecca chimed in, feeling on firm ground here.

"True, but also, he – or she – dreams things up – imagines – what *might* have happened, then snoops around to prove that it did...or didn't. By understanding the past, one predicts what lies ahead."

Ahead of them now was The Dartmoor, grand and imposing. Intended to evoke a fortified manor house and its dependent village, it was built out onto a natural rocky outcropping, the ground falling away steeply on three sides. Tall as the double-decker 'bus was, it passed easily under the high-arched stone gateway, with its half-timbered chamber above, and so into the busy precincts of the hotel and its outbuildings, ranged around a paved court. The doorman, resplendent in his crimson and gold Yeoman Warder uniform, stepped up smartly to help the girls alight. His manner implied that no Baron – either hereditary, or of the newly-minted railroad kind – need be ashamed of *this* address.

The girls bade Alec goodbye, and followed Jane's exuberant lead through the lobby and out onto a terrace overlooking a stunningly beautiful view of the mountains, the village laid out far beneath them, the running creeks and folds of hills tapering off into the distance.

"How splendid!" cried Victoria, her face relaxed in an unaccustomed smile.

Lydia's muse whispered to her a couplet that surprised her by being unironic.

"Doesn't it make you want to fly, Becca?" Kitty said, leaning far over the balustrade, her arms outstretched.

"It's...lovely," breathed Rebecca, but her stomach knotted as she stood, swaying, on what felt like a sliver of rock jutting over an abyss.

"Enough of that," said Jane abruptly. "Everybody come to my rooms and we'll have a welcome home toast. My uncle kept an excellent cellar!"

The Reverend Henry Adams, though modest, was not an abstemious man, and as befitted a major shareholder, had lived very comfortably in a suite which included a bedchamber and dressing room; a library *cum* sitting room whose casement windows, carved paneling, gothic mantelpiece, and heavy leather furniture evoked the hallowed chambers of a centuries-dead Oxford don; and a handsome dining room and well-equipped butler's pantry, but there was no kitchen – his food was prepared by the hotel's chefs and served by the hotel's waiters. All this had become Jane's property, and she led her teacher and friends to the wing that held Henry Adams' lovely apartment and unlocked its door with mixed emotions.

Whatever Jane expected to feel, it was not the shock and anger at the scene that greeted her. The charming foyer with its piano and statuary, pictures and plants, was turned upside down, vases smashed, music torn and strewn across the floor, a crude message scrawled on the mirror over the console table. Two steps farther into the apartment revealed that the devastation was not confined to the entry. Feathers from the slashed cushions of the blue velvet sofa floated on the air in the sitting room. Books were ripped from the shelves, ashes from the fireplace had been dumped over the deep leather armchairs, and everything moveable or breakable had been moved and broken.

"Kitty," said Jane, "you're the best runner. Can you find your way back to the lobby? Go get the manager. Get him to come at once. Have them send a messenger for Franca Frawley. Tell her to bring her camera, right now."

"Send for Rhys, too," said Rebecca. "He'll be on the train. Tell him to bring a gun and the evidence kit."

"And send for the police, of course," added the Professor. "Tell them to get the police. This is a very serious matter."

"It does seem deranged," said Kitty. "Illogical."

"Meanwhile," said Jane, "Leave everything just where it is. We need to find out what was taken, and then we need to find out why."

Powder flashed again and again, as Franca Frawley photographed the crime scene. Someone had wanted to inflict as much damage and destruction as they could. Every cupboard was emptied, every drawer was rifled, every cushion slashed. As the photographer finished with each room, the maid who had usually waited on Henry Adams began sweeping up the broken glass, replacing shades on lamps, taking away the slashed cushions, hanging clothes in armoires and returning the dead man's

possessions to their accustomed drawers. A man from Burnham & Shipworth had been summoned and was taking an inventory of items that would need replacing from their warehouses.

Jane was in a huddle with the hotel manager, the hotel detective, and the bobby whose usual duties were generally confined to chasing children off lawns, rescuing stranded cats, and providing local color.

"We knew you were arriving today," said the mortified manager, "so we sent housekeeping to air and dust the rooms this morning. Nothing was amiss."

"Were there any workmen, any strangers?" asked Jane.

The detective read from his notes. "The coroner came by to drop off a package containing your uncle's personal effects. It was left with a maid who says she put it on top of the musical instrument in the foyer. No one else entered these locked rooms except the two maids."

"Two maids?" said the manager, much surprised. "Elena, you were working alone this morning, were you not?"

The girl paused in her sweeping and replied. "No, sir, I was very busy this morning, and glad of the help you sent."

"I've no idea what you mean," said the manager. "I sent no one."

"She was very slow to be sure, sir, and clumsy, but I thought it was because of her age. I'm sure that red hair was dyed, if you ask me, and she was half bent over with rheumatiz. We were almost done when she spilled a bottle of polish and what a mess it made! She offered to stay and clean it up and I was that nervous about getting behind in my work that I let her do it. I told her to lock up tight behind her. Oh, sir, oh Miss, I am sorry!" The young girl was almost shaking with apprehension.

"You did nothing wrong," said the manager. "What was her name? Did she give you a name?"

"She mumbled something, but I couldn't make it out - foreign, maybe," said the girl. "After that, she just nodded when I told her what needed doing, where to put his things. I know - I knew - the Reverend's ways, where he liked his pipes, his tobacco, those books he would draw in, I knew his ways so well." The maid seemed genuinely affected.

"And you left her here alone?" mused Jane. "You went out and she stayed here, alone. It must be her! She must be the thief or vandal or madwoman!"

"She didn't seem hardly strong enough to do all this," marveled the maid, looking around her.

"Then either she had help, or she wasn't as old or feeble as she seemed," reasoned Jane. "Red hair, you say?"

"Yes, ma'am. Flaming red."

"Should I put up a wanted poster?" asked the bobby. "Wanted: Red haired woman. Strong, lively, has housekeeping skills."

"You're more likely to get a wife than a criminal with that description," laughed Jane in spite of herself. "No" she said, dead serious again, "let's play our cards close till we know some more facts. The rooms have been empty for weeks. Why wait until today to search them, if that's what she came here for? What, if anything, is missing - or did she leave something here for me to find? And most importantly - who is she working for! Who are they all working for?"

Rebecca stood in the arched doorway, surveying the once-charming sitting room. The carved paneling was undamaged, she noted with relief, but everything portable in the room had been deliberately thrown about. It seemed more than haphazard, she thought – it seemed positively vicious. The shelves that had held a scholar's cherished library were now bare, except for a few toppled ornaments; the books had been thrown to the floor, pages torn, spines broken; family pictures had been ripped from their silver frames; the cracked mirrors reflected chaos; the teal cushions of the divan breathed clouds of down from slashes in the velvet.

"Funny cuts, these," said Rhys, fingering the clean but shallow incisions in the amber-colored leather of the heavy armchairs. "Hard to picture what kind of tool was used."

"Very sharp, very short," agreed Rebecca. "Not a kitchen knife. Not a pocket knife or a letter opener."

Kitty and Lydia were placing books back on shelves, and Victoria was tending to the pictures and broken busts, salvaging what she judged could be repaired, but throwing away nothing that could be evidence.

Professor Mancini balanced an espresso cup in one hand and gestured broadly at the chaos around her with the other. "*Ecco! Brutto!* All your uncle's collections, his books, watercolors, music, papers, smashed, scattered, trampled. Who would do such a thing!? *Un brutto colpo! è stata una cattiveria!*"

"Maybe it's someone who hates educated women?" suggested Kitty. "They're mad because Jane will be taking over."

"They weren't attacking me," said Jane. "Nobody thinks of me as living here at the Dartmoor. Whoever did this must have really hated Uncle Henry!"

"But you say he was the sweetest, most inoffensive man on earth," said Lydia. "You paint a beautiful, loving picture of him."

"Even a good man – perhaps especially a good man – can make enemies," said the Professor. "although the connection between whoever caused his accident, the man who lurked at the ball and chased you on the train, and whoever did this to his home is beyond me!"

"It's all so senseless," said Lydia. "And so sad."

"It could be about money," said Rebecca. "It usually is."

"Or love," said Lydia. "It often brings out the worst in people."

"Or revenge," said Jane. "I can already feel what that urge is bringing out in me, and it isn't pretty."

A knock at the outer door interrupted her dark thoughts. The Colonel, having heard the news of the break in, had hurried up to the hotel to offer his services.

"Not the welcome I would have hoped for you, my dear girl," he began. "I am so sorry about your uncle. I had become very fond of him. I shall miss his company very much."

"Thank you, Sir George. What do you make of all this?" She gestured at the ruins of the once-exquisite little foyer. "Come meet the girls."

She led him into the library, where the girls were waiting with great curiosity, and their Professor with something more.

"Hello, George," she said evenly.

"Hello, Isabella," he replied, with a little bow.

Jane raised her eyebrows. "Well, that makes my job easier. Girls, this is my friend, neighbor and shooting teacher, Colonel Sir George Batten-Bowles. Sir George, meet my fellow astronomy students, Rebecca de Steyne, Lydia Laurence, Catherine Gray, and Victoria van Leyden. Every single one a guaranteed genius and a certified saint. Will you join us for dinner?"

"I'm afraid I am already engaged..." He cast a quick, almost guilty glance at the Professor as he uttered the word. "But may I escort you all tomorrow morning on a tour of our most famous local sight, the Garden of the Olympians?"

"The outstanding geologic features of the park, with its red sandstone sedimentary formations include Riverboat Rock, the Nine Muses, and Balanced Rock," began Kitty, who had the Baedeker by heart, it would seem.

"It's well worth seeing," said the Colonel. "For those who appreciate natural beauty."

I'm taking Paint home to the Halt tomorrow morning, but you all should go," said Jane.

"Rhys and I are touring the Burnham & Shipworth works tomorrow morning," said Rebecca, "but the rest of you should certainly go."

"Everyone looked to the Professor for her decision. "We should be delighted to join you Sir George, Kitty, Lydia, Victoria and myself. I'm sure it will be very instructive."

Proposing a time and a meeting place, and with a bow that was at once graceful, manly and slightly arthritic, the handsome old soldier took his leave.

The girls all looked at Signora Mancini, full of questions, but not daring to ask the obvious.

"I knew him, Horatio;" quoted the Professor. *"a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy."* I haven't seen or spoken to him in forty years, but yes, I once knew him quite well."

The port-cochere of the Dartmoor Hotel was a scene of cheerful bustle early the next morning as the three parties prepared to set off, each on their own adventure. Sir George arrived driving a very smart carriage and, while he helped Professor Mancini up onto the seat beside him, the three girls climbed into the back. "Be careful of that hamper, he pleasantly admonished them. "Mr. Wiggins has packed us a delicate lunch, and I'm sure would be appalled if we jostled the champagne. Are you quite comfortable, Signora?" There was no *George* and *Isabella* this morning. Certainly not in front of the girls.

Jane and Rebecca waved them goodbye and set off walking together towards the hotel's coach house and stableyard.

"Are you really okay riding up there alone?" asked Rebecca. "Won't the house be empty?"

"Of course I'll be fine. Paint could do it in his sleep. The house might be empty, but it's a working ranch. There's tons of people around. And I'll be ready for Maud's party tonight, right on time, and with ribbons in my pigtails."

"Big night," laughed Rebecca. "We meet the irresistible Mr. Sydney, if he condescends to show up."

Rhys was waiting for them in the stableyard. Jane had insisted they borrow her uncle's gig for the drive to town. His well-bred bay was harnessed to his sober but elegant carriage, and Rhys climbed onto the seat, with Rebecca beside him. "I'm going to enjoy this view," she shouted down to Jane as they drove off. "I never thought I'd say it, Rhys, but I'm a little tired of trains."

CHAPTER 16: JANE RIDES PONY HOME TO BRAKEMAN'S HALT

As Jane led Paint, saddled and bridled, out into the courtyard, Dr. Enderleigh was just arriving, no doubt on a professional visit, for he had his doctor bag fastened behind the saddle. The doctor's horse was as big and heavy-set as himself, more fit for the plow than the saddle.

"Howdy, Doctor," she called. "How's business?"

"Brisk, Miss Brakeman. Very brisk." He made a gesture towards the brim of his hat. "My condolences on your loss."

"It's all our loss," she said. "Henry Adams was the soul and conscience of this place."

"Indeed," said the doctor.

"What did he die of," asked Jane, point blank.

"Heart failure," replied the medical man.

Jane was about to remonstrate but thought better of it. Who knew who was friend or foe among these English who were with Henry Adams on his last day.

"I'm taking Paint up to Brakeman's Halt," she said, looking for his reaction. "He's looking forward to an outing with his friends, I reckon. Friends he can trust."

The doctor's look said that understood her meaning perfectly well, and his jaw tensed beneath his thick dark beard.

"Miss Brakeman, I take this opportunity to insist you take my advice, given both as chief medical officer of this place, as well as an investor and member of the board."

"Which advice is that?" she asked, knowing full well, for her uncle had written of it.

"Convert Brakeman's Halt into a luxury sanatorium for the terminal patients. Their presence in town only depresses business, yet we cannot turn away them away. The house is ideally situated and can easily be expanded as demand increases. The most desperate customers are the most demanding and the best paying. There will of course be high turnover. And you certainly won't need the place. You can live in town or more likely you'll marry and move away. Turn all of Brakeman's Halt over to the Foundation."

"It's kind of you to take such an interest in my ancestral home, doctor," said Jane. "But I'm not done living there yet. Ask me again when I'm dead."

"Just as you wish, Miss Brakeman. Of course." He tipped his hat and went on his way, bag in hand.

Shaking her head in something between dismay and disgust, she turned her attention to the ride before her, tightened the horse's girth, let down the stirrup, sprang lightly into the saddle and in moments, she and the pinto were headed home. Paint recognized the route and perked up in anticipation. Jane patted his neck. "Yep, you're going home, my friend. You get a bit of rest, sleep under your own stars and then in a few days we'll see how you carry Lydia or Kitty. If you're a good boy and behave you'll get a nice cookie."

The considerable beauties of the route couldn't compete with the thoughts that seized hold of her mind, but after a few miles, the tranquilizing pace of an hours-long ride, the freshness of the morning air, and the play of sunlight in the canyons and on the hillsides brought her back from the cares that beset her to the scenery around her, the well-known milestones that meant she was closer to home.

The still-busy stage and wagon road wound through the canyons and up the pass. At farms, camps, ranches, hamlets, she was welcomed back with a sincerity that warmed her heart. Her uncle had been respected and liked, and the locals' expressions of sympathy were no less sincere for being simple.

In the last half-mile, the pony almost danced with delight and eagerness, and Jane's heart rose as well. She kicked him into a canter as they rounded the bend and the lake came into view and beside it, the boat house. Not far beyond was the railroad halt, low and tile roofed. A flat car on the siding was being loaded with bales of hay from her pastures, newly mown and bound for the livery stables of Dakotah Springs. Crates of eggs from her henhouses were packed in straw and awaiting their turn, destined for that city's omelets and souffles.

The ranch hands crowded around her with much hearty handshaking and back slapping and swatting at with hats and other expressions of mannish joy. She had always been a favorite and had been much missed. Paint too, was treated as a returning prodigal, petted, feted and put to pasture to salute his friends and renegotiate his place in the herd.

Jane gave him a sugar cube, a kiss on the nose, and watched with bittersweet feelings as he sniffed the air and trotted off across the field. For the past year, he had been her only link to home. But he was too small to carry her now – it wasn't fair to him - she had grown too tall and might grow taller still! He father was a giant of a man, she reminded herself. She looked up the hill towards Brakeman House, silhouetted against its forested hillside. It was as beloved a sight as she had ever seen. She would defend it to her grave.

CHAPTER 17: GARDEN OF THE IMMORTALS OUTING WITH THE COLONEL

The Colonel was nervous, and it showed at first in his driving. He kept glancing to his right, where – at long last – the love of his life sat beside him. In her composed features, he was looking for the laughing, flirtatious young Italian beauty whose memory had filled his dreams all these years. He saw an old, gray-haired lady, soberly-dressed, authoritative, with a title to her name as prestigious as his own. He blushed to remind himself of what his mirror told him every morning: that he, too, was old and gray. He couldn't help making comparisons. It was his nature. He was a soldier. He liked to win. His achievements were more than equal to hers; his books on the Wars of the Roses were as much a part of the history canon as her discoveries were part of astronomical lore. Instead of becoming his wife and mother to his children, she had become a renowned scientist, a discoverer of comets, a pioneer of female education. And it was all his own fault. Guilt, shame, rivalry, regret, curiosity, all vied with the road for his attention and a few near-misses and exclamations of alarm from the three young ladies brought him back to the task at hand.

The eclipse was still some time away, yet as they wended their way down through Dakotah Springs, they all remarked that even at this early hour it was noticeably more crowded than it had been just two days before. The provision shops and eating houses already had lines out the door, and there seemed to be more jostling on the sidewalks than was usual in this well-behaved enclave. This of course, prompted Sir George to inquire about the young astronomers' eclipse plans, which unleashed a torrent of enthusiastic explanation, delivered with an intelligence, wit, imagination and erudition which did their smiling teacher proud.

In the Garden of the Immortals, Kitty kept a sharp lookout for notable foreign astronomers. She reasoned that they, being at loose ends until the actual eclipse approached, would be visiting the local high spots. She had researched and memorized their likenesses and achievements, brushed up on their native tongues – an unsurprising number spoke German, thank goodness – and she had composed and rehearsed exactly which questions she would put to each of them.

Everyone was in high spirits and inclined to approve the splendors nature had provided for their entertainment: the Garden of the Immortals did indeed live up to Baedeker's recommendation. After an hour or two spent exploring the truly magnificent spectacle of striking rock formations in startling hues, everyone was glad to settle in the shade, and make leisurely work of the picnic hamper's delicacies, which Wiggins had so artfully provided.

"He seems an admirable servant," said Lydia. "How fortunate that he didn't succumb to gold fever and run off to the diggings!"

"Running off, as you put it," said Sir George with a tinge of disapproval, "is not in his nature. He's a most loyal and courageous man."

"Has he been with you long?" asked Victoria. "Were you together out in the East?"

"Yes, indeed. We are two old campaigners," said their host, recovering his good humor. "Our wars are behind us now, I fear. I am dwindled into a doddering old don, put out to grass at last."

"You would prove a more-entertaining don than most, I'm sure, sir," said Victoria "Did you tire of teaching?"

"Not tired of teaching, but tired, yes. Just a sabbatical, my dear," smiled the Colonel. "Doctor (friend of Maud's, I gather), felt I'd been working too hard, recommended Dakotah Springs and so I applied for leave, Wiggins packed us up, and here we are."

"You look perfectly healthy to me!" commented Kitty.

"The doctor's advice seems to have done me well, then," he laughed. "A prohibition on strenuous mental effort, and a total embargo on Lancaster and York."

"Pity. It was a very romantic period in history," said Lydia. "But I hope this does not mean you are not writing anything at all anymore? What a loss that would be!"

"Hmmm?" the Colonel seemed as if distracted. "Just a few notes, now and then. Memoirs, you know. Wiggins is a great help. Gets me out of my chair and out and about. Golf. The club. The races." He looked at his pocket watch. "I'm afraid my dears, we must be on our way if we hope to present ourselves in proper kit at Maud's party. I have been so grateful for your company." And he bowed to them each, took each young lady's hand and kissed it and handed them back into the carriage.

The Professor felt uneasy. Something in the Colonel's demeanor was raising alarm bells. Some lack of ingenuousness. She couldn't quite put her finger on it, but their past history did not cloud her eyes to present dangers. Jane had an enemy in this town, and till they discovered who it was, everyone was a suspect.

CHAPTER 18: REBECCA IN DAKOTAH CITY TO TOUR BURNHAM AND SHIPWORTH

Rebecca was happy to be getting this second view of Old Town Dakota City. In many ways it was exactly what the illustrated papers prepared her to believe the *old west* to be: arcaded boardwalks connecting hastily-erected, gold-rush era wooden buildings, their outsized signs advertising the best amusements, vices, remedies, and luxuries for wild-eyed miners with dust in their pockets. Rebecca hoped these worthies visited the bath house, laundress, barber, and dentist before visiting the ladies hanging over the balconies of the countless saloons along the railroad tracks or taking a box at the splendid opera house whose spire claimed pride of place over even that of any Dakota City church of whatsoever denomination.

They drove through Railroad Square, past the station with its ramifying platforms, sidings, sheds, and the big, looming roundhouse with its attendant turntable and infernal fires within. It all struck Rebecca as a scene of cheerful bedlam: hand trucks clattering, porters shouting, latecomers scurrying, ne'er-do-wells lounging, smokers flicking ashes, cats jumping out of the way, shoeshine man singing as he flicked his rag, pie lady flogging her wares, and the smoking, steaming, clanging, huffing, snorting trains, demanding attention, lords of their Age.

Across the square, on the porch of the Station Hotel, Mr. Philip Sydney lounged in a negligent attitude, calculating his options. His three companions – Brandt, The Kid, and Scout – were close by, waiting for a sign. They had utter trust in their boss – he always made the right moves: he had come to Colorado intent on domination, and all his alliances and acquisitions so far had been accomplishing that goal very handsomely. One by one, the properties he coveted had fallen to his implacable ambition. Now, already a millionaire many times over but of undetermined origins, it was social validation which excited him, as money had in his youth.

An easy victory had been gaining entry to the fashionable society gathered at the Springs; and had a suitable British heiress been on offer, he would not have been averse to taking that short cut to respectability. Although fidelity was not, he felt sure, in his nature, he had rather counted on his looks and magnetism to excite the same keen proprietary interest among these elite females that those blessings had so reliably delivered elsewhere. It chanced, however, that in that society, at that season, susceptible well-born heiresses were thin on the ground. Still, it had proved a congenial society, much-inclined to approve of his good looks and pleasant manners. Sydney had been resolved to move on quickly after a pleasant round of dinners and mild flirtations, but when Henry Adams died, his outlook changed considerably.

A month or so before the accident, as the port had gone round after a substantial dinner at Colonel Sir George Batten-Bowles', it had been jovially suggested to the sweet-faced rector that the Brakeman holdings, consisting of a short-line railroad, majority voting shares in the Dakota Springs Corporation, a picturesque country mansion in the vernacular style, x-number of square miles of range, crop, and pastureland, well-timbered hillsides, productive streams and lakes, as well as potentially ore-laden mining claims, all this would be much better off in the hands of an enterprising fellow, rather than those of the Reverend Henry Adams. The Reverend took the joshing in good humor; he acknowledged readily that he was not a worldly man, but maintained that he was a conscientious one, and open to advice.

This Henry Adams, a New England clergyman, a Harvard man, had come to his widowed sister at Brakeman's Halt after the war and stayed to become pastor to the fashionable Anglicans in Dakota Springs and tutor to his young niece, Jane Adams Brakeman, and he was now, after his sister's death, the girl's legal guardian.

This rambunctious orphan, Sydney learned, was inheritor of the empire her enterprising mother had assembled. "Till Jane's majority or marriage", the town's lawyer volunteered, "the Reverend Adams here regulates the disposition of her property. You're the bottleneck, Henry, to exploiting the Brakeman assets. Why the railroad alone could be worth millions to a man who wanted to control access to the Crooked Creek mining district. You never know, if there's another big strike, that

monopoly could make a man a king. Set whatever rates he wanted! Pity it's not all in the hands of a man with vision, with pep!"

The vicar had just smiled and presented his glass for a refill.

Then suddenly, this vapid churchman was dead, and the girl Jane Brakeman would soon be the richest woman in Colorado. "Is she eighteen?" Sydney had wondered. "Not quite," the silly Scottish woman had helpfully replied. "And all alone in the world, poor child, without friend or family to guide her."

"Poor child," Sydney said to himself now.

Rebecca spotted him at once, as they came opposite the Station Hotel where her friends had had their first sarsaparilla ices. "Yes, that's what I pictured," she thought to herself. "Not the dark, wild one; not the clean-shaven boy; not the Indian with his broad hat and long gun. No, *he* is the other man -light-eyed, fair-haired - what was he 35? 40? The girls were right. His suit was well-cut and fit him in a way that made one want to come closer and to touch it. To touch him."

Rebecca caught her breath and laughed out loud! What had come over her?! She playfully poked Rhys. "Look, there on the porch, that must be the famous Mr. Sydney and his gang. How theatrical they are! I can hardly take them seriously! They should join up with that acting troupe we saw on the train." She couldn't stop laughing, which of course made her prettier than ever.

Sydney watched her pass, perfectly-aware whose daughter she was, and decided to take Maud Frawley up on her party invitation.

Rebecca and Rhys followed the road that paralleled the railroad tracks, till they came to a long complex of fairly uniform buildings, united by a long sign over the central group: *Burnham & Shipworth - Architects, Surveyors, Contractors*. Here there was no artifice, no fantasy of a merrier England. Straight-faced, brick-built, and forthright, these works were all-American industrial architecture. Through the screen of these sober buildings, through high, wide-arching gateways, they passed into a courtyard that was by contrast, a fairyland of exotic caprice, alive with craft work underway, pieces in progress or being packed for delivery and installation. Statues, cabinetry, doors and windows, pedestals, iron and glass, tile and terra cotta, gilded moldings and lead tracery, all in a helter-skelter state, and with hordes of functionaries ferrying items to and from the loading dock of the dedicated spur. "It's like behind-the-scenes at the theatre," said Rebecca, who had spent rapt hours backstage observing the mechanics of theatrical illusion. Lights and levers and trap doors delighted her when she was very young, and perhaps they did still.

Paul Shipworth came lightly down an outdoor stairway and over to their carriage, signaling to a lad to come take the horse's head. "He's younger than I remembered," thought Rebecca.

"Welcome to the Works! Come up to the office for a bite, and by then Edward will be able to join us on our tour. He's much more interesting than I am. He's the genius, you know. But I have a good deal of imagination and I certainly know what feels comfortable!"

"You make an admirable team, sir. I have been delighted by your taste and invention."

"Thank you, Miss de Steyne. You must know how gratified we would be by your approbation."

"I shall certainly 'talk you up' when I get home to New York!" she laughed. "You are an excellent representative of your firm, Mr. Shipworth."

"Ah, here we are," said Paul, ushering them up a flight of stairs and into a large, dim, leathery office. "Tea in a minute. Yes, there's Fergus coming across from the stables. A minute to wash up, and then...yes. Please sit, there are sofas enough, eh?! Edward likes a lie down in the afternoon but wants a change of perspective from time to time. Are you quite comfortable? Oh good, here he is now!"

The 'he' was Fergus Fraser, a startlingly-beautiful boy of perhaps 17, who came in just then with four little glasses of sherry and some biscuits and grapes on a tray. He passed the delicate glasses around, took the last one, and sat down nervously, after glancing at Paul for his cue.

"Fergus is learning the business from the ground up. His people are artisans, but I'm trying to raise his ambition to be in management."

"Not be the boss!" the youngster blurted out, though he gazed at Paul with his soul in his eyes.. "I'm a poet." He fell silent again.

"Yes, of course," Paul said. "Perfectly right."

Rebecca struggled to decipher the strange emotional tone of the exchange. "Here, on one side at least, was love," she thought. "But which side?" There was hero worship in the impressionable teenager's whole demeanor, and tender protectiveness in the face of the older man.

A slow tread on the stairs announced the arrival of Edward Burnham. Fergus jumped up before the door could open, and with sherry glass in hand, hurried into an adjoining room. Edward entered, doffed his soft brown hat, and greeted Paul with a wry smile and turned to his guests.

"Hello, all. Hope I'm not late."

"Hullo, Edward. May I present Miss Rebecca de Steyne and her assistant Rhys Jones?"

"Come to see how the sausage is made, eh!" said the congenial architect, shaking their hands and taking a seat by the fire.

"Come to marvel and admire," laughed Rebecca, happy with Edward Burnham's casual manner. It had been her experience of great architects that they could be humorless and self-absorbed. This specimen of the breed appeared very approachable. She hadn't forgotten that she hoped to get the details of the Brakeman's Halt murder out of him, eventually.

Paul turned back to the earlier conversation. "Don't you love this room! It's intended for business, but it's sort of a sanctuary, too. We put our feet up and are a happy couple of bachelors, aren't we, Ned?" He reached out a hand, and Edward grasped it.

Fergus came in shyly to clear the tea things. Edward's brow knitted as he observed the graceful young man, fine-featured, and delicately-built, moving around the room quietly and shooting glances at Paul, who seemed unaware of the boy's intense manner. Indeed, a moment later, Paul rose with decision and proposed that the tour begin.

Downstairs, Rhys shouted to be heard over the thumps, whines, and clangs of machinery and the hiss of the steam engine driving them all via a centralized powered shafting system. "I could see us in a place just like this, Becca. Upstairs with our feet up on those comfy sofas, sipping a nice cuppa, then bang! brilliant notion strikes! We rush down to the benches, set the wheels in motion and presto! Another genius innovation! We'd set to work, wouldn't we, Bec? Despite those tempting sofas, this feels like a place for getting things done."

"You're right about that, Mr. Jones," said Paul, leading them past various workstations and introducing them to some of the artisans, who seemed to originate from every corner of the globe. Rebecca, smiling broadly in excitement at the hive of activity in the workrooms around her, knew better than to interrupt the men and women who were sewing, sanding, drilling, sawing, polishing, staining, carving, painting, gluing, upholstering.

"I don't know, Rhys. I think I would find it too exciting here to get any of my own work done!" said Rebecca, who was indeed quite unusually animated.

Edward turned to Rebecca. "You make a good point, Miss deSteyne. I spend most of my days at our office in Dakotah Springs? In Bedford Square."

"Nice frontage. One of our best models. Oozes prestige and respectability," said Paul.

"It gives me a peaceful place to work, and gives the clients peace of mind," said Edward.

"First impressions are vitally important on purchases that size," nodded Paul.

"In everyday life," said Rebecca, "I have noticed that the attractiveness of the package often determines the buyer's estimation of the item's worth."

The old architect's eyes went wide and he nodded in assent. "A private building is the package of a life; a public building is the package of an ideal – Governance, Faith, Justice. I have designed a city that is the package for an complete world, a universe that will replicate as a plant does, each leaf being a facsimile of the next. It is my greatest, my crowning, my last achievement before age and infirmity strike me down and I become my own last pitiful client."

Paul interrupted, alarmed at his partner's outburst, "This particular building in Bedford Square satisfies our wealthy clients. Lured by Lady Maud and cured by Dr. Enderleigh, they come to Dakotah Springs expecting to be housed in a fashion that displays or exaggerates their means. The houses are designed by Edward in keeping with the Master Plan and realized under the Burnham & Shipworth construction banner. We meet with clients in the front rooms. There's a beautiful large, bright studio looking onto the garden behind, and that's where Edward spends much of his time drawing and supervising the assistants."

"Assistants. Aye, there's the rub." Edward looked disgruntled. "They don't grow on trees. At least good ones don't."

"You've no idea how complicated it all is," said Paul defensively. "We need so many, and all sorts. There must be draughtsman to draw the full-size details for the carpenters, masons and plasterers to follow; workmen of all trades must be hired, supervised, and paid; antiques and raw materials must be located, verified, purchased, transported, adapted or fabricated and installed. What we design, we must deliver; what we promise, we must fulfill." Paul was so energetic and capable that Rebecca got the impression he might pick up a hammer and help with the building himself. "The construction is an enormous business in itself," he went on. "Luckily, it's just the kind of business Old Dakotah City is a natural for. Strong rail connections. County seat. Plenty of banks and boarding houses. And plenty of rich clients just up the hill. No wonder it's become a magnet for artists and craftspeople from around the world!"

As they walked through the residential streets nearby, Rebecca heard a dozen languages being spoken, and sniffed the aromas from as many cuisines. Paul continued giving the banker's daughter an overview of the scope of the firm's operations, a recital of the soundness of any potential investment in the project, and at last an outright suggestion that if such an investment were to happen, an entire major new boulevard would be christened with said investor's august surname.

Rebecca smiled. "My ambitions lie elsewhere," she laughed. "I'd like to be the one who invents a new way of paving that boulevard, and then you can name that patented process after me! But of course I am eager for your success, for Jane's success."

Edward was walking a bit behind, chatting with Rhys, when he called Rebecca's attention to a modest wooden chapel just up a side street.

"This is what I wanted to show you," said Edward, pausing. "This was Henry's first church. Here is where he preached, before we built St. David's for him in the Springs."

"St. David's is a very noble building, Mr. Burnham," Rebecca said.

"Thank you, my dear. Reverend Adams, for his part, would have been content to stay in this humble chapel. His was a most sincere faith. How I shall miss him. He had the finest sensibilities of any American I've yet met. And the warmest heart."

"What can have happened, Mr. Burnham?" cried Rebecca. "I cannot understand what happened at Brakeman's Halt!"

"None of us can, Miss de Steyne! We were concerned when he missed Maud's birthday dinner, the very reason we were there! The party was his own idea!" Edward mused, a frown creasing his brow. "Sydney wondered if he had perhaps gone up to Forest City or one of the other villages on some emergency. He did sometimes used to preach at the mill town, while his curate –who I suppose will be promoted now – would take the service at St. David's. We imagined someone had summoned him and he hadn't left word, not expecting to be gone long."

"Had he told anyone that was his plan? Did anyone see him receive a message?"

"No. Very strange. Dinnertime came. Maud had asked for a picnic under the oaks near the house, but after our ride a thick fog came in, and it never lifted - if anything it became colder and fouler. So we ate indoors and were all relieved when it came time to board the train and head back to town."

"And still no sign of Rev. Adams?"

"Someone, the doctor perhaps, suggested that he might come down with Fergus and the wagon, when the fog lifted."

"And then?"

"And then our train continued around the bend and down Brakeman Grade, and we could feel that we had hit something. A deer, perhaps. That happens. Or a cow. In that fog, we couldn't see an inch in front of us. We didn't stop. We got to town, we said our goodbyes and went home to our own firesides."

"And then....?" she asked.

Paul answered for his partner, who seemed very tired or ill. "He was found eventually by a search party and brought home and buried. We are all heartbroken, Miss deSteyne, especially for Jane."

"What killed him?" asked Rhys.

"Impossible to day. He had injuries. A fall perhaps." Paul seemed uncomfortable. "I'm afraid I have a vendor I must meet, and Edward should lie down. May I send for your carriage?"

Fergus brought the gig around and as Rebecca climbed up onto the seat, the pretty youth pressed a roll of papers into her hand. "Just a poem," he mumbled. "Read it. It's for Miss Brakeman," he whispered as they drove away.

CHAPTER 19: GUNS AND HORSES AT BRAKEMAN'S HALT

Jane felt a whoosh of friendly spirits and happy memories envelop her as she opened her own front door for the first time in almost a year. She was glad they'd be moving up here in a few days. The house needed to be filled with life again. Young Mrs. Maran, daughter-in-law to that old Mrs. Maran who had been a fixture of her childhood, would be coming up tomorrow to brew and bake, to air the beds and beat the rugs and make all ready for their stay.

The Brakeman house had been remodeled and wings added as their fortunes expanded, but at the heart of it was still the original fort her parents had built in the wilderness before there was such a thing as a stage road, much less a railroad. That fortified dwelling, with great stone pillars and giant logs in between, was now the great hall of the commodious house. A gallery ran round two sides at second floor level, and rooms opened off it. A grand stone fireplace filled one wall, its chimney soaring thirty feet or more to the rafters. Tall leaded windows with inset medallions of colored glass took up much of the fourth wall and made the most of a memorable view, which Jane paused to admire before running up the stairs and along the gallery to her Uncle's old room.

Saying a little prayer as she crossed the threshold, she opened the rector's wardrobe and began laying items on the bed: hat, gloves, gauntlets, vest, jacket, gun-belt and holster. All black, all sober and elegant. She stood looking at them for a moment, picturing her uncle, perhaps. She put them on over her black blouse and split riding skirt, tucked her hair up under Henry's hat, and looked in the mirror. If she had been wearing trousers, she thought, she could pass for him. She shook her head at the thought of her carefree days of play-acting a lad and thought of how easily the British actors had seen through her disguise. Childhood games, compared to this reality. Graduation, the Birthday Ball, Foxden, it all seemed to have happened impossibly long ago and in another world. This, here, was what was real, what was worth loving, worth fighting for.

If you'd been doing an advertisement for the benefits of a free, active, outdoor upbringing for young women, you couldn't have picked a better model than Jane Brakeman of Brakeman's Halt. Glowing with health, she was lithe and strong, sure-footed and athletic, with copper-colored hair, bright hazel eyes, an open, lively expression, brows more likely to arch in amusement than contract in disapproval, a dry turn of humor, an easy laugh. A lifetime of riding astride had given an outward bow to her knees as she walked, but the tight corsets and full skirts she was obliged to wear out East hid the fact. She could never approve of this impractical mode of dress, and she made fun of it relentlessly among her friends, but she had at least resigned herself to it until she could return to the mountains and dress as she pleased --for there, who dared oppose the rich, good-natured, grinning youngster when she insisted on doing things exactly her own way and wearing split skirts, or even boy's riding gear?

As a very young child, Jane Brakeman had shown independence and level-headedness, and she had been given exceptional freedom by her hard-working, enterprising mother and her gentle, tolerant uncle. Jane knew her father only by reputation, but seeing him through her mother's eyes, he became in the child's mind a giant of a man -- vast, magnetic, handsome, keen, optimistic, indomitable -- convinced that a way could be found around, under, or through any obstacle. He had died heroically -- commanding a volunteer unit in the war when Jane was just a year old. He was her Hero. She wanted to grow up to be exactly like him.

From the first, freedom had agreed with her, and her mother and uncle had had the wisdom to allow her talents and curiosity to dictate the direction of her education. The lessons of structure came naturally, in observing the regularity of the seasons, of breeding times and reaping times; discipline was learned in the rituals of animal care, the labor of keeping oneself warm and dry, in the never-ending battle with the encroaching elements in the landscape -- and because she was the child of educated, open-minded people and the heir to a tradition of intellectual attainment -- all of these

observed things were given grace and beauty of form and shown to have their places in the long history of civilization, via the tutelage of her uncle, the Reverend Henry Adams. Calm, serious, and be-spectacled, he quietly gave the growing child the benefit of his excellent education, his extensive reading, his interests in botany and geology. He had a gift for teaching in the way that was most agreeable to her lively mind and ever-active body. She came to love him dearly, and he expanded in the warmth of her childish smiles and laughter and felt the pride almost of a father in her every precocious attainment. He was twenty-seven years old when he arrived at his widowed sister's estate. Six-year-old Jane had treated him from the first as another sad and lovable creature who needed her care, much like the ancient half-blind hound who lay by the kitchen fire, lamenting lost bones. Her uncle, a chaplain, had lived through the war, and as Jane grew wiser, she wondered if it was the war – or the living through it when so many had died – that was the source of his persistent sorrow.

Imogen Brakeman – a former teacher herself – had made sure the little girl was well-founded in reading, writing, and arithmetic. But with so much work to do, short-handed during the war, her husband away and then lost in battle, it was inevitable that the child would be left to scramble into whatever education she could on her own. Bright and curious, she was so likeable with her droll little sense of humor, that she had been 'adopted' by the ranch-hands, the blacksmith, the stagecoach driver, the horse wranglers, the cook in the kitchen at home, and the cook on the chuckwagon when she and her mother would accompany the herd on the trail. The constant variety was well suited to her lively mind, and as if the events of the day did not provide enough stimulation, the child would then lie beside her mother in camp at night, and cuddled up in the crook of her arm, tell her whispered stories of imagined heroic deeds – escaping a lizard as big as a goat, finding diamonds and pearls in the bed of the creek, riding a horse so magical it could leap off a cliff and fly.

For Uncle Henry's sake, little Jane had endeavored to curb her restlessness and to sometimes sit wriggling beside him as he read to her, in English, French, Latin. She giggled overmuch at her own silly attempts to pronounce *monsieur* correctly, but she was thirsty for knowledge and soaked it up quickly. In fair weather or foul, they took nature walks – or more often, rides – together, where he contributed ten words of vital instruction to her thousand words of fantasy. She was amusing or dramatic by turns, very inventive – the animals that crossed their path – the shy antelope, the scurrying rabbit – all had biographies in Jane's imagination. Around every curve, danger, mystery, or adventure lay waiting to be encountered. And in every story, Jane, the hero, triumphed!

When she was about thirteen and considerably less-sensitive to other's rights to privacy than she was to her own, Jane could not conquer her need to know the secrets of her uncle's past. She was sure there was a romantic secret behind his poetic remoteness. It occurred to her that perhaps he was just shortsighted, but she dismissed the idea as pedestrian. She took to listening for clues in his conversation and even in his sermons, for though he was invariably gentle and kind, he was not *open*. It became almost a mission to her, listening to him preach of a Sunday morning, imagining every homily as his own personal confession. Why was he so sad? What was his secret? Had he broken a commandment? Lost a great love? Would he tell her when she grew up?

So the years went by and Jane grew, happy, confident, content, with a joke and a smile for everyone. It had been agreed that being educated at home, with so excellent a tutor as the Reverend Henry Adams, was a sound idea. Jane grew increasingly useful to her mother in her businesses, learning the skills she would one day need to follow in her mother's footsteps and run The Brakeman Company. These were the years when her father's great dream was realized, and the rails were laid between Dakota City and Milltown. It was odd having a train stop at the foot of one's drive, instead of the same old stagecoaches or wagons. Now Jane switched her allegiance from the stagecoach drivers to the engine drivers on the neat, puffing, little engines pulling freight and passengers up and down the mountain.

And for Jane, there had been a compelling reason for staying at home; her mother's failing health. The disease which hit her suddenly had taken her mercifully quickly. In her few remaining months, Imogen Adams had arranged for all the family's various enterprises to be put into trustworthy custodianship until such time as Jane could legally take over. The will stipulated that that time would

be when Jane turned eighteen. Imogen knew that her sweet, sad younger brother was a saint on earth, but couldn't be trusted to remember which pocket he put his watch in! She also knew that her daughter had all the qualities – except maturity and experience – to be a worthy successor to her enterprising parents. Uncle Henry was to be Legal Guardian, but not empowered to make unilateral decisions without Jane's concurrence.

For the first time in her life, Jane knew devastating heartbreak. She became solitary and rode for hours in the hills, or stood silently beside Jack, her favorite engineer, as they chugged up to the Mills and back to town. On starry nights, she would ride out and sit on a promontory, trying to stare into eternity and see her mother's face again. She hated the streets, the stores, the parlors, with people going about their usual business, chatting, laughing. "How can you smile, when my mother is dead?" she thought, angrily looking around in a fog of misery.

Soon after his sister's death, Henry had been visited by the Governor's wife, an old friend of Imogen's. She had urged Henry to send the girl away to school at once, arguing that a change of scene was the best medicine for the girl's deep sorrow, and that it was high time Jane mixed with girls of her own class, hinting that looking for a suitable husband in the process was not the least of her plan's advantages. Mrs. Governor could highly-recommend a very-selective boarding school in Switzerland. A couple years there, and the young heiress could very likely come home engaged to a viscount or even one of the lesser middle-European princes. Her fortune could certainly warrant that!

Henry had smiled sadly and made no reply. He was doubly lonely with his sister gone, and with his beloved pupil withdrawn and depressed. It would have pained him to see her gone. Luckily, the choice was not his to make – Imogen had been most explicit that Jane was not to be sent away against her will – or indeed forced into any action against her will. Imogen had also made it clear to her attorneys Bettermore & Bettermore, that the family's holdings were not to be broken up – that no piece of it could be sold off without Jane's explicit informed consent. Imogen relied on the wisdom of old Hubert Bettermore – and on the energy and quick-wittedness of his son Julius -to resist all efforts to pressure the girl in any way.

With Imogen gone, and with Henry's clerical duties requiring his presence in Dakota Springs, there had been pressure for Jane to leave Brakeman's Halt and come to live entirely with her Uncle at his apartments in the Dartmoor Hotel. She resisted this for a year or more, refusing to leave her only home; but at last, she found herself spending almost as much time at the Springs as she did at the Halt, and finding the change of pace stimulating.

Dakota Springs was at bottom a health resort, aimed at mildly-ill, well-heeled upper-class Britons. It was England in miniature. Her uncle was the rector of St. David's Episcopal Church, and being a sensitive reader of Scripture, and approaching forty, still softly handsome and undeniably single, he was the focus of much affection from his lady parishioners. It was even said (by Jane in a waggish moment) that some Methodist wives had converted, entirely for the pleasure of looking at him on a Sunday.

Young Jane, who rode and shot as well as any boy her age, and moreover, told a sporting tale with singular humor, was soon a favorite with all the old invalid officers. Her marital prospects and the exact extent of her fortune were a never-ending source of discussion among the benign dowagers of the place. What sort of man would she marry, they all wondered? What sort of a man would marry her!! Lady Maud reminded them that the girl was barely seventeen and should be left to enjoy her freedom as long as she could. She certainly didn't need any man's money, having inherited plenty of her own.

Jane's feelings about going away to school had begun to change when she and her uncle had been called upon by a family of cousins, large, good-natured people from one of the newer farming states. Though the great hall at Brakeman's Halt was broad and lofty, it seemed over-filled by the seven enormous Midwesterners. A chatty, ample mother kept a sharp eye on her three *zoffig* daughters who poked each other and giggled, while ignoring two thick, stolid younger sons, both of whom seemed content to sit placidly waiting for their next feeding. The father – a cousin of James Brakeman's

on his mother's side - was the odd man out. "He so little resembles any of the children, that an impolite person might doubt their parentage," thought Jane. Hollow-cheeked, with slightly-mad eyes, he talked to himself under his breath in continual sarcastic asides, whose power to harm was compromised by their inaudibility. He was enormously-rich and taking his family on a holiday to San Francisco.

Jane who although fascinated to meet any blood relative of her father's, was in fact bored, and as the family droned on and the father fidgeted, she allowed her mind to make pictures of what she was hearing.

The three girls had all just been at a boarding school together and their conversation was full of shared references to classes, friendships, and activities. They had all wanted to go to Vassar, that new college for females upriver from Manhattan, but Papa had laughed almost-aloud at the thought of their being capable of intellectual work and followed it with a *sotto voce* invective against the idiocy of his own kin. Mama had instead seen that they were sent to a proper ladies' academy where more-appropriate accomplishments were gently encouraged. Needlework, dancing, French, and calligraphy would be of the highest utility in their future lives as rich man's wives. *Caveat emptor*, Jane smiled to herself, ducking her chin to hide the width of her grin. But from that moment, Jane had felt a curiosity about Vassar College, where apparently, they taught things worth knowing, and despite her cousins' silliness, their real pleasure in the shared experiences of school left an unexpectedly strong impression on Jane.

With her mother gone, she had found herself almost entirely-surrounded by men – indeed, from her earliest days, her favorite activities made that inevitable. Her first best friend had been Rusty Naill, the chief cowhand. He had taught her to ride and rope. At eight, her mother gave Jane her first little rifle and it soon became clear that the child had a precocious ability to hit almost any target at almost any distance! And the little girl loved to shoot! Henry discovered that he could combine lessons with lengthy shooting sessions, as she recited the times tables or listed the kings of England in order with the dates of their accession, with a humorous remark and a well-aimed bullet punctuating each one. It was as if her mind was most present when her focus was most distant.

Her newer best friend was Jack Wallace, senior engine driver on the Dakotah City & Milltown R.R. - the short line, narrow-gauge railway that ran from Dakotah City, through Dakotah Springs, up to Brakeman's Halt, beyond to the mountain resort camps, and on to Forest City and finally, Milltown. Surveyed, mapped and engineered by Jane's father before the war, construction of the route had had to wait till the connecting route was completed. Then Imogen Adams Brakeman assembled the team and negotiated the deals that got the D.C. & M. R.R. off the drawing boards and up the inclines and over the gorges that lay between her termini, fulfilling her husband's dream, and substantially enriching the Brakeman coffers. The new railroad served the new resort, and the resort served the railroad, providing a steady stream of tourists intent on scaling the Peak, or spending the day in nature. The boom in mine and rail construction, along with the explosion in domestic and commercial development meant that a strong demand for timber would keep the freight traffic flowing on the line.

Now, Jane stood at the window of Henry's bedchamber and looked across the valley at her cattle grazing on the far hillsides, at the wagons lumbering by on the old stage road, at the little figures hurrying to and fro, going about the everyday tasks of a prosperous ranch. Right on time, with a roar and a whistle, the train came through, as necessary to the neighborhood as the creek it ran beside. It was bound for the Peak, Forest City and Milltown, loaded with freight and pulling extra cars overflowing with gaping tourists. The little old locomotive labored with the effort of its burden. More runs, or at least a second engine, a helper, would be needed soon. And a second crew. She turned her mind from railroad logistics and back to the job at hand.

Downstairs, in the estate office, her mother's presence was strong. This had been the hub of her personal empire, as various maps on the wall attested. The room was full of mementos and memories. Placed somewhat apart from the living quarters, it had a door straight to the stableyard outside, and through it, tenants came to pay their rents, foremen came to receive their orders. Behind a heavy wooden door was the closet where the strong box was kept and the guns. It was the guns that

interested Jane, and she chose from among them as carefully as she had chosen her uncle's clothes. She holstered the pair of black-handled pistols and carried the rifle with her out to the tack room in the barn behind the house. This room, too, was a trove of memories. Here was the little red saddle that had fit her first pony. There was her mother's elegant, formal sidesaddle, and beside it, the high pommeled roping saddle she had used on the trail. Her uncle's gear was sober, good-looking and well-cared for, like all his things, and of course, black. She took bridle and saddle off their pegs and carried them to the yard where his favorite horse stood, sober, elegant, steady, but capable of fire, as she knew, for she had chosen and trained him herself. They were old friends and he showed his affection politely as she tacked him up. His black coat gleamed with health and he seemed well aware of his own beauty.

"What's this?" said Jane, checking the saddlebag. Tucked inside was one Henry's sketchbooks, less than half-filled. "His last one" she thought, "perhaps from the day of that very last ride." She swallowed hard to keep the emotion back. The little book fit in her jacket pocket. She slid her rifle into the sling hanging from the saddle, mounted and turned the horse's head back towards the Springs and the mysteries and battles that awaited her there.

CHAPTER 22: DRESSMAKER'S FIRST VISIT

Heads turned as Jane strode through the lobby of The Dartmoor, perhaps because her guns were still on her hips and her rifle was slung over her shoulder. Or perhaps it was the man's hat, or the waistcoat and jacket that hung loose on her tall, thin frame that caught the eye. There were plenty of women out west – homesteaders, pioneers - who dressed this way, but not in the lobby of the most expensive hotel in an exclusive resort.

"Welcome back, Miss Brakeman," said the desk clerk, a youngish man from the Midlands. "The dressmaker's here. The young ladies said I'm to send you to Miss deSteyne's suite as soon as you arrive. Sounds like fun."

"To you, maybe, Robbie, not so much to me." She gave him a friendly grin, took her key, and headed to her own – her uncle's – apartment.

As she stood at the door, key in hand, she heard a faint tinkle of glass inside, then a crash and a sort of howl. Gun in hand, she unlocked the door, kicked it open, and drew aim on the source of the commotion. A fat, clumsy white cat sat amidst the fragments of a once lovely leaded-glass lampshade and licked at the cut on its paw. "Frosty!" exclaimed Jane. "I forgot all about you! I'm so sorry, you poor old thing! Where have you been!?" Scooping him up, she stepped over the broken glass, and carried him into the sitting room. The apartment had been restored to almost its original comfort and charm. A few baskets of torn and broken items awaited scrutiny. She hoped that if the girls all put their minds together, among them, they could decipher some reason for the attack.

She locked her guns in the bottom drawer of Henry's desk and stashed her rifle in the back of a wardrobe along with the vest, hat, and jacket she had borrowed. The trail dust was heavy on her black clothes. She washed at the stand and changed into a clean shift, stockings, dress and shoes. She took the pins out of her coppery hair, shook it loose with her fingers, and tied it back with a ribbon. Her face was reddened and she was squinting a bit from the hours in the sun on horseback today. "You look the way I feel, poor thing," she said to her mirror. "Well, let's go get it over with."

Rebecca's opulent suite, with plenty of mirrors and million-dollar views of the mountains, was the perfect setting for the afternoon's entertainment. Madame Arlette Beauclaire, petite, chic, and shrewd, had come to wait upon the young ladies, who were gathered by appointment to meet the dressmaker. Her assistant, Betty Simple, a plump girl of nineteen or so, had followed her, staggering under armloads of fabric samples and fashion magazines. Next had come a hotel waiter pushing a tea cart, with plates of sandwiches, and gorgeous candy-colored cakes which the healthy young women tucked into without urging.

Laughing and chattering, their fingers sticky with marzipan and Chantilly crème, Becca, Vicky, Kitty and Lydia took turns submitting to Madame Arlette's expert calculations of their 'natural' dimensions. The new silhouette the enterprising Frenchwoman had devised and advocated was lighter-boned and eschewed superfluous fabric and ornamentation. It was better suited to the climate, she insisted, allowed freedom of movement and was more *au courant* as well. Their country day dresses and riding habits would be in this new style.

Lydia pulled in her stomach and stretched to her utmost height – her hourglass figure had been much-admired. Devoted as she was to dressing *a la mode*, if natural meant thick-waisted, she wanted none of it. Kitty had gone back to reading the book she had brought with her; Rebecca and Victoria were mulling the dressmakers' sample patterns and fabrics and choosing buttons and braids.

"Guess it's my turn," said Jane, stepping up onto the dressmaker's box. Arlette Beauclaire had been letting down the hems and mending the tears in Jane's dresses since she was a rowdy, rough-riding child. Now the Frenchwoman welcomed the college girl home with a tsk of disapproval.

"What barbarian made this dress? Sacre bleu! It fits you not at all." The *modiste's* scorn was palpable.

"I grew while I was out there. A lot. Had to get something. Nothing fit." Jane said.

"In any event," the *modiste* concluded, "we must now make you a proper black habit."

"Never mind that," said Jane. "Uncle Henry's shirts fit me fine, and if Betty will shorten a jacket sleeve or a trouser leg for me, I'll be all set."

"Think of your uncle, my child!" the Frenchwoman was shocked. "Think of what people will say!"

"I don't need to prove anything to anyone," said Jane. "Make me whatever you like. It's just clothes."

"Just clothes!" gasped Lydia, theatrically. "Just clothes!! Are you mad?!"

"For millennia, clothes have served as signifiers of status," said Kitty, without looking up from her book, "as well as fulfilling the practical purposes of protecting us from the elements and hiding our nakedness."

Her classmates ignored this all too characteristic interjection from Kitty.

"Mr. Sydney said just the other night that beautiful clothes on the right body were more exciting than plain old nudity." This startling assertion from Betty Simple raised some eyebrows.

"It's certainly been a truism for painters and sculptors, since ancient times," said Victoria, breaking the silence.

"It would be very bad for our business if it were not so," said the French *couturier*.

"That's what I told him," laughed Betty, "and all the gentlemen agreed with me!"

This Betty Simple, young, pretty and pleasing, was possessed of an inquisitive nature and blessed with an excellent memory for names and dates. In addition, she was a natural tease, so the stories with which she entertained her clients never lacked suspense. She gave the five friends a somewhat sensationalized rundown of recent births, deaths, slanders, and scandals, and as orders were placed for skirts and bodices suitable for the outdoor life at Brakeman's Halt, the talk turned to what they each would wear to that night's *soiree* at Lady Maud Frawley's.

"Have you all met Mr. Sydney?" Betty asked, as she knelt before Jane, pinning up the hems of Uncle Henry's trousers. She gave an assessing upward glance at the circle of half-clad virgins around her. "I imagine he's a very good kisser," she said slyly, "though I wouldn't actually know, myself, of course."

"Which means," thought Lydia, "that he's had her under the stairs." She felt the blood warming her cheeks as she pictured the encounter and she lay back on a chaise to enjoy the sensation. "Wait till you meet him, Rebecca," she said, waving a languid hand at the dark-haired heiress. "He's handsome and rich and will make some poor girl a very exciting husband!"

CHAPTER 22A: PARTY AT THE GALLERY

Lady Maud's party was being held, not at her villa, but in a wing of Edward Burnham's handsome Assembly Rooms, which graced a square that included St. David's Church, the Baths, and the Pumphouse.

The wing, vaulted and plain-walled, with only narrow horizontal windows very high up in the masonry had caught Victoria's attention the day before. "A gallery, I wager," she had said to herself then, and tonight, her guess was borne out. The lofty space was the repository of Maud's ever-growing collection of Indian arts and crafts. There were exquisite examples of basketry, pottery, weaving, beading, and leatherwork, glass cases of feathered headdresses, jewelry, tools and weapons. Oil paintings of Western landscapes hung on the walls, and Franca's photographs of Indian women hung among them.

The Professor stood and viewed each photograph in turn with deepening interest. Besides testifying to an evolving command of her craft, Franca's portraits showed a connection with her subjects that was rare and moving.

"Isn't she wonderful?" said Lady Maud to the Professor. "She knows these natives, you know. Loves them, really."

Signora Mancini smiled at the fond Scotswoman. "Your granddaughter has a rare talent. I am glad she has your support! With it, she could go far."

"Thank you!" said Lady Maud, "I thank you so much."

With decades of experience nurturing the talents of her girl students, the Professor could see in Franca a mind that desperately needed to express itself; art was a safe and ennobling focus for her energies. She shared this thought with Sir George, and as they chatted she noticed an air of resentment clouding Madame Arlette's sharp little features. "Oh, my," thought the Italian, "Surely I am past the age of exciting jealousy. I am no rival for the attentions of this old *cavaliere*, whatever fun we may have had forty years past."

Just then, Jane exclaimed loudly, "Sir George! Why is your Jezail here?"

Among the displays of tomahawks, bows and spears, there were weapons at once more modern and more deadly—rows and rows of pistols, rifles, shotguns, even the one outsized, outlandish gun that Jane instantly recalled.

"What an amazing contraption!" marveled Rebecca, joining them. "Rhys, come look at this amazing gun! It seems cobbled together from the parts of a half-dozen other weapons."

"And so it is, Miss de Steyne." Said the Colonel. "One of the most accurate ranged weapons of the whole Anglo-Afghan wars. Reliable at six hundred yards, even eight hundred, in the right hands; designed to be easy to reload from horseback and shot from under the arm while riding full pelt. These beautiful monstrosities took a terrible toll on us, I'm afraid." The Colonel took the elaborately-engraved gun off the wall and handed it to Jane, who dropped to one knee, tucked its crooked stock against her side and eyed down the impossibly long barrel.

"Sir George, look at this!" exulted Jane. "I'm tall enough for it now!"

"I'm sure Lady Maud wouldn't protest if I borrowed it back from the museum for a bit," said the old soldier. "I'll bring it up to Brakeman's Halt one day. It's a bit tricky to shoot. Dangerous, in the wrong hands. I'll show you how to avoid blowing your face off."

"Yes, please do avoid blowing your face off, Miss Brakeman." It was Doctor Enderleigh who spoke. "My surgical skills are just that, skills, not magic, and they don't extend to restoring lost faces." The medical man's commanding bass-baritone voice, together with his sheer height and bulk, had

ensured his success as a healer. No one dared contest his pronouncements, for who would contest the voice of God?! If Dr. Enderleigh judged you were dying, you died to oblige him. If he said you were well, you picked up your bed and walked.

"Hullo, Doctor," said Jane. "Hullo Alice, how are you?. Thank you so much for your kind note. It helps to be reminded how dearly Uncle Henry was loved and will be missed by his parishioners."

The Doctor's head snapped around sharply, as he gave an angry look at his subdued wife, whose reddened eyes seemed to excite his contempt. He soon remembered his professional manners. "Condolences again on the loss of your Uncle, Miss Brakeman. We shall *all* miss him, I'm sure, though perhaps not as lachrymosely as my wife."

"Oh, my poor dear Alice, are you leaking again?" This was said by a very large, sweet-looking old woman who put her well-fleshed arm around the doctor's waiflike little wife and pulled her close.

The doctor's voice boomed. "Miss Brakeman, may I present my mother, Mrs. Enderleigh. Mother, this is Miss Jane Brakeman." The resemblance between oversized mother and son was so strong that Jane could have guessed the relationship without the introduction.

"Pleased to meet you," said Jane. "Hope you're enjoying your visit."

"What a pleasure to meet you at last, Miss Brakeman," said the nice old woman. "I am one of your citizens, now, or at least one of the grateful permanent residents of your beautiful town."

"Mother has come to live with us, to look after Alice and Teddy and myself," the doctor said. "My wife is glad of the help, and as Mother is a trained nurse, I find her presence very useful at times."

"He's so much like his father, bless his soul!" said the proud parent, beaming at her gigantic offspring.

A sudden stir at the door announced the late arrival of Philip Sydney. He seemed perfectly unassuming, passing quietly around the room, exchanging greetings, making apologies for his lateness, being introduced to the newcomers, yet Rebecca felt that not just she, but everyone in the room, was vividly aware of his presence. This is charisma, she thought to herself. She had met many of the great actors and actresses of the age, and this was the same quality she had noted in them. This seemingly-unconscious command of attention, and, she thought, this power of exciting desire. "How can I be sanely-analyzing his effect, and insanely-powerless against it?" she wondered, as her turn came to be introduced. "I must *want* to succumb. How curious."

"Hello, Miss de Steyne, I believe I saw you and Mr. Jones passing through Old Town this morning? Did you accomplish your business, I hope?"

There was certainly nothing disrespectful in his words or in his address, but somehow, Rebecca felt that whatever answer she gave, it would sound provocative. Still, something must be said. If she could only keep her mind on her work! She tried reminding herself to think of him as a suspect like all the others, but standing a foot in front of her, virtually eye to eye with him, she could only see a man, and could think of nothing to say.

Sydney recognized the signs of infatuation, and as was his usual habit, banked a woman's desire for him for his own future use. In his long rise to his present eminence, secrets had been divulged, trusts betrayed, favors given, by women who hoped to buy his love, or at least his company, for a while. His was a genius for stoking passions, without arousing ire. Even those he had used would gladly have him back again.

Rebecca, who was observing her own hormonal reactions with some scientific detachment at last, asked the question she'd been mulling all day. "Mr. Sydney, why did you tell your friends that Mr. Adams had gone to Forest City when he didn't show up to lunch?"

Sydney laughed, and Rebecca's heart turned over as he smiled at her, "No *'hello sir'*, *'a pleasure to meet you, sir'*, *'are you enjoying the mountains, sir?'*"

Rebecca broke out in what she feared were giggles. "No time for that, sir, must solve a case, sir, where were you between eight and ten o'clock on the morning of the 17th, sir?"

"In my bed, asleep, and I wish you were, too."

"Asleep, sir?"

"In bed, miss."

"I'm never abed of that hour, sir. I love the dawns."

"As do I, miss, they light my way home after strenuous nights."

"Mr. Sydney, I fear you mistake me."

"I must take you as I find you, Miss de Steyne."

"There is no conversing with you, sir."

"Perhaps you are right." He was suddenly serious. "Maybe words are not our proper mode. I shall see you anon, fair Rebecca. I shall track you to your lair."

"What the hell was that?!" whispered Rhys, grabbing Rebecca by the elbow and ushering her out onto the lawn.

"I don't know. I don't know what just happened."

"You were talking like a hussy out of Shakespeare with a man you just met. What would your father say?"

"I know. I know. No harm done. Innocent fun. Means nothing," Rebecca defended herself. "My father would say to not put any money on it."

It was only later that she realized Mr. Sydney hadn't actually answered her question.

The rest of the evening she could barely attend to the other guests' chatter, her hostesses' kind inquiries after her family, Paul and Edward's warm thanks for her visit that morning, as if *she* had been conferring the favor, not them. No, all she seemed completely aware of was Mr. Sydney's whereabouts; his voice, low and pleasant as it was, with its slight patrician Southern drawl, seemed to cut through the babble and be all she heard clearly. His attentions seemed all directed at Jane, but in so gentlemanlike a manner that even Rebecca couldn't find fault. He praised her uncle to her and regretted his loss; he complimented her mother's genius in assembling so well-rounded and substantial a portfolio of holdings; he offered her any business advice she might want, and repeated and expanded his previous offer to take the railroad off her hands, so she could return to college without that burden.

There was no pressure, no hard sell, thought Rebecca, admiring the expertness of his approach. As if he were making a proposal - and in fact, there was the air of an offer of partnership in his manner - he asked Jane to refrain from giving an answer until she had taken time to consider. He had business in Denver. He would call upon her when he returned.

He took his leave, and to Rebecca, the party suddenly seemed dull as a wake.

CHAPTER 22B: BREAKFAST DE-BRIEFING

The scenery was sublime, the day mild and sunny, and breakfast service was in full swing on the terrace of the Dartmoor Hotel. "Good thing we reserved a table," said Kitty, as the college party was led past the line of waiting guests.

"It's the owners table," said Lydia, knowledgeable in the ways of luxury hotels. "It's always reserved for, always available to, the chief stockholders."

"We used to eat in my uncle's dining room," said Jane. "This outdoor eating may be a treat for Easterners and foreigners, but when you spend your life eating off the back of a chuckwagon, or making do with whatever's in your saddlebag, a roof over your head at mealtime beats a sun umbrella every time!"

Their order of business was firstly, to pass judgement on the previous evening's gathering; secondly, to briefly recapitulate their previous day's adventures; and lastly, to plot the schedule and logistics of their remove to Brakeman's Halt.

Jane addressed the last issue first. "I telegraphed this morning, and they tell me Locomotive No. 483 is in the shop again," Jane said to Rebecca. "So we're just going to have to wait to take your cars up to Brakeman's Halt until I can dig up an engine to get us there!"

"That reminds me," said Rebecca, "I've got something, call it a late birthday present – for you, Jane. Something I think you'll like that I ordered before we left. It's being delivered at the Station in just a few hours. We should all go down together to see it."

"I hope it's more exciting than that gallery was," said Victoria. "A lot of doo-dads and hardly any art."

This of course turned the talk to impressions of last night's welcome party.

Kitty had praise for the ethnological exhibits at the museum but considered the cataloguing system deficient in several particulars.

Lydia, who had enjoyed chatting with the pair of Scottish cousins and their colorful Aunt, remarked that Lady Maud had departed from her ranch-hand attire for this evening and dressed instead as a true Caledonian, in a green tartan check taffeta gown, with a plaid thrown across her shoulder like a sash, fastened with a curiously-wrought medieval-looking brooch. Her nephews, Lydia noted, had wisely chosen irreproachable regulation evening attire.

Victoria grudgingly conceded that she had been impressed that so newly-hatched a town supported a municipal art gallery. She said nothing of her reaction to Franca's portraits.

Rebecca reported being delighted by the music of the local string quartet and the excellence of the refreshments. She said nothing of her reaction to Philip Sydney.

The Professor complimented Jane on the Colonel's loan of the Jezail, but said nothing of her growing suspicions of Sir George. The way he observed the young women disturbed her; the questions he asked them, the way he listened in on their talk – though she could not say for certain it was prurient – something was not right, she was sure. Till she knew more, she was hesitant to suggest to Jane that one of her old friends might be a secret enemy.

"Which one do you all think it was?" Jane asked frankly, as she buttered a roll. "That's the same group that was at Brakeman's Halt. Which of those people at the party last night is the one who killed my Uncle? I think it's Sydney."

Rebecca flinched. "Why would you say so?"

"Process of elimination," said Jane. "I know who it isn't. Sydney was the only outsider. He wants to buy my railroad. He has that gang of low-lives he calls friends. And I just don't like him."

"Well, if we're voting, I'm no fan of the doctor," said Lydia. "That poor little wife of his. Whyever doesn't he cure her?"

"There were some odd undertones at Paul and Edward's yesterday," said Rebecca. "Something with the boy apprentice. That reminds me, Fergus gave me a poem to give to you. It's in my room." Jane groaned.

"Speaking of odd," said Victoria, "I didn't think much of the way that dressmaker's girl talked about 'all the gentlemen' agreeing on the benefits of provocative clothing. I bet she's been modeling undraped for some local painters."

"Probably photographers," amended Kitty. "She's probably posing for photographers. Gentlemen generally are too busy to learn to paint until they grow old and bored with retirement."

"Well, she certainly was full of gossip," said Rebecca. "I hope she's careful how she acquires it."

"What about all the servants who were helping with the party?" Lydia couldn't imagine a party without servants.

"Well," said Jane, "it was just Wiggins and Fergus helping -- they went up the day before with the food and drink. The partygoers weren't staying overnight -- it was just for the one meal."

"Are you vouching for them both?" asked Rebecca.

"Wiggins is devoted to the colonel the way your Nanny is to you, Becky. He would likely do whatever he was asked to do, say whatever he was asked to say, hide whatever he was asked to hide."

"But would he kill someone he thought was a threat to Sir George?" The Professor sounded skeptical. "I do not see it."

"And as for Fergus, I don't see him killing -- well - anyone really!" Rebecca looked thoughtful. "He's just a lad, and lost in some fantasy world, I think. He's very attached to Paul Shipworth. I imagine he *might* do something dramatic as an act of love."

"Madame Arlette was there" said Kitty. "Lady Maud said *'I felt a frisson of excitement in the air that day. Sir George was being most attentive to Madame Arlette.'*"

The Professor remembered that look of jealous spite on the Frenchwoman's face and shivered. What might she be capable of? But wait! All this speculation was nonsense or at least premature. She was almost ashamed of herself.

"We have no evidence of a crime, no reason to believe Jane's uncle was anyone's victim," she reminded her students. "We lack the most basic information. We should do our research before we condemn Jane's friends and neighbors."

"Mr. Sydney is no friend of mine, and I sure don't want him for a neighbor. I don't like him, and I don't trust him." Jane clung stubbornly to her hunch. "No crime, you say? We have a death no one will explain to me! We have an apartment torn to pieces for spite! We have strange men following us and attacking us on the train. Someone is behind it all. I say it's Philip Sydney!"

"Let's go," said Rebecca, abruptly standing up from the table. "There'll be something at the station worth seeing and we can't be late."

CHAPTER 23: DESTINY IS DELIVERED TO DAKOTAH SPRINGS

“What do you make of them fellows?” said the pie lady to her friend the janitress. There wasn’t a train scheduled into Dakotah Springs Station for a few more hours, and the two women were taking advantage of the lull to eat their lunches in comfortable companionship.

The fellows in question were the colorful trio who generally attended Mr. Sydney: Brandt, Scout and the Kid. They had been hanging around the station for a couple hours, idly basking in the thin mountain sunshine, one playing his guitar, another filing his nails, the Indian seemingly dozing with one eye open.

“Here come them Frawleys,” said the janitress, “with the Scottish boys.”

“Can’t a girl eat in peace!” exclaimed her pie-vending friend, wrapping up her sandwich and preparing to try to sell her wares.

“What are they doing here at this hour?” asked the janitress. “Better make a show with the broom or they’ll be reporting me to that Donnelly man.”

The Colonel and Edward Burnham could be seen walking together, descending the hill from their club, obviously on their way to the station.

Franca unloaded her camera and tripod and set it up on the platform facing north, as the note she had received from Rebecca had requested. They were all there on Rebecca’s invitation they discovered, though none knew the occasion for their presence at this otherwise empty station.

Next to arrive was the editor of the Dakotah Springs Gazette, followed soon after by a girl reporter from the Dakotah City Times who came galloping up, scared she had missed whatever unknown news event she had come for. They all were there on faith. Rebecca deSteyne was one of the richest girls in America. Whatever she had up her sleeve, it was bound to be lavish.

Rhys Jones could be seen crossing the tracks from the siding where the deSteyne cars were parked. With him were Jack Wallace, the engine driver who had stoked young Jane’s enthusiasm for railroading; Pete Nelson, Jack’s fireman; and Chester Morrissey, brakeman. The pie lady and janitress perked up at sight of these long-lost friends. It was months since Mitchell Donnelly had fired the driver and all the other old-timers. The crew waved a friendly greeting at the two women, and followed Rhys to the telegraph office and went inside.

Three railroad workers more or less were not enough to catch the notice of the aristocrats gathered at Rebecca’s behest, but the newspaper girl took a note, and the Editor stubbed out his cigar, ready for action.

A minute later, the Dartmoor’s own station wagon pulled up and disgorged its pretty young passengers. Their spirits elevated by the promise of a pleasant surprise, they came through the little lobby and out onto the platform.

The convergence on the station of these important people at so inexplicable a time was enough to arouse the curiosity of the citizens of this little community and many found that their paths conveniently led to the same locale. Soon, a cheerful crowd had gathered. Some bought pies. A little group formed around the guitar player and threw money into his hat. The Indian had wandered over to the camera equipment and stood, silently puffing on his pipe, observing the serious young photographer.

The crowd around the guitar player thinned and Lydia moved to the front and took a good look at the guitar the young man was playing. It was battered, and old, second-hand probably, but its tone was beautiful, she thought. She said so, and the young player nodded and grinned, his front teeth a little crooked. He was remarkably attractive, she suddenly thought. An ordinary boy, of course, but what a sweet guitar!

The man called Brandt consulted a folded newspaper he pulled from his pocket, gazed closely at the photo on the front, and moved confidently towards the little cluster of college girls. The leader of Sydney's gang was a peacock of a man. Extremely tall, he was a dandy from boots to stovepipe hat, but it was rumored that he was useful to Philip Sydney as a pitiless enforcer of agreements. Because he was rough, Sydney could afford to appear smooth. Scout and the Kid played their useful roles, but it was Brandt who thrived on being hated and feared.

Kitty was fascinated, watching Brandt's arrogant strut towards them. To her, it was as if he were a circus performer on stilts, his absurdly tall hat cutting through the crowd. "Just like the fin of a shark," she thought. She couldn't take her eyes off him.

Jane, for her part, turned to face the man square and put her hand on her holster as he headed straight for her, but the sneering villain had come in peace, with a friendly message of support from his employer, that excellent fellow, Philip Sydney. The girl's line needed massive investment. He repeated Sydney's offer of taking it off her hands.

Jane didn't shoot and she didn't spit, but it was only because Rebecca was hanging on her gun hand, dragging her back from the confrontation.

"Get out of my town!" Jane said to the tricked-out scarecrow of a man.

Brandt laughed and spat into the street. "You're already one engine short, Miss Brakeman. It would be a pity if another one broke down."

Kitty couldn't quite follow the plot and was staring at Brandt in puzzlement - his clothes, his manners, his speech were so exotic! And now Jane was actually pointing a gun at him!

"I told you once," said the cold-eyed girl. "Don't make me tell you again."

Brandt advanced a step towards her. "This ain't your damn town, not for long."

As he spoke, the shriek of a train whistle cut through the rumble of the crowd. A train was coming up from Dakotah City, its whistle shrieking around the bends. In an instant, all of Jane's intensity shifted to the oncoming train. An unscheduled run could spell disaster, a head-on collision on the single track line. What madness was this?

Rhys came running across the yard from the telegraph office, shouting and waving to Rebecca.

"It's here," she said to Jane. "Here comes your present."

And with that it came into view - *Destiny* - the prettiest, newest, shiniest, most-colorful narrow-gauge engine ever built - and its matching tender and a red caboose, with the name of Jane's railroad painted in gold letters on the sides.

"I got you something practical," said Rebecca. "I hope you don't mind!"

Jane picked up her laughing friend and whirled her round and round in her excitement, pelting her with questions. How had Rebecca managed it? How did she get it made so quickly? That money and connections had greased the skids, went without saying. The deSteynes were excellent customers of the great Philadelphia locomotive works which had built the custom cars that had carried them in

such comfort across the continent, and it was there that Rebecca's lab car had been designed and constructed. Her order for an engine had gone to the head of the line and at the generous rates she authorized, workers had gladly put in overtime.

And here it was, beautiful, strong, capable and ready to take them all to Brakeman's Halt, and then be set to work on the DC&M, pulling passengers and freight over Jane's rails.

Jack Wallace and his mates came out of the telegraph office, and joined the delivery crew. The crowd cheered as the magnificent new engine was run onto a siding and with a big exhale of steam, came to a stop. Jane was all over it in a second, climbing up to the antlers on the lantern, and waving her hat in the air, posing half-hanging out the cab window, with the engine's name *Destiny* visible on the door below her. The flagman was ushering Lydia and Kitty into the caboose, where they climbed into the cupola and waved down at the Professor and Lady Maud and the Colonel, standing below. Franca took photo after photo, and even Victoria succumbed to the urge to sketch the scene.

For a brand-new top-of-the-line engine to have appeared out of thin air was news for certain, and the girl reporter hurried over to Franca to get exclusive rights to a photo or two for the illustrated weekly she was a stringer for. The editor of the Dakotah Springs daily was yet another old buddy of Jane's and he approached the local hero and her New York benefactor and requested an interview. The two girls happily obliged, and their easy, joking camaraderie was a relief to them both after their recent estrangement.

Jane's obvious affection and Rebecca's gratified smile would have warmed any heart -- any heart but Brandt's. This new rig the deSteyne girl had bought and outright gifted to the DC&M would make all the difference to the short-line's profitability. Jane Brakeman wouldn't feel pressured to sell. Sydney would be furious. Brandt felt humiliated, tricked, out-manuevered by a girl, and he silently vowed revenge against this officious dark-haired witch from New York City and her unruly cowgirl pet.

He looked around him angrily and luckily found immediate relief for his feelings. Kitty, still puzzling out the mystery of this strange specimen, was staring intently at Brandt. He took the plain little college girl's chin in his hand, tilted her head up and bent his to within an inch of her wide-open eyes. "Be careful what you wish for, my little dearie," he hissed. "You just might get it!" He stood up to his full ridiculous height, laughed, and cut through the crowd, trailed by his subordinates, the guitar-playing Kid, and photography enthusiast, Scout.

Charles watched their exit, mesmerized. Perhaps, he thought, there are characters to play which are even more exciting than sailors and cowboys. "I could be a villain!" he said out loud.

"No, you couldn't," said his cousin. "You're not built right for the part." Alec Macallum was getting to know how his young charge's mind worked.

"It's a pity," said his aunt, "that your imagination is not required in the line of life that has been set out for you as heir, Charles. Upholding unbroken traditions requires the opposite of imagination."

"Yes," agreed Alec. "Only younger sons are free to use their imaginations - free to imagine ways to support themselves!"

"Marry money," said his aunt. "It would be no disgrace, Alec, to trade your social position for some girl's father's fortune. Pick one of these girls, one of the rich ones. One is even quite good-looking, and they are all healthy, educated, pleasant, and rich."

"Don't pick Jane," said Charles. "Leave her alone."

"No, Charles." Lady Maud was very serious. "You leave her alone. She's not in your future, any more than becoming an actor is. Forget her."

But Charles had just seen Jane fearlessly confront Brandt, actually draw on him! She was his hero. How could he possibly forget her?!

With great optimism and high spirits, the eclipse party gathered the next morning at the station. The spruce new engine and tender, coupled to the elegant deSteyne cars and finished off with the bright red caboose, made a pretty sight, much appreciated by the girls and the friends who had come down to see them off. The pie lady, having wind of their plans, had the wit to provide herself with breakfast pastries and coffee, and was doing a brisk business.

Rhys cleared the workbenches in the lab car and carefully latched the cabinets. Kitty and Lydia made certain that no reference book, or guitar stand, or jewelry case was left behind. The Professor assured herself that the wooden crates cradling the telescopes were properly tied down in the baggage car. She was glad they were finally on the move again. She had begun to be eager to get to Jane's ranch. There had been too many confrontations, too many mysteries on the trip so far. She wanted time to think, without the distraction of parties and break-ins and outings and old lovers.

Their journey couldn't begin until after the up-train from Dakotah City cleared the station, and when it pulled in, Jane was pleased to see another of her friends, the county Sheriff, stepping off onto the platform. He saw her, tipped his hat and wagged his head towards a quieter corner of the station yard, where she joined him.

"Sorry about your uncle," said the Sheriff. "Glad you're back."

"Thanks," she said with a deep exhale. "I can't talk about it now, but I know there's something going on here. You've got to tell me what you've been able to find out."

"I don't know much," he said, "But you're welcome to it."

"Come up to the Halt?" she asked. "I've got to get these girls out of this town. It's not safe."

"You're pretty exposed out there in the country, too," he said seriously. "You prepared?"

"Yep." She nodded hard. "It's this eclipse thing. Lots of strangers about all of a sudden. Feels wrong, like there's bound to be trouble. A lot of extra work for you."

"I've still got time to look out for you," he said. "I'll make time. You're mighty important around here, Janey. What this place becomes in the next ten years could depend on what happens to you in the next ten days. There's folks who want what you got. Be careful."

He watched as Jane rounded up the girls with yee-haws and sweeping gestures and herded them into the saloon car." Victoria and Franca traded parting insults, and Sir George handed the Professor up onto the train with becoming dignity.

The doors were slammed shut, and with a wave to their new friends, they were off to the Brakeman ranch at last! The muscular new engine pulled its little train of cars confidently up the steep grade out of town, whistled through the dark-forested canyons, across the golden meadows, beside the dusty wagon road, along the noisy creek, trailing clouds of black smoke and shooting jets of white steam. As the train settled into its soothing, monotonous clickety-clack, it was as if the soundtrack of life had changed – from nervous, sophisticated, urban – to majestic, pastoral, ennobling. The girls felt the change and settled back in their luxurious armchairs and lapsed into silence.

For this inaugural trip, Jane had taken the seat beside Jack Wallace in the cabin. The old engineer was a seasoned veteran, both of the war and the railroads and Jane was of the opinion that what he didn't know wasn't worth knowing. Pete the young fireman tipped his cap to the Miss and went about his sweaty work of tending the blaze in the firebox. It was a job for an expert and if Jack trusted him, so did Jane. Though they had been shown all its new features, dials, gauges, levers, and luxuries by the

man who delivered the engine, operating the beautiful beast for the first time, learning it's personality, was a job that took concentration and skill, and it wasn't until Jack had negotiated a narrow defile and inched them safely along a hair-raising ledge that Jane could breathe easy.

The scenery as they climbed was new to the other young women, and Victoria was noticeably stimulated by the changing landscape. Lydia, watching her face, was imagining what it must be like to see the world through the eyes of an artist.

Halfway up, they steamed past the old three-story stagecoach inn, flanked by a capacious barn, its corrals full of spare teams of horses. Despite the advent of the railroad, wagons and stages still plied this road, which ran all the way to where the railroad line ended at Milltown and continued beyond, to the Crooked Creek district with its history of fortunes made and lost and its now near-deserted mining town.

The Stagecoach Inn made a convenient outing from the Springs, and groups of well-dressed day trippers were playing skittles on the post house lawn, lounging on the broad veranda, or enjoying the cheerful tavern's hearty fare under the dappled shade of ancient oaks. They waved at the girls as their train went by. It didn't escape Lydia that this was where the dances were held, and a thrill of anticipation went through her.

Jack grinned with satisfaction as the game new engine powered up the last long steep grade before Brakeman's Halt. The tracks ran close under the cliffs here and waterfalls cascaded down the hillside and coursed through culverts beneath the tracks to tumble into the creek below. They came around the mountain into a smiling, placid valley nestled among the peaks. To their right was a little lake that wandered off into the trees at the far end. A rustic boathouse added a touch of the picturesque. Halfway up the hillside stood the massive stone and log mass of Brakeman House, dramatic against a backdrop of thick pines.

Out the left window, split rail fences began to border the road, and run off in every direction, dividing the valley bottom into hayfields and pastures, paddocks and farmyards. Barns and low, red-roofed buildings could be glimpsed among the clusters of trees that marked the path of the creek, where cattle came to drink and the odd fisherman could be seen with his net and long pole.

As they traversed the open valley, Kitty had her compass in her hand and a book open on her knee, looking around intently for the potential spots she had calculated for siting their telescopes and pointing these out to the Professor as she found them.

The train pulled onto a siding at Brakeman's Halt itself, a neat little stone and log miniature of the Brakeman's grand house – not a station exactly, but a place to wait for a train in all weathers. A line ran to it from the nearest telegraph pole, Rebecca noted with relief. She was a city girl and the thought of being entirely out of touch had made her a bit uneasy. She was not born to the country life and through she was determined to enjoy herself for Jane's sake, she couldn't shake a feeling of apprehension at the absence of sidewalks and streetlights.

Lydia, pinning on her hat, looked out the window to see half-a-dozen extremely good-looking ranch hands, young, fit, and cocky, waiting to help the girls off the train and load their luggage onto a wagon. Their muscles flexed as they shifted the heavy trunks and cases.

"I hope Jane didn't hire them especially for us," said Lydia, "but if she did, God bless her!"

The handsome old ranch foreman was there, too, to greet his boss's train, meet his boss's friends. Jane hopped down out of the cab, and walked with him to the baggage car, where they unloaded her uncle's black gelding from the stall that had served Paint for two thousand miles.

"It's good to have you home, Jane," he started. "But I hope my boys can keep their minds on their work. Your girls seem mighty distracting."

"They're okay once you get to know them, Red." Said Jane, laughing. "Just your regular, college-educated, millionaire girl scientists. The usual rules between boys and girls will likely apply, I don't doubt. Let's herd these fillies on up to the house."

The ladies carefully stepped their way across the tracks from the siding to the shelter of the Halt and found themselves seats.

"What are you waiting for?" asked Jane, coming up to them. "Your bags are on the wagon, let's start walking if you hope to have supper before sundown."

"Walk?" said Rebecca. "No thank you. I'll just wait for the carriage."

"There is no carriage," said Jane. "This is your new world, Rebecca; you came because you wanted to be independent, so stand on your own two feet. All of you, get walking."

"And ruin these shoes?!" cried Lydia. She was gasping a bit as she said it. The air was thinner here for certain. "Madness. There's not such another pair this side of Paris!"

"I'll give it a try," said Victoria, for once the voice of reason. "I'll walk."

"Me, too," said Kitty, eyeing the dirt road she saw arcing up from the the Halt to the house on the hill. "It's only two city blocks on a three-percent grade."

"I plead age and assert precedence," said the astronomer, "and claim a seat in the luggage wagon. My shoes are stout, but my knees betray me."

"Of course, Professor, I didn't mean you!" said Jane. "But if you don't keep moving, you'll seize up faster. Tomorrow, I'll take you for an easy walk through my uncle's Shakespeare garden – what's left of it." She bit down on her sadness and went on urging her reluctant friends. "Come on, Becky, you can do it, take my arm. Lydia, give it a try! It's only shoes."

Groaning, the pair stood up. Both girls cast lingering looks at the smiling young cowboy hero who sat with the reins in his hands and the suntanned Adonis helping the Professor up onto the wagon seat beside him.

"Let's go," said Jane to the two sighing girls. "The boy's'll still be here later, purty as ever."

Laughing, and half-pulling the reluctant ones, the five young friends started walking up the long drive. The luggage wagon passed them as they climbed. The driver flashed his irresistible smile and the professor waved cheerfully as they went by.

"Don't look so jealous, Liddy," said Jane. "We'll go pick horses for all of you after we change. You'll get plenty of chances for rides in Joe's wagon."

The house was too big to disappear into its surroundings, but an attempt had been made to blend it in, using materials found on site or nearby. Rocks and boulders had been harvested from the stony fields and riverbeds and built into massive piers marking the corners of the original fortress. Stout log walls had provided both shelter and defense. That the walls were pierced by an abundance of multistory windows proved that those perilous times had passed. To Jane, it had been the safest place on earth.

There was smoke coming from the chimneys, and the smells of fresh coffee, fresh bread and warm berry pies greeted them as Jane pushed open the front door. Young Mrs. Maran and her cousins Peggy and Agnes had been hard at work and the rooms that had seemed so cold and neglected on Jane's previous visit now exuded warmth and welcome. There was a little fire in the enormous fireplace to take the chill out of the lofty room, despite it being summer. The tall leaded windows with

their botanical motifs sparkled colorfully in the sunlight. No speck of dust marred the trophies on the walls - elk and moose and deer - their heads held proudly, their antlers magnificent, their sad eyes wise, too late. And here was young Mrs. Maran herself, with coffee and tea and the aforesaid freshly-baked delights. The girls threw off their travelling cloaks and dug in with enthusiasm and relief.

Peggy took an armful of the girls' wraps and started up the stairs to the bedrooms. The long, winding staircase was one of the fanciful wonders of the house, balanced as if floating on the limbs of a huge tree, the railings an openwork weave of slender twigs.

"Wait," cried Rebecca, "where are you taking my cloak!"

"I gave you my mother's room," said Jane. "It has a wonderful view."

"Up there?" asked Rebecca gulping at the prospect of climbing – and worse yet, descending - those terrifying stairs over and over again. She might work up courage to make it a time or two, but it was punishment to make yet another fear a part of her daily life, she thought.

"Janey, would you mind if I slept on the train? Or here on one of these couches?" She was visibly pale.

"Oh, Becky, there's no bedrooms on this floor," Jane said. "I'm sorry, I didn't think."

"I could make up the daybed in your mother's office, if you like," said Mrs. Maran. "She often slept there in the busy season."

"Is it on this floor?" asked Rebecca nervously.

"Sure is. It's in the oldest part of the house, my favorite part," said Jane. "You'll be fine there, if you don't mind sharing a room with the estate ledgers, the strongbox and the armory, and it's even got its own entrance to the stable yard and gardens."

"Thank you!" said Rebecca sincerely. "I'll sleep much better." She gave a long look of loathing at the stairs. She was glad Jane understood her so well.

"All you need is a hard gallop and a big steak dinner," said the cowgirl, "and you'll sleep like a baby!"

Rebecca revised her opinion. Jane didn't know her at all!

"Do we get to pick our own horses?" asked Lydia. "I saw a very pretty little palomino with a blond mane and tail. It looked sweet-tempered and will go very well with the new riding habit Madame Arlette is making me."

"I don't suppose you've got a donkey I can borrow," said Victoria. "To carry my painting gear."

"I'm sure we can find you a donkey," said Jane, pleased that the often-disgruntled artist had plans to paint *en plein air*. "And yes, Liddy, Goldie will be perfect for you, no matter what color you're wearing. And you, Becky, I think I'll put you up on Paint."

Rebecca remembered the sight of Jane and her pony streaking across the campus like a banshee on a tiger and she shivered.

"Only kidding," said Jane, laughing. "I've got the quietest old mare for you that'll get you there eventually but at least in one piece. And I guess you and Kitty will be wanting a hand with the telescopes and such, Professor. I've got a nice college boy from back east working on the ranch this summer, and he'll be perfect to show you around."

The afternoon was spent happily carrying out these plans and when they met for dinner, although they were all dressed and coiffed with their customary elegance, their manners were already beginning to relax. There were smiles and laughter and toasting and telling and retelling of the best moments of their adventures so far.

They were six remarkable, intelligent women, and they looked around the table at one another with satisfaction. They had done it! They were a female scientific expedition, thousands of miles from home, and not under the direction or supervision of any man whatsoever. It was dizzyingly exciting, and they surged as one out through the hall and into the night, to where the stars shone above the mountains with a closeness and clarity that seemed more than magic. It was as wonderful as they had dared hope.

"Lucky you, Jane," said Rebecca, "to have been brought up under such a sky."

"Yep," said Jane.

Rebecca could see the sadness pass across her friend's face.

"We'd better get back in," said Jane, who for once wasn't armed. "I'm not prepared for bears."

"You're teasing us," scoffed Victoria.

But Jane just raised an eyebrow and cocked her head back towards the open front door. "A couple dozen tourists get mauled every season. Or outright eaten. We don't put it in the brochures."

With nervous giggles, they said their goodnights and found their beds.

CHAPTER 25: AN INTRUDER

It was a bear that came to mind immediately when Rebecca floated up out of dreams to the very real sounds of thumping and scratching and what sounded like clawing at the windows and doors of the low-ceilinged office. It was as if the beast was determined to find a way in. She didn't wait to learn more, but ran out into the main body of the house and called at the top of her lungs for help.

Jane, rifle in hand, was down the stairs in a trice and ran with Rebecca to her Mother's old office. The whole household was in an uproar by this point, a din that must have scared away all but the most fanatically-motivated intruder.

Jane opened the strongroom and handed out loaded guns to anyone who would take one and took a double-barreled shotgun for herself. Then she doused the room lights, and cracked open the door to the outside. All was silent. She readied herself to step outside.

"Wait!" cried Kitty. "Look for tracks!"

"Bring a lantern," commanded Jane. "Hold it low."

The porch had been swept by the conscientious Maran clan, but clearly visible on the clean surface were the smudged dusty footprints not of a beast, but of a man. A large man with city-style boots.

"Do you think he was coming for me?" asked Rebecca.

"Nobody could have guessed you'd be sleeping in this room," said Jane. "Everybody knows this is the office. Maybe when they didn't find what they were looking for down in my uncle's apartment, they figured whatever it was got left up here."

She pulled some boots and a coat out of the closet. "I'm going to go have a little look around. You all stay right here and lock the door."

"I'm going with you," said Rebecca, shivering in her nightgown and bare feet.

"That's the bravest thing I've ever heard," said Jane, looking down at her friend with genuine love.

"We'll all go," said the Professor levelly. "The prints seem to be all of the one man, not a gang. We have the advantage."

"I like how you think, Professor," said Jane admiringly. "You all stay behind me. No shooting unless I say so, you hear me, all of you? We don't want to kill each other in the dark."

With lanterns and guns at the ready, they ventured out into the yard outside the office.

He had tried to jimmy the windows with something short and sharp - the scratch marks were evident. A wire protruded from the keyhole of the outer door.

"It looks like he knelt here and tried to pick the lock," said Kitty. "You probably slept through that part, Becky."

"And when that didn't work," said Lydia, "he let his temper get the better of him and tried brute force."

"And that woke me up and I was sure it was a bear!" Rebecca said. "I don't which is worse!"

"The man is worse, Becky," said Jane. "The bear's not evil, it's just doing its job."

"And the man's job," said Rebecca, "is what?"

"Not a cowhand, with those city boots," said Jane. "More like a lawyer or a gambler."

"A big man, in any case," said Lydia.

"Or a little man in big shoes," said Kitty.

"Or for that matter a woman in men's boots," said Victoria. "It was a woman playing a maid who tore up your uncle's apartment."

Kitty stuck a finger in a boot-heel depression in the freshly tended soil of the flowerbed. "I estimate a minimum weight of one hundred eighty-five pounds," she said.

"So definitely a man," said Lydia.

"Unless it was a woman in men's boots holding a couple cannonballs," said Jane, "while picking the lock and scratching at the windows."

"You're right," said the Professor. "Speculation is premature, but gathering facts is not. Good work, all of you. What now?"

"The horses are quiet," said Jane, "so he's not hiding in the barn. More likely when we scared him he hightailed it and is long gone by now."

"Should we try to follow him?" asked Kitty.

"I'm not going out there. Not in the dark," said Jane. "The evidence will still be there in the morning. Meanwhile you all should go to bed. I'll sleep here on the floor."

Rebecca's relief was impossible to conceal. She helped Jane collect cushions and a blanket from the Hall and Jane let her friend relieve her anxiety by telling her story over and over again. At last Rebecca fell asleep, and when Jane was certain she slept deeply, she slipped out the door, locking it behind her, and took off into the woods.

CHAPTER 26: ARLETTE & BETTY BRING NEW CLOTHES TO BH

"Your clothes are here, Lydia," said Kitty. She had a telescope on a swivel mount set up in the morning room and was focusing on a moving thread of smoke which, together with the loud, low whoop-whoop of a whistle, signaled the imminent arrival of the morning train from Dakotah City. Victoria and Lydia came to the window to watch as the train came around the mountain, and steamed across the valley towards the Halt. The Professor looked up from her writing and took another sip of her coffee. She grimaced a little. Barbarism. No espresso! No cappuccino! There were Italian artisans working in Dakotah City. She must find out where they got their coffee!

They had found breakfast set out on the buffet in the dining room and the girls had helped themselves with appetites sharpened or depressed according to how they reacted to last night's scare. Rebecca and Jane had grabbed ham sandwiches and gone down to the station to meet the dressmakers. Rebecca had headed straight to her lab car, where she found Rhys and breathlessly recounted the thrills of the previous night. His heart was in his throat as he listened.

Jane told the same story to Red, the foreman, but to him she imparted what she had discovered last night. City-shoes, on horseback, had climbed from the road up into the forest, and made his way through it to a clearing about a hundred yards from the house. He'd tethered the horse. There were droppings, other marks. The forest floor was a thick carpet of needles, and she couldn't find any distinct hoof prints to point to the horse's size or origins. The intruder, on foot, had circled around just inside the edge of the wood to a point closest to the house and crossed to the shelter of the porch. His lock-picking skills failed him, and he tried prying open the windows, then perhaps in frustration, threw his weight against the door, hoping, she imagined, to breach it with sheer force. When the girls started screaming, he had run straight across the yard to the place where his horse was tied, and presumably fled without being remarked.

"I'll post a guard at the house while you're here," said the foreman. "Someone used to staying up all night with the herd. Someone who's a good shot."

"That's what I was hoping," said Jane. "Two of those girls are the daughters of millionaires. They'd fetch a nice ransom." The racket of the arriving train ended all conversation or Red might have reminded her that she was a millionaire in her own right.

The new engine – *Destiny* – was still on the siding, and she looked from it, with its colorful splendor, to the shabby, unloved condition of the locomotive that was bringing up the morning mixed train. Passengers - locals and tourists alike - were admiring the luxurious deSteyne cars and the beautiful new engine. More targets for thieves and vandals, she thought. Good thing Rhys was sleeping on the idled train.

The crew on this morning run were acting none too respectfully, she thought, considering she paid their wages. She reminded herself that they were all Mitchell Donnelly's hires. She was going to have to straighten that man out.

With a terrifying barrage of French imprecations, Madame Arlette was supervising the unloading of two large trunks and their transfer to a waiting wagon. Betty toddled behind her, a half-dozen hatboxes strung by their strings along both arms. The three ladies found seats in the wagon, Jane climbed up onto the box, and with a cluck to the team, they started on up the drive.

"See anybody interesting on the road?" asked Jane. "Anyone we know?"

The Frenchwoman sniffed derisively. "I see nothing but the strangers, come for the Eclipse. The men *tres desagreable* and the women *tres demode*."

"We saw the curate, on his mule, and the doctor, coming back from some emergency I suppose." Betty was observant and helpful. "Those three men of Mr. Sydney's were eating outside at the Stagecoach Inn. I think they were drinking, too, though it is so early!"

"Were they now!" Jane was thoughtful. "City boots on that tall one, for sure, I bet," she said quietly, turning to Rebecca on the seat beside her. "I tell you it's Sydney for sure. In person or through his goons. He's out to get me."

Arlette and Betty get to the house – open the trunks to oohs and ahs – anticipation – who doesn't love new clothes? The fabrics are sturdier, suited to the climate and terrain, country clothes, but it's the cuts that are exciting.

The clothes come out of the trunks, bundled and tied with ribbon, with each girl's name on a tag. Betty opens the bundles and arrays the clothes on furniture around the great hall.

Lydia is avid, but wary/suspicious. This is not Paris, or even New York.

Kitty is mildly curious.

Victoria is self-conscious. She's nowhere near as rich as these girls. She's only ordered a riding skirt and a simple day dress in more ordinary fabrics.

Girl's chatter about last night's attempted break-in. Betty, more subdued than usual, listens carefully. "What can he have wanted?" they wonder.

Betty says to Rebecca "You could stay upstairs if you are not too proud to take the servant's stairs. I always prefers the back stairs myself. So private like."

Corset debate (possibly lose this because it is too hackneyed at this point, or is this a new angle?)
Lydia almost cries about the fit. Not tight enough. She and Lynette are complaining in rapid French.
Argue in French with Arlette. (Everyone in the room speak French, except Betty, who is pissed.)

Jane goes out, comes back in a suit of her Uncle's black clothes, tailored to fit and flatter her. Hat, boots, guns make her formidable.

Professor and Arlette spar some more about Astrology vs Astronomy. The girls call for more fortune telling.

Madame Arlette lays out the Tarot cards. She sees love, deceit, the Devil, etc. Arlette warns against Sydney. Betty implies she knows something very dark against him. Jane drinks it up.

The girls hurry in time for Arlette and Betty and the empty trunks to catch the down train.

Jane talks to Jack at the Halt. He's admiring the new engine. His funky loco pulling passengers and freight. He'll take Destiny up to Milltown soon.

Jane wants to be alone, free. She's excited to be outdoors and on her own beloved land. She's very frisky. Her horse comes when she calls. She names him/her _____. Blissful solo ride. Heroic silhouette.

CHAPTER 27: TAKING DESTINY TO MILLTOWN

(add wood-burning locomotive to service network of logging lines. It burns “scrap and trim from the planing mill” “turpentine knots” ADD army wanted to buy rr line to destroy it, low it up etc for training purposes. Cf Bebee “full-size working experiment in demolition.”)

A couple days later, Jack is dropped off at the Halt by the up train. It's his day off. Jane is there to greet him. (He's dying to drive it, so they have decided to take Destiny and her tender up to Milltown.)

Jack had sent a man up the night before to slowly fire up Destiny. Rebecca had paid double for the best fireman available. That guy had gotten in the same train that dropped Jack off.

Rebecca comes hurrying down from the house, dressed in her new country outfit, carrying Jane's jacket. Jane goes to a closet in the Halt building and comes out with two cool jackets. Tightly belted, nothing to catch on machinery, caps, gloves, goggles. They climb up into the cab and the engine and tender pull out of the station. Very steampunk look.

Just above Brakeman's Halt, a mile or so, there's a huge trestle and immediately the other side of the trestle is a defile that the Standard-gauge width de Steyne cars would not have fitted through, but the narrow gauge engine is of course able to make it. So the cars are stuck at the Halt.

Destiny and her tender slow to a footpace across the trestle – the gap at the end is so narrow. Wouldn't want to scratch the new paint. (When the loco is in the defile, perhaps they can't get out of the cab?) After the defile, they can pick up speed.

Rebecca is watching Jack's driving and asking very intelligent questions. He has her “shift” etc. Jane is shoveling coal, and watching the gauges, reveling in the work. She's fired for Jack before.

The view from the cab is exhilarating! One scene more beautiful than the next. But you have to hang out the window of the cab to see the views.

Successful and abandoned enterprises along the route. The forested mountainsides with the peaks above them.

They stop at the water tower and refill their tanks. They will re-coal in Milltown.

They cross the river on an impressive trestle. Jane is very proud of it. One of the biggest engineering feats around. Rebecca is terrified.

Pike's Peak – they roll slowly through the bustling outpost where expeditions to the Pak begin, There are tourists, vendors, holiday camps nearby.

The railroad is clearly the lifeblood of many of these enterprises, Jane explains. Kids up and down the line can get to school. Crops can get to market cheaper, faster. Old days of wagon and packing – they pass wagons on the road.

Beyond Milltown, Jane explains, it's all wagons and pack-trains of mules. Her father had projected a – very challenging – route all the way to Crooked Creek, but not being needed when the mines ran out – it was never built (1873 financial troubles, too.)

Jane explains – Crooked Creek has played out mines. It's hey-day is over, though many settlers – formerly supplying the miners – remain. A hair-raising route, though.

They come to a stretch where the beauty is marred by the clear-cutting of the forests. Long mule-trains are hauling logs through the hellish landscape. Some tracks and engines working the hillsides, too.

Looking at the trees being hauled, Jane says – behold future railroad ties, mine shoring, houses, etc. *add here: Jane doesn't own the lands being logged or else make the operation less EVIL, because I want to introduce a new character – a man, the mill owner, who was her parents' friend, fought beside Jane's father, and after the war, tried for years to get Jane's mother to marry him. This is news to Jane. He can be an ally. He lives in Denver, not squalid Milltown. He's a bachelor, but has been seen with Betty Simple.*

They are reaching Milltown. It's as ugly as can be, but it's sort of the *raison d'être* of the railroad.

The girls are met by the manager of the mines, the mayor and the aldermen, and the principle females of the place, who all make a fuss over the wealthy and powerfully-connected girls. They insist on giving the girls a tour and have a gig waiting to drive them around.

Rebecca is just saying to herself "There are no elegancies in Milltown" when she is presented with the ornate façade of the Milltown Opera House.

The girls spot the theatrical troupe outside the theatres, putting up playbills, etc. Shockingly, Mr. Cornelius is there, too, haranguing the old red-haired actress.

Girls wonder, could SHE have played the 'cleaner' who ransacked Uncle's apartments? How about last night's break-in? What's her connection to Mr. Cornelius? They drive on.

Jane doesn't seem fazed, but Rebecca is floored by the squalor, roughness, dustiness, clamor and 'mood' of the place. Those trees become RR ties, mine shoring, stupid houses.

Rebecca's distaste is soon overridden by her excitement at being inside a roaring industrial monster. She loves this stuff, like Jane loves the outdoors. Doing, building, making, reaching, excite her.

The engine has been coaled and watered but Jane wants to ride with the engine through the wye turnaround. It's cool to see how this is done. But what is said or done during it?

They've got to get going. Telegraph confirms that the road is being held clear for them and off they go – back home to Brakeman's Halt.

CHAPTER 28: SUMMER CAMP

The summer days flow by. Nature works its magic. They ride. Splash in the river. Watch the sky at night. The moon is waning. They sing around the campfire with Lydia (and maybe the hands for a harmonica.)

Every day for a bit, Jane and Rebecca hang out with Rhys in the de Steyne cars. Jane learns from Becky. With Mrs. Ickes, Rebecca still conducts some business. Rebecca is getting healthier. Jane is learning how business is conducted at a higher level than her mother worked at Jane's mother was a visionary with big ideas and formidable powers of persuasion – but she wasn't the greatest dealmaker. Jane learns listening to Rebecca, who learned from her father. Jane's huge responsibility is daunting an intrepid girl.

Victoria paints. Lydia plays, writes. Kitty studies.

Letter #2 Describe girl's activities within letter from Professor to her friend –

Astride – break ins – girl's affairs – eclipse stuff – Lady Maud and Franca – Arlette – Colonel – Oh! The Colonel –

CHAPTER 29: AUTHOR AT WORK

Colonel Sir George Benton-Bowles sat at his desk in his very masculine library. A warm pool of lamplight shone on his silver hair and noble features. A sheaf of foolscap manuscript, heavily overwritten bore witness both to his industry and his vacillating mind. His manservant – and best friend – Solomon Wiggins leaned against the mantelpiece in an attitude of despair. Wracking sobs shook his substantial frame. Still, the Colonel wrote on without pause.

Finishing a sentence with a flourish, the Colonel looked up and almost whispered, “*Knock-knock.*” Wiggins looked up expectantly, rushed to the door, threw it open, and gazed with rapturous joy at...nothing.

“Very good. Excellent.” Sir George exulted, still writing madly, and now declaiming aloud:

“It was he – Rodrigo – as handsome and virile as she remembered. But the Southern fire, the passion which had proved her undoing so many times before, was gone. His gray eyes were cold and his usually sensuous lips a thin line of disapproval. “Oh, please, do not be cruel,” she cried. As she attempted to embrace him, the thin silk of her bodice stretched tightly across her straining breasts...”

“...beg pardon, sir, her breasts were straining not three pages ago.”

“Heaving? Heaving breasts. Have we used “heaving?””

“Not this chapter, sir.”

“*Heaving* it is,” said the Colonel, as Wiggin demonstrated the rapid rise and fall of his not-at-all feminine chest.

Just then, a perfunctory knock at the French window was quickly followed by the entrance of Lady Maud. The Writer and his Muse looked up vacantly, their thoughts deep in the throes of creation.

“Hope you don’t mind,” said Maud. “The Church Fete committee was meeting next door and I saw your light on and thought I’d just pop round.”

Wiggins straightened his disordered clothes and bowed to Lady Maud, who gave him a friendly nod and a shake of the head. “Really, Mr. Wiggins, how can you encourage Sir George in writing such drivel?”

“Ignore her, Wiggy,” said the Colonel. “My dear Maud, with all respect, it’s the drivel that pays the bills; surely not the scholar’s paltry earnings nor the soldier’s half-pay. I admit to liking the good life,” he said with a frank, expansive gesture. Lady Maud harrumphed, but Sir George was too old a campaigner to be put out by a cheeky subaltern. “We all make our devil’s bargains, Maud. If your mother the Countess, were alive, what would she make of your cowgirl charade?”

“Absolutely right, George. I didn’t mean to offend.” `

“These romances are putting a bit of bacon in my beans, Maud, and in truth I like writing them! But my credibility as a scholar could be destroyed if it were known I was the author of such popular classics as *Friar’s Entry*, *The Beauty of Beaver Close*, and *Mrs. Cockfoster’s Catered Affair.*”

Lady Maud raised her eyebrows expressively. “Wiggins, do you think we might have a cup of tea?” asked the noblewoman.

“Of course, M ’lady, directly,” the ever-tactful servant replied. Wiggins, quietly closing the door behind him, understood perfectly well that haste was not required.

Lady Maud flopped into an easy chair and put her booted feet up on a convenient low table. “George, I’m worried about Franca. She’s been invited to join the girls’ party at the Halt.”

"They would be excellent company for her, would they not?" asked the Colonel, pouring her a large whisky, which she gratefully accepted. "Whatever are you worried for!?"

"I worry that seeing these educated girls - rich, charming, with all the world before them - I'm afraid that when they leave, she will feel her life here with me is rather small." The truly affectionate grandmother looked pained to think of the girl's possible unhappiness, and equally sad to think of losing Franca to a larger society. "I failed her once. I'm so afraid I could fail her again."

"Maud, you have means and freedom. If she were to move on, marry, etc., you could follow." This sensible advice did not seem to remove the cloud which oppressed her.

"You know she's not like them. Could never be like them. I fear that even if she found happiness, some vicious soul would find a way to bring out the truth." Her face set in fierce determination. "I must keep her near, protect her."

"She's stronger than you realize, my dear. And better able to make her own way. This is a new age for tolerance and equality. Please, do comfort yourself with that thought. And let the girl have a bit of variety and fun with young women her own age for once."

Maud took a deep breath and a big sip of Sir George's excellent Scotch. "Perhaps if you rode up with her...? Your visit would be welcome, I sure. For dinner, perhaps. And you can let me know if Franca seems unhappy or out-of-place?"

"Of course, I will go. I'll take Jane that Afghan rifle she covets. I very much look forward to seeing them all again," said the old author.

"Especially the beautiful Italian professor?" asked his friend archly. "She seems quite taken with you. It's like a romance out of a novel, you know...you two, after all these years."

He smiled. Laughed at himself. "I shan't get ahead of myself, but I confess I am pleased. And I don't doubt that all our romantic misadventures will at least be useful as grist for my authorial mills."

Lady Maud's laugh was genuine this time, and Wiggins, who had been waiting outside the door, chose this auspicious moment to enter with the tea.

CHAPTER 30: VISITORS AT THE HALT

On the morning up-train, the Colonel and Franca alight at Brakeman's Halt Station – the Colonel has crazy-shaped gun case.

Victoria is there, waiting eagerly to greet her. They start arguing almost at once. All is well! They really like each other. Franca brought camera stuff, of course.

Visit from the Colonel is for the Jezail demonstration. But first, he wants to go to the house and say hello to the other ladies (Professor!)

The Colonel seems younger, cooler. Clothes and grooming smarter, sexier.

The Professor and the Colonel are starting to have feelings about each other and it makes them both shy, awkward. Cute. Promising.

Jane can't wait to shoot this rifle. Looking at the elderly pair she thinks, "they've waited long enough for love, they can wait a couple hours more." Laughing, he goes out with her to shoot.

Admiring the Jezail, shooting it, Jane tries to get the Colonel to talk about his military career, but he demurs. "It was after the army," he says, "that he found in war the scope he desired. Only as a historian of war could he appreciate its necessity, its horror."

The Colonel stays the night. It's odd to have a masculine presence in an all-female society – it's a little bit spooky, the way he observes then all as if from a distance. How would each girl think of this? (We understand it's because of the writing. Humor? Or Scary as suspect?)

Re: Colonel and the girls. Do they talk among themselves about Henry's death? His life? Civil Wars? Women's Rights? Popular Culture? World Events? Monopolism? What else would each girl care to say? Or is he silent and observing?

The girls and prof are observing colonel, too, though they talk and he observes. Girls wonder if he's a suspect – what is he hiding? Prof is seeing the boy-him in his expressions and gestures.

With Rebecca sleeping up the back stairs way to her room, Jane shares her bed that night and the colonel sleeps in the office downstairs where the break in was attempted. What does he think?

Early the next morning, the colonel and Jane are out shooting again. They ride far on horseback, stop to shoot, estimate distances. Jane's getting good at it. Maybe set up scenery locale for later climax? They ride up to the trestle so presage shot. (Is this even do able?)

At trestle, Jane makes great shot. Colonel fails. Explains some age-related Advancing condition has ruined his once-great aim. Jane is too young to get this. "Laura would understand," he thinks. (He will have to make this shot at climax.)

They ride back to the Halt. The Professor sees them through telescope in breakfast room. He leaves jezail with Jane. Asks her to keep secret of his suspected disease (for now.) His valise is waiting at the station. Ranch hand takes the horses. He gets on train back to Dakotah Springs.

CHAPTER 30: AN UNWELCOME HOUSE CALL

The wagon/stage road runs right past the siding where the de Steyne cars are sitting. The engine is in a shed. It and the cars are kept sparkling clean by attendants – a gang of local boys and girl under the guidance of “Irish twins” whose father worked the railroad.

Rhys is their god, keeping the little rascals in line and educating them in practical mechanics. Rebecca has a sharp eye out for the most-talented among them and proposes a scholarship program they can work towards. The girls are especially inspired.

Sometimes one or two of the kid’s mothers bring the youngest baby to see the pretty engine (and maybe bring food to little workers), but mostly they’re working like made keeping it together. Brewing, baking, sewing, nursing, poultry, gardening, cleaning, wife duties. Our girls see and admire their pluck and endurance.

Various of the girls have started coming down to the Halt at the regular time when the kid crew shows up, and inevitably the girls end up grabbing a rag and cleaning the engine and car parts, thereby becoming a little familiar with them, the cylinders, the drivers, sand dome, etc. They get used to climbing around on it, though not as exuberantly as the kids.

Lydia is playing and singing one day while Jane and Rebecca and Rhys are working with the Twins and a few other kids when the passing hoofbeats pause and out of the glare of the midday sun a silhouetted figure enters the cool shade of the shed. The music stops. The wind picks up. A flock of starlings wheels and reforms behind the dark figure.

It’s the Doctor. He’s very big in every way. He touches his hat brim to the ladies. Smiles. “I was passing,” he says, “ and thought to enquire. Are you all quite well?”

It somehow sounds ominous. “Never better,” says Jane. “We were just about to go to lunch/tea. Won’t you join us?”

It’s clear a storm is brewing and Jane hopes the Doc will say that he’s got to keep moving.

But no, he accepts. An urchin runs up to the house to tell his aunt, Mrs. Maran, to prepare. The other kids melt away. A hand takes Doc’s horse. They all walk up to the house.

Luncheon is an ordeal. The Colonel had brought male energy into their domain, but his was courtly and unassertive. The Doctor, however, was a very successful, very persuasive man, used to laying down the law for his female patients. His conversation on any subject quickly became a mansplaining, fury-inducing monologue.

The Professor, as the only other adult, and as his professional equal, at least in her mind, is silent, contemptuous, disinterested, until...

The doctor looks suddenly abstracted. (why?) In that pause, Franca and Victoria announce their intention to photograph Indian life. Idealized visions of gentle savages come from Lydia. Jane scoffs – “Gentle, my foot. Just ask poor scalped Willie McTell.”

At the mention of scalping, there is a distinct change in the doctor’s demeanor. He comes out of the reverie that had allowed room for girl-talk, and begins to lecture on torture in a strange, choked voice. He goes on about the different tribes, cultures, classes of society, etc., over history and their recourse to torture in war and peace, for punishment or – he says – pleasure. He seems really into torture. The girls shiver.

Thunder booms. Lightning cracks. The downpour starts. The Professor stands. Dinner is over. The girls and of course the Doctor must stand too. Professor waves off Peggy, bringing the last course. "Thank you for your company, Doctor," says the Professor. "You must be eager to be on your way."

The Doctor's horse is brought to the door. He puts on his raincape, and is off, soon disappearing into the downpour, but hoofbeats still audible.

In a flash, Jane is on her knees in the soft earth, measuring the marks of the groom's and the doctor's boot-prints. The grooms are wide and almost shapeless.

Victoria declares the Doc's boots match the footprints in the garden after the attempted break-in. She's almost certain they are the same, big and very long but neat and narrow.

Lydia says Mr. Brandt's boots are just the same size and shape, but Kitty rushes to defend him from suspicion.

CHAPTER 31: THE SHERIFF CALLS

It's pouring rain. "I hate doctors. I hate them!" spews Rebecca, sitting bundled up and shivering by the stove in her lab car, while Nanny fusses over her, Rhys is playing sax or working, Mrs. Ickes is typing on her brand-new Remington with shift key. (A significant innovation was the [shift key](#), introduced with the [Remington](#) No. 2 in 1878.) Jane is amusing herself, bored by the rain.

Rebecca keeps complaining about the doctor. "he makes me sick! They all do! My whole life's lived on doctor's orders. Stop treating me like a child. My feet are cold. Where's my tea?" Rebecca is rotten. Doc has really upset something deep.

"And yet the English love him," says Jane, wandering the lab, playing with the toys. "He'd be hard to replace, and he knows it. His last trip to London paid for the Assembly Rooms, paving the High Street, etc., and Maud's salary."

It's still raining. A racket outside and a clatter of knocks signal the arrival of the kids brigade. Rhys blows his sax out the door to their delight, then cases it up and goes out to join them in the engine shed.

"Those wretched children!! Why do they scream everything!" Rebecca is in a bad mood.

Nanny hands Rebecca a cookie and as she nibbles and sips milky tea, her mood improves. "So the boots might be a match, and I suppose he could have tethered that horse and sneaked up the back way, but why?! And why break in to the Dartmoor?"

Jane says, "He and Doc-wife stayed in that room. Could he have left something embarrassing and came back to get it?"

"Like a dirty book?" says Rebecca, thinking of Doc's praise for de Sade.

"Exactly. If we find one, it won't be my uncle's!" says Jane.

Rebecca is sparked into action. Dresses to go to House to search room, but knock on lab door heralds arrival of sheriff from Dakotah City. He is an old friend of Jane's.

They invite the sheriff in, but he says he "passing and thought of taking a look at the hereabouts" Jane knows what he's saying. "you'll help us!," she cries. "I'll try," he says.

Though it's still raining and a minute ago she was sick, Rebecca insists on going on this hike. "The puzzle," she begins, "is how the killer got Mr. Adams to that spot on the track."

Rascal spots the three going out and calls, "Hey, where ya going?" Rhys comes out to see. All the kids follow him out. The twins skip to the head of the little party, eager to help, eager for adventure.

The sheriff, Jane, Rebecca, and Rhys are standing on the tracks at the Halt station. It's crazy to think someone carried a body – or a live man – all the way around the hill and down the grade." "And made it back to dinner!"

"What's your problem, Miss?" say the twins, one after another. "Well," says Jane, "suppose I shot a deer, a buck, right here, and I needed to put him onto a passing train at Peter's Point."

"I know, I know!" claims a freckled little girl. "I'd put him in boat and row across the lake, then take him out at north fork landing. It's just a short scramble over the rocks and you're right above the track at Peter's Point."

"That kid's going to Harvard," says Rebecca, her jaw almost dropping. "Show us," says Jane.

They go to the boathouse. It's atmospheric in the non-stop rain. They get in two or three boats and row slowly across the lake. Visibility sucks. Silence except for the birds calling and the sound of the oars dipping in the gloom, and of course the sound of the rain.

Jane, Rebecca, the Sheriff and the freckled girl lead the little armada. There's calling back and forth across the water for directions. Rebecca grabs Jane's hand. Jane is digging it, though it's macabre, thinking of her uncle as a corpse in the bottom of the boat.

"Right here, by this tree, here's the landing,," the child says. They pull their boat out of the water, or tie it to a post and little wharf. Wait for the others. The kids, leader and followers reunited, scamper off down a (well-known? Or well-disguised?) path.

It's still pouring, thundering, as they follow the children's trodden path. Jane is keeping up with the kids. The sheriff is escorting Rebecca – the going is rough and slippery. Rebecca can't believe she's bearing it.

In no time at all, the path ends in a heap of rock – boulders, etc. The freckled child is standing at the top and in a second Jane stands beside her, arms akimbo.

Rebecca, helped by both Rhys and the Sheriff, inches her way – almost on her belly – till she can see over the edge. Thirty feet below are the steeply descending tracks on a ledge scarcely wider than the ties. Hundreds of feet below that, the river roars with the new rain. So this is where he died.

CHAPTER 32: THE SKETCHBOOK. THE POEM. THE MAP.

That night, after dinner, it's still pouring. The girls are gathered around a fire. A bored Lydia decides to read Fergus' poem. Jane is cleaning the jezail. The others are variously occupied.

Kitty has found some old watercolor sketchbooks of Uncle Henry's...botanical sketches – she bursts out laughing, which is unusual for her. “What is it?” they all ask. Vicki looks over Kitty's shoulder at Uncle's plant sketches.

“These Latin inscriptions” Kitty says. “I thought they be plant names, but they're nonsense. Silly stuff – word play, jokes!”

Jane says, “That's from when I was little. Uncle got me to learn Latin and botany that way. I didn't think he kept it up after I grew up.”

“If he did,” says Rebecca, “Perhaps there might be clues to what happened to him to be found in his most recent notebooks. Are they here?” “I found his current book here, in his saddle bag. I forgot I had put it in my pocket and ended up taking it with me to the Dartmoor. It should be safe there. The manager has promised to only send an old, trusted housekeeper to service the flat.”

“When we were up in Milltown, we saw that old red-haired actress,” says Rebecca, “and we wondered if she could vandalized the flat while in disguise as a servant.”

Jane has taken one of Uncle's sketchbooks from Kitty and is looking fondly at Uncle's gentle jokes and puns in the Latin inscriptions. “He was the gentlest man I ever knew,” says Jane. She notices Lydia reading the manuscript from Fergus.

Lydia reads on. “How is the poem?” asks Jane.

“Turgid. Very circumstantial,” says Lydia. He has a unique lack of rhythm and a very inconstant allegiance to rhyme.”

“The story?”, asks Rebecca.

“I'm afraid it's an account of his search for your uncle. Very distressing.” Lydia gasps suddenly.

“What is it? What does he say?” they all ask.

“It says his hands were bound. When they found the body, the hands were tightly bound!”

Pandemonium.

“He says in the poem that Paul cut the cord.”

A thousand questions, a hundred speculations re suddenly the focus of the college crew. It seems a contest of who can talk louder and faster, make the wilder leap of chain of events. Jane is pacing.

Jane is pissed that Fergus and Paul must have known but never let on! Covered up? Let a murderer get away with it?!

They work out the ramifications. “Certainly not an accident.” “Suicide ruled out” says Jane with relief, despite the horror. It must be murder. But who? How? Why? The when seems clear.

They tell Mrs. Maran they'll have tea in the library and move there.

“We need to be systematic,” says Kitty. “Who are our suspects?”

"Sydney!" shouts Jane. "I can't stand him. He wants my railroad. He'd do anything. And Arlette said she knew something horrible about that day at the Halt, something Sydney did."

"It's not necessarily him," says Rebecca, wondering why she's coming to the man's defense. "Many powerful people want your railroad. And his feet are quite small and neat, I noticed, so he's not the intruder."

"Why are you defending him?!" shouts Jane. "Who is he to have your sympathy? What about me? What am I to do with all this responsibility?"

Kitty repeats: "We're all scientists here – let's find the facts. Let's work together as we do in class."
"Quite right," says the Prof. "Method. Order."

Jane had gone to a big cupboard in the room, and having gotten out a roll of her father's drafting paper, they pin it up on a wall and Victoria makes little sketches. Kitty's involved, too.

Victoria sketches Uncle Henry at top of chart, a likeness from portrait on the wall of him as a youth. Franca runs up to her room, comes back with group photos she took on fateful day at Dakotah Springs Station before they all got onto the party train. Vicky refers to it as she sketches characters.

Lydia says, "If we're picking people based on whether they LOOK like a villain, what about the guy at the ball in New York City? You said you saw him in Milltown, so we know he knows his way around out here." Victoria remembers Cornelius from the ball, and does a very fair sketch of him (Jim Osborne.)

Rebecca says, "Maybe – probably – he's working for the mystery bidder we heard about? He was also tall! Maybe it was his boot prints!"

Jane exclaims, "And it was he who chased me on the train and was in cahoots with the men who shot at me!"

Mrs. Ickes makes notes. Victoria sketches train scene – Jane on roof, pursued! These cartoons will prove priceless!

She writes little captions: "Find out who he is!" "He looks like a murderer!"

Kitty says, "We have to consider every person who was here that day as a suspect."

Jane: "But those are my friends! His friends! None of them is capable of murdering Uncle Henry! Or anybody, for that matter. It must have been an outsider, like Sydney or the sinister stranger!"

"Consider motive," says Franca. "Out here, when a man's killed, it's always over love or money."

Professor: "Not just out here, my dear. It is everywhere the way of the world."

Lydia: "Who loved him?"

Jane: "Everybody!"

Lydia: "No, I mean, he was single. Did he have a lady friend? Or any close emotional attachment?"

Jane: "A lot of ladies set their sights on him, but he always said my mother and I were plenty for him. The church ladies spoiled him rotten, he said. And the hotel servants took care of everything else. He didn't need a wife."

The Professor looks at the group photo of the people she has so lately met. Lady Maud. Edward & Paul. The Doctor's family. Philip Sydney. Franca herself. Fergus. Wiggins. Arlette. Betty. None look

like killers to her, although she disapproved of Arlette and Betty, and is repelled by the Doctor's personality.

Professor: "Must it have been one of the party? Or a servant working that day?"

Rebecca: "Or, it could have been an outsider sneaking in like the intruder did the other night."

"Hard to sneak in broad daylight," says Lydia.

"Oh," says Mrs. Maran, serving tea, "it wasn't really broad daylight, though it was mid-afternoon. "It was terrible foggy that day. That's why we had to move the dinner indoors instead of a picnic outside as planned. You couldn't see your nose in front of your face."

"Mrs. Maran! Were you here that day?"

They insist she sit down, pour her a cup of tea, hand her a cake, and she tells her story. We've heard it from Lady Maud, but different perspective/details.

As Mrs. Maran ticks off the guests names and details, Kitty and Victoria add it to the board.

Mrs. M was "serving/cooking aided by her niece Agnes Kelly, sadly died in childbirth soon after. That Betty Simple was there, to act as maid for the ladies, but she was too uppity to help Mrs. M. "Sure, she had something up her sleeve. A sly one that. Mr. Wiggins and Fergus were very helpful though it wasn't their place, in getting the tables in from the garden when the fog came up sudden-like. Real gentlemen."

"What is known of the French dressmaker?" ventures the Professor.

This one Vicki can draw from memory – Arlette, pinched, sharp, devious.

"That's not fair!" cries Jane. "She doesn't look like that!"

"She's right," says the Professor. "You are so talented Vicki, that you could make anyone look like a villain."

"I'll say what no one else will say around me," says Franca, "My grandmother can be ruthless, unstoppable when she wants something badly enough. I should know. She'd kill for me. I'd die for her. Sketch me, Vicki. Show my ugly side. Either side will do. I was there that day. Put me as a suspect. I had no special love for the man."

The others are aghast. Vicki puts her crayon down and sits beside Franca, speaks quietly but forcefully, takes Franca's hand, but Franca pulls it away.

"That's nonsense," interjects Mrs. Maran. I saw the girl a dozen times. So kind to her granny she was. At her beck and call. Wouldn't have had time to kill a fly, much less a man, even if she was so minded."

"Of course she didn't" says Kitty, matter-of-factly. "She's too small to tie a grown man up and drag him to wherever. (more explicit and graphic.)"

Kitty's literalness stuns them all. Jane looks about to be sick.

Kitty, expectant, unaware of her faux pas, says "Who's next? What about this doctor? Where's he in this picture?"

Vicki draws Dr. Enderleigh, big, self-important, soulless. "Is that neutral enough?" she asks.

"It's people's motives we need to discover," says Lydia. "Their passions, their fears."

The fire dies down. They all go up to bed. Jane walks Rebecca up the back stairs. They talk. It's still pouring rain. "Let's go back to Dakotah Springs. The suspects, the clues, the law, they're all back in Englishtown."

CHAPTER 33: BACK TO DAKOTA SPRINGS TO INVESTIGATE

The storm rages all night. Thunder in the mountains seems so close. Morning brings steady rain – a downpour really – at breakfast, nothing to be seen through the scopes. Wait, there is something to be seen. Smoke rising from the stack of the engine, which is out of the shed. “Destiny.”

“Why! They’ve started the train,” says Kitty. “And now they’re hooking up the cars!”

"I sent Rhys word last night," says Rebecca, "to be ready to leave after breakfast."

Jane says, "This rain is likely to be with us for days, I'm afraid."

"I hope it clears by the Eclipse!" says the Professor.

Give the girls option to stay on at Brakeman's Halt, but Jane and Rebecca's suggestion that they all go back to town for a while (?) (Until eclipse) is met with rapid, universal assent. Each has her own interest in returning, (as follows):

As they ride their beautiful train back down the mountain, the girls talk and/or think about the tasks ahead of them. Their sense of teamwork continues.

Vicky leafs through a notebook full of studies of Franca and her photography setup. Makes her look cool and heroic. She's doing this idly on the train as the ride. Ignores scenery. Fixed on Franca.

Victoria thinks – find out what makes Franca so unhappy. What is the mystery about her and her grandmother? She says, “drawing those sketches gave me the urge to paint some of these characters. (Wants to paint Franca.) OMG, actually wants portraiture.

Lydia leans her head out the window. Is elevated by the view. Hums to herself. Mouths some words. Pauses, happy, “working”, writes them down, revises, etc. Unfaithful love and murder. Olde English vein? Or chugging of the train rhythm.

Lydia talks: convinced motive is the key. Wants chance to assess all suspects with insight into their hearts. Thinks: wants to play music with The Kid again.

Kitty is making lists – one of suspects, another list of crimes. She's got a timeline going and is plugging in verified facts as they talk. Henry last seen @ ____ by ____ and _____. Called for dinner @ ____ by ____ etc. Kitty is convinced movements – therefore alibis – are the key to the not-very-complex equation they are presented with: Givens, variables, postulates, etc. Math talk. She also reasons that Brandt – an outlier even among individualists – may be relevant – she's fooling herself. Hot for him. At the end, she was right!

Everyone who was at Maud's birthday party is a suspect.

Lydia asks motives – emotional

Kitty talks movements

Rebecca asks motives – financial

Jane focuses on actions they will take

The **Professor** talks about her genuine fear for the safety of her charges and seeks protection of civilized setting, characters. She thinks about how she feels responsible for getting the Colonel's

secret explained, but only if it is relevant to the girls' safety and not wholly personal. She doesn't want to pry. Boundaries are very adult.

Jane talks to Rebecca.

- follow up on sketchbook
- question Fergus & Paul re bonds, body. Why they hid the fact?
- question undertaker re same
- face the Board on hostile takeover
- get Donnelly to behave
- improve performance of RR
- question Doc – if marks on wrist, why silent?
- consult with Sheriff over latest developments
- get official investigation by law enforcement started
- run around with Charles

Rebecca –

- learn more about Sydney's character and history
- uncover source of competing mystery bid
- who was Arlette before?
- what about acting troupe?
- what about Cornelius?
- what was Doc's reputation in U.K.?
- what's the story of Doc-wife?
- what about Doc-Mom? Odd.
- look into finances of all Jane's enterprises
- figure out cash flow and who is in charge of it? Who's writing checks?

CHAPTER 34: CROWDING BACK IN TO THE DARTMOOR

The rain has stopped when they arrive at the Springs station. Word of the girls' return has gotten around and as the train pulls into the station, Lydia sees the Kid, waiting at the earliest possible point. He raises his head, looks right at her. She feels a little thrill.

The girls walk in happy formation – the women who step off the train are tanner, fitter, more confident than the students who left (x) weeks ago. (timeline?)

As they're driven through town, people smile, wave, tip hats, etc. Folks are happy to have them back. Lots of new faces in the streets, too. Eclipse tourists, visiting scientists, etc. Jam-packed, jolly.

No rooms at the Inn. The hotel manager meets the girls at the entrance, opens their carriage doors himself, full of apologies at not being able to properly accommodate them – the eclipse, Maude's big event, etc.

While manager apologizes, Rebecca walks out towards edge of terrace. Inches closer to the parapet. Looks over, her heart pounding. Takes a breath, turns and goes in to hotel with the rest of the girls. She is progressing.

They all get to Uncle's apartment. Jane goes straight for 'last sketchbook', hands it to Kitty. Latin inscriptions are puzzling Kitty – not plant names, not jokes like the juvenile ones, but what do they mean? She decides to translate them all. E.g. Bruised lips. Michaelmas, May 20, Pained posture, Whitsunday, June 5 etc. Could be plant names or descriptions?

In a move that will ease the crowding, since all the girls have to stay in Uncle's flat, Vicki will stay at Lady Maud's with Franca. They want to visit Indian camps. Vicki will start portrait of Franca and perhaps Maud in her cowboy mode. Franca's photo portraits are interesting Vicki in character rather than abstraction.

Vicki gathers up her 'city things' to take with her to Maud's. Franca reminds them all that her grandmother will expect them at the big promotional event that evening in the Dartmoor assembly rooms.

Lydia and Lynette go into a huddle at once over what to wear. Nanny says she'll steam Rebecca's best velvet and takes it out ...it's dowdy, high necked, juvenile. Nanny says it'll look so nice with the pearls. She insists Rebecca take a nap. Rebecca refuses, happy to be engaged and stimulated.

Seeing Nanny with Rebecca's dowdy dress, Lydia and Lynette look at one another and grimace. "What a pity to cover up her pale neck and lovely shoulders. Have I got anything you can cut down to fit her?"

"We'll find something," says Lynette. "Anything will be better than that old lady dress."

Rebecca, used to being treated like a doll, is content to let the two fashionistas have fun with her. They turn her this way and that, sizing up her charms.

Vicki and Franca leave for Maud's. Jane says she'll ride down with them and hike back up. She has much energy. She intends to question 'witnesses'.

The carriage heads down to the High Street. Passes useless Bobby Bill, walking his beat. He tips his nightstick to his helmet in greeting.

“Hold on a minute,” says Jane to driver. “See you tonight girls,” she says hopping out of the carriage and jogging back uphill to catch up with Bobby Bill. “How’s crime?” asks Jane. “Slow, slow, just as it should be,” answers the stolid policeman.

“Well, we’re all back for a few days,” says Jane. “Maybe put an extra man on guarding the hotel. Wouldn’t want another break-in.” “Will do,” says Bobby Bill.

Striding down through town, Jane encounters three ladies from St. David’s church Women’s Society. They are lovely people, on way to church, gentlewomen almost comically upper-class British, other signifiers of the Englishness of the place.

Arriving at the Dakotah Springs RR station, the train is in; Jane swings up into the cab and chats with Jack. The guy who is firing the engine is surly and uncouth. Jane rides the remaining few miles to Dakotah City.

CHAPTER 35: JANE STARTS ASKING QUESTIONS IN DAKOTA CITY

Jane exits train and walks to busy commercial district to undertakers' fancy shop. No one in front of shop.

Pretentious mortician storefront. Lots of people come here to die. Jane goes to question undertaker in his workshop. Sees undertaker's boy and Betty Simple canoodling, her looking triumphant, him love-dazed.

Undertaker is evasive – he thought marks might be from transporting the body. Something fishy Rev must have been up to. Jane is outraged!

Dropping the affectations, undertaker says, "Look, it's not my business. I just knock em in a box and plant em under a stone. Besides, Doc saw it same as me and he never blinked an eye." "The marks you mean?" asks Jane. "Sure. He must have seen them. Plain as day."

Frustrated, Jane comes out into the street. Sydney's gang ride down main street, tip hat to her. She pauses for a moment, crosses to the newspaper office/printer across the street.

"Eugene McCormack, Ed. Pub. Prop." We saw this man in the crowd when Destiny was delivered, covering the story.

McCormack actually publishes two papers, The Daily Gazette, and the weekly social and gossip and advertising paper Englishtown Illustrated News. Jane and the Proprietor are old friends.

Jane hitches herself up onto a counter and starts fiddling with the trays of type. She asks to see how they covered her Uncle's death. The Weekly laments his passing and extols his ministry and civic importance. But what she reads in the Daily Gazette shocks and informs her.

In the Daily Gazette, the first article mentions an unexpected absence for several days, friends concerned, plea for information. Church duties to be undertaken by curate.

Second article calls for all able-bodied men to assemble next dawn for exhaustive search.

Says Jane, "You mean he was missing for days and no one thought to tell me! None of my friends? None of our employees/managers? How did business go on? Why wasn't I told."

"You're asking the wrong man," says Proprietor. Hands her "missing person" handbill printed in that very shop. Jane stares at Franca's photo of Henry on the handbill. "Who ordered the printing? Who took charge?" asks Jane. Emotions play across her face, and then resolve. "Who's in charge," she repeats. "Who did this and didn't tell me?"

"Don't know who was in charge, but it was the Lady Maud Frawley – who I do a lot of printing for – she brought in the handbill. (The piece features a photo (?) of Henry by Franca and a description and where and when he was last seen.)

CHAPTER 36: LADY MAUD HOSTS A PARTY AT THE DARTMOOR

Lady Maud Frawley stands at the door to the grand ballroom of the Dartmoor Hotel, greeting guests. An orchestra is playing.

The girls all look stunning! The gas chandeliers cast their peculiar glow.

“Candles were so much more flattering,” sighs the Professor.

Victoria looks at her critically. “I’ll paint you in candlelight,” she offers.

“You dear girl,” the Professor replies.

“Starlight would be more apropos,” says the Colonel.

The Professor has had a makeover by Lynette and is looking like an old Italian movie star. The Colonel had come towards her immediately. Walks her away to dance. There’s a spring in his step.

Lynette has transformed Rebecca as well. She’s hot.

“Nanny was like a jealous pug dog, furious at me,” says Lydia, “and she would have bitten Lynette if she could.”

“You look great!” says an admiring Alec. They dance.

Rebecca asks Lady Maud and Alec what they think of Mr. Sydney and his methods.

Alec says he’s ruthless and unprincipled and likely to succeed in creating a monopoly.

Maud says he’d be a good catch for any girl – not her Franca, of course, - but a woman who could keep him amused and accept cheating.

Sydney is now entertaining Lydia. She’s even prettier when she laughs. They look like a movie-star couple, and are enjoying exercising their social talents. To Rebecca, watching, it is torture! She has never before envied Lydia her stunning good looks.

Alec is taken with this hotter look on Rebecca who is talking animatedly about her experiments recording sound effects. A voice behind her says “Great minds think alike!” It’s her friend Thomas Edison, on his way to Wyoming with the Draper Party to view eclipse. Alec is eclipsed.

Sydney sees Rebecca in conversation with Tom Edison – impressed! He transfers his attention to Jane. He’s trying to work his charm on her but she has a different agenda.

Jane and Mr. Sydney face off – Sydney makes funny comments about some of the more outré scientist-tourist-guests: strong, hard-faced women from Scandinavia and Russia, Germany and Poland. Jane says those he is making fun of are who interest her the most. Sydney says respectable womanhood is best presented in a coy, feminine way.

Sydney asks Doc-Mom for her support – and she very adroitly supports both sides of the argument.

A three-way conversation ensues with (sexual?) tension between Sydney and Mom-Doc. She’s a striking older woman – you can hardly call her old! Almost as tall as her son, looking fit to tackle most anything.

Doc-Mom agrees that though it wouldn’t do for herself, for certain men, a docile, accepting, subservient disposition is a valuable trait in a wife. She’s looking at Doc-Wife, who is being talked to – head hanging – most kindly by Lydia (who invites her to bring Teddy to Rebecca’s lab car tour.)

Following her gaze, Jane says frankly, "I like Alice, and my uncle liked her too. I've heard him say she was the most-sincerely pious woman in his congregation."

"Yes, she likes her church, indeed, says Doc-Mom, a little miffed at the implied comparison. "A harmless pastime, and I'm happy to keep Teddy company while she prays (or whatever.)"

Sydney finds himself looking around for Rebecca – there she is, head bent, listening intently to that little French woman who is speaking rapidly, presumably in French, judging from her gestures, as Rebecca nods and answers in a command of French denoting absolute fluency...she grew up speaking it at home.

The Scottish cousins are standing alone together for a moment.

Charles is crestfallen, seeing Jane being addressed by Sydney. Alec tells him not to worry – he sees that Jane hates Sydney.

Jane, bored of Sydney and Doc-Mom, sees Charles across the room, smiles at him. He brightens up immediately. They find a way through crowds of bonhomous guests to meet in a relatively quiet corner. "I shot the jezail!" she says. "Awesome," says Charles. Tech talk ensues and eventually, yes they dance.

Kitty – (did Lynette spiff her up, too? Or is she "plain" or with giant tits?) is the focus of three jolly German scientists, and one cranky Polish one. They keep handing her drinks (champagne) and she keeps lecturing them in German and Polish as she gets progressively tipsier. The Professor eases her away.

Lydia, leaving Doc-wife with a sweet hug, drifts over to Fergus – about the only young man who is unfazed by her beauty. She talks to him about his poem, and learns much about the search for and finding of Henry's body. "Not carried along by river. He was on the rocks, not in the river. The body came down from above, as if dropped from Heaven." Lydia asks to be shown where he found it. "You don't need me," says Fergus, "It's all in the poem." *This doesn't work, we already know where to look!*

Lydia – "I guess much of it is imagination – the poem – for effect - his hands being tied?"

Fergus – "Truth is my God, my genius demands it, I write what I see."

Lydia – "But no one else ever mentioned bonds."

Fergus – "Well, Paul cut them, you see. It seemed best, he said."

A watchful Lady Maud makes the circuit of her guests. The Colonel and the Professor are talking and Maud sees them pass through the open French doors out into the moonlit terrace (or garden).

Victoria and Franca are already out there, sharing a cigarette. They quickly stub it out and go back inside when they see the Prof.

As Franca enters, Maud swoops down on her and introduces her to an awkward young man. Matchmaking. Franca heaves a sigh and goes through the motions, rolling her eyes at Vicki who is both amused and jealous.

The Colonel and the Professor are walking arm in arm in the moonlight. "...and there you have it, you see," concludes the Blushing author. "I'm not proud of it, but it does pay the bills and I do enjoy it, I will not lie to you, my dear."

"And are the stories very erotic?" she asks.

“They are very romantic,” he says, taking her in his arms.

CHAPTER 37: REBECCA GOES HER OWN WAY. SYDNEY FOLLOWS.

Charles and Jane are dancing. Jane likes vigorous, jumping around kind of stuff. Rebecca catches her between dances and tells her she's going to her room. A slight indisposition, no worry."

Instead, putting on a hooded cloak over her evening dress, she goes to the lobby, the doorman calls her a cab and he rides down through town to her own train cars. Seeing the town after dark is suspenseful. The rain has started again a little. The town is quiet and almost deserted at this hour. The revelers not yet on their way home. There are no bars or brothels to keep the streets lively with music and brawling. What dissipations are left to this ill and aging portion of the British ex-pat class, are carried on behind closed doors.

Lights are going out one after another in the residential upper Englishtown. The gas-lit High Street, with its shops and offices, is eerie as a few people hurry by, huddled under their umbrellas. The train station looms into sight through the mist and rain.

Thunder sounds as she leaves the cab at the station, though the cabbie warns her "there ain't no train leaving till morning." She's deeply cloaked. Goes to her cars. Light burning low in the lab car, but no sign of Rhys! She checks everywhere, calling his name. His hat and gun are gone. He's gone out! And why not! But now, she's alone in the train and there's crunching footsteps in the gravel, approaching the train. Thunder and lightning, of course.

It's not Rhys out there – she can tell. She clutches her cloak around her and thinks of all the places weapons are stashed. Right! The workbench drawer, right here. She pulls the gun out, checks the chamber, loads it from a box of bullets in the same drawer, tucks the weapon inside the folds of her cloak and draws back into the shadow.

She can see a shape – a man's shape – tall hat under a big umbrella. She checks her gun, readies it, in case.

The steps come closer – she's ready – a rap on the side of the car and a voice calling out "Are you quite all right. Miss de Steyne?" Damned if it isn't Philip Sydney! She thinks fast. She should pretend no one is home.

"Miss de Steyne," he says, "I followed you here. I was alarmed to see you set out alone at night. I wanted to be assured that – wherever you were headed - you arrived safely."

She steps into the light, opens the door. "I am safe as you can see. Goodnight Mr. Sydney."

They are exquisitely conscious of one another. Rebecca has never felt this before. She *feels* him thinking about her, listening beyond normal social contacts. "This is how lovers feel," she thinks.

He takes a step up to enter the car, his arms either side of her on the railings. Her cloak falls back revealing her beautiful, low-cut, evening dress, jewels, lustrous hair, heightened color – and loaded pistol, pointed at his heart.

Running footsteps behind, then Rhys, out of breath, appearing out of the mist, soaking wet, gun in hand. "Rebecca!" he calls.

"I'm fine, Mr. Jones. Come in."

Rhys tips his hat to Sydney, who backs away, tipping his tall hat to Rebecca. "Goodnight, Miss de Steyne. "I leave you in safe hands."

Inside, as they stoke a fire in the cast-iron stove, Rhys and Rebecca explode at one another, their fear turned into anger.

“Why were you here?!”

Why were you NOT here!?”

They are old friends, they work it out. He plays sax. She thinks sex – with Sydney.

Rebecca to Rhys, “You’d better send a message to the Dartmoor before Nanny has a fit. I’ll sleep here in my own bed. She falls asleep to the sexy soothing sax music and the clatter of the telegraph.

CHAPTER 38: DISTURBANCE IN THE TRAIN YARD

Rebecca tosses and turns, dreaming, it seems, of sex and danger.

It's before dawn but the yard is coming to life, with increasing clamor and the din of rain.

She stirs, but does not wake as shouts and curses are added to the workaday chatter. Jack is out there, infuriated, expostulating with someone. Rebecca opens her eyes – alert. What did Jack just say?!

Rhys knocks on her door, thrusts his head in – “I'm going to check it out. Don't move. Lock yourself in. Where's your gun?”

She flops her hand around in the covers and comes up with the gun.

“Jesus, Mary and Joseph!” says Rhys. “Stay right here. Don't make a sound.”

As soon as he's gone, she immediately gets up, dresses simply in clothes from her closet/trunk, and heads through saloon car out onto observation deck/platform.

She sorts out the milling confusion. It's still pre-dawn, misty, gas-lit. (The train from D.C. sits steaming and clanking on the tracks.?)

In the rain, Brandt, freakishly tall and with the tallest stovepipe hat she ever saw, is surrounded by milling railroad workers, from firemen to porters and offering them \$\$ to walk off the job right this minute.

A very little accountant man next to Brandt is handing out “promissory notes” for \$50 to any man who will sign (and step into waiting conveyance), then handing them a can of beer.

The now-crewless train has steamed in from Dakotah City, hauling freight and passengers. Rebecca thinks, “Looks like Brandt has decided to stage this demonstration where we couldn't miss the message. Otherwise, why not do it in Dakotah City?”

Disembarking are newly-arrived scientist-tourists, with their bulky eclipse-related baggage, and not a porter in sight, all drawn off by Brandt's lucrative offer of alternate employment and an immediate bonus. Indignation in a babble of languages. Miserable in the rain.

Rebecca sees no one in charge. Even the Station Master has deserted. The whole crew is gone, almost to a man.

Left behind are the females – the little ticket seller old lady, the janitress with her mop, the pie lady, the telegrapher.

The telegrapher! Rebecca calls her over. Starts dictating message to Jane. Telegrapher says “already done. Ticket seller sounded the alarm at once. Sent message to Dartmoor. Had no idea Rebecca was at the yard.”

Jack is expostulating with the men, but it's too late. Rebecca sees Jack rush into the DC&M office and literally pull/drag Mitchell Donnelly out into the yard to deal with it.

Brandt and Donnelly exchange glances. Donnelly brushes off Jack's arm angrily, stalks back into office without saying a word to the deserting men, most of whom were his hires to replace Brakeman loyalists.

Brandt goes right back to recruiting deserters. He's very eloquent in an insulting, superior way. Very creepy but sort of death-metal cool.

The bedlam on the platform and on the yard is increasing in level and intensity. Rebecca wishes she had time to record it. Makes mental notes, abstracted.

Rhys has been questioning some men – they're looking at Rebecca on deck of her parlor car. Rhys yells at Rebecca – "Get back inside!" Brandt looks over and sees her and grins an evil grin. He's like Snidely Whiplash! Rebecca can't help shrinking away from his gaze. Ick.

Commotion outside changes as a horse comes galloping up. It's Jane. The loyal old ticket seller lady sent for her at first sign of trouble.

The sun is just coming up, the rain is tapering to nothing. The train sits steaming on the tracks, crewless, deserted, except for the passengers still sitting in the car, wondering what's next.

Jack shouts to Jane – give me a hand, we've got to get her onto a siding and bank the engines. Jane tethers her horse and runs to the train. Rebecca sees them confer. Rhys will be fireman. Jane changes signals and throws switches as Jack backs the train out of the station and maneuvers it onto a side track, cars still attached.

Jane is here, there, and everywhere. Very athletic, knowledgeable about the track layout and switching operations. (The Springs layout is pretty simple, compared to D.C.) Jack is calling out directions.

Jane hops into the cab to confer with Jack, and then drops to the ground and hurries to where Rebecca still watches from her observation deck.

Jane's filthy dirty, but enjoying the work.

Rebecca looks at her health and vigor and is envious for the second time, to her surprise. "It's as if Jane brings the sun with her," she thinks.

"Nice work!" say Rebecca.

"What's going on?" asks Jane.

"Brandt poached your whole crew. I've got to believe this is Mr. Sydney's doing," says Rebecca.

"That's a hanging offense!" says Jane.

"Unfair, unethical to be sure," says Becky, "but not criminal, I think. Business moves like this are common."

"I'm sure that Donnelly is working for Sydney. I'll get that snake if it's the last thing I do!" says Jane.

"Donnelly? Or Sydney?" asks Rebecca.

"Two of a kind. Best get em both before they mate and we have to deal with their spawn!" says Jane.

"I can't believe your men would go so easily?!" says Rebecca.

"They weren't "my" men, that's why!" seethes Jane. "Jack told me Donnelly replaced all of our old-timers with his own men. Jack says they had to keep him on to keep old No.493 running."

"And where was Mr. Donnelly during all this, I wonder?" says Jane. "Let's ask him." She heads into the DC&M Station.

Rebecca hurries up behind her, gun in hand.

"Put that away!" snaps Jane.

They pause. "If you want me to use it," says Rebecca, "just give me a sign, a password. How about the old college motto?"

"Wisdom and Self-Control?" says Jane. "Don't be ridiculous. It's too late for that."

"Just saying," says Rebecca.

Jane calms herself down. Moseys into Donnelly's office. Sits on the edge of his desk. He lights a cigar. Blows smoke at her.

"How much are you getting paid, Mr. Donnelly?"

"You know how much, Miss Jane. You've seen my contract."

"Oh, I know how much *I'm* paying you. I want to know how much Mr. Sydney and Mr. Brandt are paying you to wreck my railroad?"

"Haven't you got a mouth on you!" snarls Donnelly. "Didn't your mama teach you manners? Never met the lady but I hear she was a real piece of work."

Jane glances at Rebecca, then straight at Donnelly. "Luckily for you, Mr. Donnelly, my mama taught me wisdom and self-control."

Rebecca's gun is out and pointed at Donnelly.

Donnelly looks at Rebecca's little gun, laughs, doesn't move; then, swivels his chair so his back is to them, and opens a drawer to take out a gun. (or stands to take a rifle off the wall.)

Jane is over the desk in one bound.

"Do you prefer this one, then!" asks Jane, her big gun to the guy's head. Cocks the hammer. "Your services are no longer required, Mr. Donnelly. You're fired."

"You won't get away with this!" says Donnelly.

"Get up slowly or I'll have to shoot you in self-defense, as my witness here will attest."

Furious, Donnelly eases up, smashes his hat onto his head and storms out.

CHAPTER 39: RAILROAD GIRLS ARE BORN

Jane follows him out the door and watches his retreat. She and Rebecca put up their guns and breathe a sigh of relief. The clamor continues in the yard.

The little old ticket lady sticks her head out her window. "What shall I tell them?" she shouts. "Are we running a train or not?"

"What do you think?" Jane says quietly to Rebecca.

"I say hand around free pies and cups of coffee. Ordinarily, I'd say to offer the men a tot of liquor, but it's six a.m. and we can't deal with a mob of drunken men before we've even had breakfast."

"Good thinking. I'm a little scared," says Jane.

"What would your mother have done?" asks Rebecca.

"She'd make a joke, talk like one of the guys while still being a lady, and tell them all to hold still while she gets the lay of the land."

"That's what you should do. Short speech, short delay, patience requested. Then come back to the office for a strategy session. I'll round up all the loyalists left. Here come Rhys and Jack. They'll clear a way through the crowd for you."

"Are you kidding?" says the girl. She pulls up onto the overhanging brackets and walks across men's shoulders to get to elevated place to make her announcement. People are eating pies. Gawking up at her.

Jane's dressed in her uncle's black clothes and hat and her own guns. A striking figure with her vitality and (red? Blonde?) hair worn down still (?)

"My lords and ladies," she begins. She makes a funny short speech. Acclaim, laughter, some grumbles. "Okay, folks. Now take me back." She falls backward into waiting upraised arms and is crowd-surfed back to doors of the station. Rebecca is clapping and laughing.

"And that's how your mother would have done it, is it?" laughs Rebecca.

It's Jane's turn to laugh. "Well maybe not the acrobatics!"

Jack has sent a messenger down to the Hibernian Club and the boy comes back followed by stout, trustworthy fellows willing to act as porters to clear the new batch of tourists off the platforms. Includes the 'fighting Irish' brothers.

Inside, the ticket seller, the janitress, the pie-lady – her stock exhausted – and the telegrapher, are joined by Jack, Rhys, Rebecca and Jane.

Mrs. Ickes comes huffing in, tousled by the struggle through the crowd. She takes off her coat, rolls up her sleeves as it were, and starts taking notes.

Kitty and Lydia are not far behind her and take seats on the floor, radiator, etc.

Jane sketches the situation. Outside, cars are moving livestock and chickens are stranded – and their noises are added to the din.

The event has become a "story" and as the morning advances, reporters and looky-loos alike are still coming to the yard to look at the train that's not going anywhere.

"OK," says Jane. "It's time to figure out how to run a railroad!"

"Facts first," says Kitty. "What's the published schedule and how far behind are we. When's another train due into this station?"

"The ticket seller of course knows the schedule. "The morning train from Milltown is due at the Springs station at 11:47 a.m."

"We can borrow some of their men, use them as the nucleus of a replacement crew."

The telegrapher has faithfully womanned her instrument, and now receives report from Milltown that their train is stranded in the station. "Crew walked off! What to do? Only the women are left working in Milltown."

She gets back to business- "Who collects the money? Are you in any liability for people and things getting delayed?" asks Rebecca. (Mrs. Ickes is taking notes.)

The ticket seller answers, "Ticket receipts go in the safe. The freight agent handles that money."

"And where is the freight agent now?" asks Jane.

"Walked off with the rest of 'em" says the pie lady. "They all 'us bad uns."

"And they all walked," contributes the janitress.

"Wow!" says Rebecca. "Fast and thorough. Very professional."

Jane throws her a look that says, "How could you root for the enemy!"

Rebecca is surprised at herself. WTF? Defending Sydney?

"Why was Donnelly made G.M.?" Jane asks aloud. "What happened to Duncan Campbell?"

"He just packed up and left one day," says the ticket seller.

"Happens he had a good reason to move so fast," says the Janitress. "My Mickey went to school with Mr. Campbell's little girls, the twins, so cute, and he said they came to school in tears one day, shaking, and the next day, the whole family was gone, lock stock and barrel. Mickey says the Campbell girls drew him a picture when he asked what was wrong. Who it was that scared them. He says they drew a scarecrow with a hat as tall as he was and the grinning face of a devil."

"It must be Brandt!" they think.

"Jane," says Rebecca, "can you get Duncan Campbell to come back? Promise him protection. Promise him the earth! I'll pay!"

"Absolutely, let's do it!" says Jane.

"I'm on it," says Mrs. Ickes.

"Now," says Jane, "let's break it down. What's our first thing."

"Safety. Communication." shout some.

"Finding a crew!" says Jack.

"Spinning the story," says Lydia.

"A counter-move to Sydney" says Rebecca.

Kitty has been leafing through the manuals on the shelves. She turns to Jane – “I’ve memorized the signal book. I could be a crew member!”

“When did you learn it?”

“Just now.” A fun demonstration. She’s perfect.

Rebecca says, “I’ve observed RR operations with an eye to improving them. I think I could do a good job as brakeman – don’t laugh – I can do this! The Westinghouse air brakes make the job so much safer and simpler.”

Jane says, “I want your help, Becky, but not in that job. You’re not going to enjoy jumping off to change a signal or throw a switch when we’re running along the edge of a cliff.”

Rebecca gulps, “Perhaps you’re right!”

“We’ll find you something,” says Jack, “something you’re already good at.”

“Well,” Rebecca says, “I do love to drive.”

Rhys says, “And she’s getting damned good at it.”

“Meet me in the cab,” says Jack, “Apprentice engineer.”

“Are you girls serious?” asks Jane. “You’d work on the railroad for me?”

“For us!”

“For science!”

“Can’t let tourists down.”

“Bound to straighten out soon...”

Lydia offers to shovel coal, but Rhys says he’ll be fireman up there with Jack and Rebecca”

“Jane,” says Jack, “you’re the conductor. You know the route and the routine. It’s your train. You’re in charge.”

Kitty, Lydia, Rebecca and Jane strip to ‘bloomers’ and climb into sweaters, overalls, boots, lanterns, rule books.

Jane is lecturing and the girls are reading the rule books as fast as they can, while changing their clothes, as if cramming for a test. They run out into the yard. Jane conducts their activities. Climbing, shouting directives, etc.

Let’s get this train to Milltown” yells Jane. The girls “hurrah”.

The monster starts moving again, onto the main track. Freight is loaded, passengers board, herded by pie lady and janitress in oversized RR uniforms. Cap says “Station Master.”

Franca and Victoria ride up to the station, rush inside, but the train is gone. They had been on a pre-dawn ride to sketch and photograph Indian camp. Didn’t get the news till they got back just now.

Telegrapher says, “Miss Jane left you a note.”

Victoria reads, “Rally the troops, meet us tonight DC&M Station in Dakotah City.” Telegrapher says she’ll let them know when train will be due.

CHAPTER 40: FIRST RUN TO MILLTOWN

The girls wave, whoop, hurrah, and the train chugs slowly on its way, tooting and honking and blowing clouds of steam downwards around the wheels.

Aboard the train, Jane is punching tickets and then sitting at the conductor's desk, working out the details, checking times, big watch, writing in a log.

Lydia is hawking snacks and souvenirs and doing a brisk business. Beauty helps.

Rebecca is in the cab with Jack and Rhys. Rhys is tending the fire. Jack is explaining the operations of the valves and levers and you can see Rebecca committing it to memory, coordinating throttle, valve gear and brakes is delicate – doesn't respond immediately.

Jack tells her that setting the brakes is the hardest and most crucial part. 15-20 second lag. Rebecca is familiar with air brakes. Rhys, too, obviously. But not on this scale! Coal dust and greasy smoke.

Rebecca's practice with La Mancelle has given her a taste for driving and she gets into it with total concentration, Jack approves.

Check the gauge atop the firebox. "150#/sq. in. pressure." Rebecca wonders if she'd ever achieve the easy, fluid, confident grace with which Jack manages the controls. She resolves to drive her own engine, Destiny, some day.

For Rebecca, the view from the cab was exhilarating and she found that even on cliff edges that would have terrified her, she felt secure in the vast weight of the engine and the undeviating restraint of the rails. (She doesn't think of train wrecks.)

They slow as they roll through an "isolated little station" to pick up mail where postmaster's daughter is "poised to flag down passing train." She's standing on a little flight of three steps to be on a level for the hand-off. GET THE MAIL HOOK IN HERE.

Up a grade, around a curve and the complex that is Brakeman's Halt comes into view. "Pretty and prosperous," thinks Jane with pride. "And I am mistress of it all. Defender, guardian of it all."

"I hope I'm worthy." She prays.

The ranch manager is waiting with a half-dozen good-looking cowpokes. Jane has recruited them as bodyguards cum freight handlers as they go up to Milltown. The girls know these guys well from their vacation.

Jane has a plan – she'll drop the men off at the Halt on the way back down. Mrs. Ickes and telegrapher will have lined up porters, freight handlers, etc. in DS and DC by the time this train returns.

Ranch manager agrees to keep a sharp eye on attempts on her property. Clearly, Jane has enemies.

The train heads further into the mountains. Scenery is breathtaking. They slow to a stop to refill the boiler at the water tower.

Jane advises passengers not to leave the train or stray away, joking that there are Indians in the woods. "They won't take kindly to being disturbed. The railroad hereby disclaims all responsibility for the retention of passengers' scalps." Nervous laughs. Wide eyes.

Jane hops off and walks along train, checking journal boxes, etc. Oiling stuff. Checking watch.

Jane climbs atop the boiler, where Rhys and Jack are maneuvering the spigot into the fill hole. It's sort of phallic. They'll re-coal in Milltown, Jack reminds her. Jane looks around the clearing – she doesn't like the vulnerability of their situation. She swings down into the cab where Rebecca is also scanning the tree line for hazards. Rebecca catches her drift.

"Ambush opportunity you're thinking?" asks Rebecca. "Seems so obvious."

"They're men," snaps Jane. "They'll always do the obvious thing."

They glance over to where two of the cowpokes are hitting on Lydia (even in overalls, Lydia is a knockout), and another two guys are hitting each other's asses with towels.

"How in the world do we ever fall in love with them?" Jane and Rebecca burst out laughing. "And why on earth would we ever obey them. Our grandmothers made very bad deals!"

The tank filled, the train whistles, blows off steam, spews smoke and chug chug chugs on up the grade and over spectacular gorge with trestle. (?)

Most of the tourists get off at the next stop, the trailhead for the Peak excursions. A bit of a camping 'resort' is building up around it, but the terrain is bleaker, not as pretty as at Brakeman's Halt. Now, most everyone on the train is headed to Milltown, plus the chickens and livestock.

At Milltown station, Rebecca thinks of the town she had visited so light-heartedly. It's odd to be viewing from the perspective of the railroad that gives life to the towns and its mills.

The cowboys serve as porters, freight, handlers, etc.

Milltown is as ugly as ever. Train is unloaded, turned, pick up boxcars (?) for return trip, leave empties.

Crew gets some lunch.

Jane goes into Milltown station, is handed a sheaf of telegrams by Milltown's female telegrapher. Both this woman and the one at D.S. had been students of Jane's mother, when she first came West as a teacher.

Jane looks at the telegrams. "Most of them are from Mrs. Ickes. Everything we talked about is in the works."

"Finding Duncan Campbell?"

"Yes, and any of the old loyal crew."

On platform and in yard the mill manager wants to know what to expect. Service is essential. Shopkeepers, too, want to know where they stand. Will goods come in? Postmaster concerned about mail. DC&M employees – maybe find a loyalist or two who can cope.

Jane reassures everyone that the railroad will be back to normal Pronto. For the moment, there will be only one train a day. Make your plans accordingly. Grumbling protests.

Rebecca notices a group of older, rough-looking men getting off the train, loading their gear onto waiting mules and setting off up the wagon/stage road towards Crooked Creek. They don't have gold pans, she notes, but they do have picks and shovels.

Rebecca nudges Jane – "Look," she says, "Prospectors. Maybe they know something we don't." Jane thinks. "A strike?" Wouldn't we have heard of it?" "Maybe more like a rumor," offers Rebecca. "Not gold, but what?"

"We shall see," says Jane.

The theatre troupe comes panting up and boards the train. The old red-haired actress is trying to calm the indignant ingenue, who's loudly protesting the lead actor's roving hands. "Just get on the train. \$2 more a week." "Deal."

A very young man in clerical garb boards the train in Milltown. Punching his ticket, Jane learns that he is Henry's former curate. Jane enjoys talking to the curate about her uncle. When told that Henry's death was surely a murder, he says he isn't surprised. He hints there might have been reason for Henry's murder, but he won't elaborate, beyond saying that when he was away on a mission to the Indians (No use, you know, he says, they have their own beliefs and they are quite fond of them. Set in their ways, he says, much like civilized folk)...while he was away, something happened that shook Henry up. Became secretive. Worried. Hearing this, Jane is glad that suicide is ruled out.

The train reaches Dakotah Springs, where Mrs. Ickes, the pie lady, the observant janitress and the telegrapher (?) are waiting to board for the meeting in Dakotah City.

Jane, Rebecca, Kitty, Lydia, Rhys and Jack are the crew.

At the station in Dakotah City, they are met by the Professor, Colonel, Vicki, Franca, Alec, Charles and Lady Maud.

Passengers get off. Jac and Rhys put the train away (RR men recruited yet? Night engine watchman.

The four girls are greeted as heroes by their friends.

Lydia looks fruitlessly for the Kid. Obviously no Mr. Sydney either, thinks Rebecca. Charles greets Jane.

The girls head into the changing room. Lydia is still corseted under her shapeless overalls – all of them are speckled with grease and their clothes have little cinder burns. They wash and dress in real clothes and go into waiting room.

In general, the girls are too giddy with success to think of anything but the feeling of freedom and power and physical exhaustion.

The Professor is severe. They pulled this stunt without her knowledge.

Jane and the Colonel together calm Prof down. No real danger, they argue.

Jane says calmly, "The girls should of course do what they think is right, but as for me, Professor, the fight is not one I can walk away from. If Mr. Sydney wants a war, I'll give him one he'll never forget."

Charles is enthralled. Alec looks pained.

Jane continues, expressing views I will think about another time. Very noble. Bigger issue for nation, womenkind, etc.

"Very well put, Miss Jane," says the Colonel. "Now, what do we know about this maneuver, and what can we do to counter it?"

"Yes," Maud says, "how can we help? I'm afraid I'm too old to be very active..."

"You can get the word out – that Sydney is no better than a murdering, thieving, low-down skunk, and if he thinks he can steal my railroad, he's got a lot to learn." Says Jane.

"I can't get it in print – that libel – even supposing it's true. Mr. Sydney is a millionaire and behaves in the high-handed manner such men are wont to do," replies Maud. "That's not news."

"Is it news that he killed my uncle?!" Jane almost shouts.

"That would indeed be news - but only if you had witnesses, evidence," says the Colonel. "My dear, let's think of the measures we must take at once for the railroad to run."

"He's right, Jane," says Rebecca. "Let's keep the trains running."

They put their heads together and work out a plan.

Mrs. Ickes reported on efforts to trace Duncan Campbell. Pie lady interrupts – she knows where they went. Stayed in touch.

"Great!" enthuses Jane.

"Whatever he's making where he's at," says Rebecca, "tell him I'll double it."

"His wife and kiddies can go stay with their mother, out of the way," contributes the pie lady.

"Yes," says Becky. "Let's send a big box of toys for the kids."

"The old freight agent is local and would come back," says the D.C. telegraph lady. "He's just been trying to run his own small import/export business."

"He was a trusted employee," says someone else.

"Get him," says Jane, "subject to Duncan Campbell's O.K. – but should be fine."

"What about porters?" asks Lydia, mindful of her normal luggage requirements.

"There were only two in D.C. and one in D.S. and they went back to farming. "They were good men."

"Get them back," urges Lydia.

Jane says, "So we have good leads on crew, but we don't actually have them yet?"

"We'll have to improvise."

The ticket seller says she's told by a buddy that the men stolen that morning are already employed on a railroad recently acquired by Sydney. The road also goes part way to Crooked Creek, by a different route.

"What happened to the crews already working that line?" asks someone.

Ticket seller: let go and replaced by these new men."

Colonel: "Not loyal enough, no doubt, to the new owner, nor corruptible enough. These men are professional thugs with railroad skills."

"We could try to hire the old crew, let's contact them."

"All these are good ideas," says Jane, "but we need to run at least one train from here to Milltown and back, every day of the year, barring acts of god. It's in our charter. We've got to carry the U.S. mail."

"You ask who we've got? Who can we trust? To do it tomorrow – and maybe until we get reorganized?" asks Jane. "Once again, I say we've got ourselves."

As soon as they get a second driver, Jane and Rebecca have a plan to split freight and passenger service. Each makes one round-trip a day. Destiny pulls lighter passenger cars. Jane's two (0-6-0s? 4-4-0s?) combine for one heavier load. Roundhouse is in D.C., shared with main line. There are also switch engines in DC, DS, MT.

“Meanwhile,” finishes Jane, “let’s keep it simple. You all know your tasks, who you’re shadowing, ask questions, never guess! We can do this. We already did it great today. Meet here at 6:00 a.m. tomorrow.”

As they’re leaving, Alec pulls Maud aside. “Don’t encourage her. Don’t help her. Don’t make her another one of your Wild West heroes.”

“Whyever not?” asks Maud.

“Because my dear aunt, helping Jane Brakeman s hurting me and you. There’s no time to explain.”

Franca, Victoria and Jane join Lady Maud. They want her to show the world that the RR is running fine and perhaps attract more excursionists with novelty of female crew. They want Lydia to be the face of their campaign. Franca will photograph girls on train in morning. They want Maud to line up press to cover the event, both leaving D.C. (and arriving in D.S.?). They’re proud of their idea and disappointed at Lady Maud’s refusal to take it seriously. Her excuses all seem lame, but she refuses to lift a finger. Alec sees, approves. Franca is pissed.

Livery stable has brought round carriages and saddle horses and all disperse.

Thinking hard, Jane watches the others disperse. She mounts and starts riding out of town, till she sees a light on at the Dakota city Argus. She dismounts, ties up her horse and with a jangle of bells, pushes open the door to the newspaper office.

CHAPTER 41: RUN #2 TO MILLTOWN AND BACK

Early the next morning, under Jane's direction, the girls are readying the train – by the book – with Kitty reciting the checks and settings.

Rebecca climbs up into the cab with Jack. Victoria is learning the fireman skills from Rhys, who is being prompted by Jack, however, -- cab is too small for four people. Vicki says she's got it. Jack will direct. Rhys goes out.

Franca has several cameras set up and is calmly managing all three angles.

Lydia arrives in well-tailored overalls, her glorious hair streaming from under her rakish cap. The camera go snap snap snap as she poses with tools, etc.

The reporter from the D.C. Argus is interviewing Lydia while she poses and her husky voice mesmerizes him – he forgets to take notes. Rebecca, at his elbow, reminds him. "Make the afternoon edition."

The reporter from Dakotah Springs' papers comes rattling up in his gig, having just gotten a tip that something was up. He sees Jane – "Is this how you repay a friend?" "Sorry. I had to promise him an exclusive. People in Denver read the his papers." "Nah, I get it," he says. "Smart move." "Is there a lot of crew poaching? I don't remember it?" "Seems like that's the new way to get ahead. Monopoly." "I don't like it, not one bit."

Jack toots the whistle, rings the bell?

"Ok," Jane yells, turning away from the reporter. "Train number 493 from Dakotah City to Milltown by way of Dakotah Springs, Brick Camp, Potter's Crossing, Brakeman's Halt, Forest City, Peak Head and Milltown on track number one, leaving in five minutes. All aboard!"

The girls are all much better at their jobs this second day.

And enterprising lady reporter with a longer deadline than the dailies has embedded herself on the train and is interviewing the girls as they work. Not just Lydia, but all the girls, because she's a lady not a dude!

When the train pulls back into Dakotah City that evening, it is met by a crowd of press, including two more lady reporters, and tourists lining up to buy excursion tickets. The girl's gambit is successful.

Jane and her railroad are about to become famous.

Philip Sydney, in a posh San Francisco hotel lobby, buys an Illustrated Weekly and opens to a story with pictures of the amazing Railroad Girls of the DC&M.

CHAPTER 42: AMBUSH AT THE WATER TANK

A couple days later...

The evening train is once again leaving DC station, and some of the “old” yard crew are back on the job, but Jane, Becky, Kitty, Lydia and Victoria(Franca) are still working the train. Business is tremendous!

Nanny has insisted on riding the train each day, to be there if Rebecca needs her – and Rebecca, used to being waited upon, does use her: hair brush, tea, cookie, fresh handkerchief, hand wash, etc.

Lynette, not to be outdone by a British nanny, also insists on riding the train, but she is soon bored and reads fashion magazines and romances. She primps Lydia for the photos, interviews.

The enterprising lady reporter is climbing back on board and Jane greets her.

Playful, delightful Lydia is chattering away to the reporter while waving at her fans and blowing kisses to the photographers who have multiplied!

Brandt, the Kid and Scout exit an eating house near the station and follow the crowd to see what’s up. Lydia is on a little platform, singing and playing guitar (a railroad song, like Jimmie Rodgers).

People are happy, packing onto the train, taking the ride for the sake of the ride.

Brandt observes. His eyes narrow. Kitty, in her overalls, sees him, he sees her and gives a contemptuous laugh. She’s embarrassed, but somehow digs it. Brandt looks at Jane, cool and in control. He exits. (Horseback?)

Paul Shipworth is embarking. He and Edward are meeting with a new client – best done in the posh office/showroom they maintain in the D.S. High Street. They have marvelous scale models of the best projects – hotel, church, assembly rooms, pumproom, etc.

Fergus is carrying Paul’s portfolio and Paul is giving last-minute reminders on a dozen subjects.

Fergus sees Vicki shoveling coal and is struck by Cupid’s crooked arrow.

Arlette is seeing Betty Simple onto the train. Her arms are full of packages for delivery to customers in the Springs.

Fergus pushes past Betty to get portfolio onto train.

Arlette issues a reproof and shoots Paul a look of hatred. Jane sees.

With a Gallic shrug, Arlette says to Jane – “She is a bitch, with no morals whatsoever, but she is useful enough to me. My only fear is of losing the custom of wives whose husbands she is shagging.” Another shrug.

Betty is a fashion snob, which is useful to Arlette. E.g., Betty raves to customer #1 about customer #2’s awesome gown, creating desire for same in customer #1.

Jane has everything under control and is working at her conductor’s desk when a low voice behind her asks, “Got a few minutes?” She glances to her left to see the reflection of the seats behind her – an old trick. It’s the Sheriff of D.C.

“Business in Milltown,” he says, answering a question she hadn’t asked. “I’m not here just to protect you – at least not officially. Privately, I’m worried you’re riling up a lot of powerful people who were counting on this railroad failing so they could get their hands on it. I can think up a lot of reasons for

these robber barons, lords and ladies to want your uncle removed. Even if they didn't dirty their hands with it themselves. I hate them and their high and mighty ways."

"And you think we're in danger?" asks Jane.

"You bet, you in particular, but all of you young ladies. You all might be important in your own worlds, but out here, you're just a fly in their ointment. They'll swat you as soon as kiss you, pretty though you all may be. The only ones up at the Halt that day are the pillars of Englishtown society and their loyal dogsbodies. I don't trust em. Not the sneaky Colonel or the guilty-looking dark girl. Not that bunch of arty types, nor their quack medicos and Frenchies. Hypocrites, all of them."

Jane asks, "Which of them do you think killed my uncle? And why?"

Sheriff says, "I don't rightly know, and I can't get past the Englishtown code of silence – loyalty to their own kind – to get to the truth. You're not English, but you are an insider. What do you think? (Spy on them?)"

The train is pulling into Dakotah Springs.

Paul and Betty are preparing to disembark. Jane is making announcements, doing her job, seeing people off the train.

Paul pauses as he exits, and says to Jane, "My dear Jane, I know you are preoccupied, but the suppliers are absolutely demanding cash on the barrelhead. If the railroad goes under, they don't want to be left holding the bag."

Jane goes back to her desk and rejoins Sheriff. She picks up where they left off –

"I'm no more an insider with these English folks than you are!" she retorted. "Born and raised right here and you know it, seeing me grow up from a kid(?)"

"Yes, but that Eastern college education shows in the way you talk, the things you talk about, the things you think."

"I don't think the killer was English at all! Who was at that party with everything to lose if my uncle didn't play ball? The American – Philip Sydney! I'm sure he's behind the break-ins and the poaching as well. What will he do next?!"

"...What will he do next?" echoed in Jane's head as she directed the slowdown and stop at the water tower...

She unlocks a drawer and takes out her holster (?) and two handguns. She straps them on and then opens a long closet and put on a duster. She takes two rifles out of the closet and tosses one to the Sheriff.

Noisy and blowing out steam clouds, the train slows as it comes to a clearing, high above the river. A new type of windmill keeps the water tank filled from a spring. The tank is high up on legs so gravity can fill the train's boiler via a spout.

In passenger cars, Kitty and Lydia go through cars advising passengers that stop will be brief, best to stay on board. Folk still getting up anyway.

Vicki and Rhys climb onto top of tender to fill reservoir tank. (?) They are jerking the spout into position on top of the tender.

With the long (?) train at a standstill and billowing lots of steam, on a curve, the engine is visible to the trailing cars.

Jane hops off one side and walks towards the engine, her long coat billowing.

The Sheriff stays in his seat, intently scanning the woods, and checking his rifle is ready. He stands, unbuttons his coat, pushes it back to free his handguns and reveal the badge on his vest.

Kitty and Lydia are trying to corral wandering passengers - scientist quartet who have been drinking heartily and now they troop off the train to pee, over Kitty's protest in German and Polish.

Jane slings her rifle over her back and climbs up onto top of train where water is being taken on by Rhys and Vicki.

Jane spots movement on top of the water tank, more movement in the bushes, shouts warning just as –

A troop of “Indians” attacks the stationary train, whooping and swinging tomahawks to terrorize the passengers, shooting rifles into the air, attempting to swarm the cars. They swing down from overhanging trees. Passengers are shouting, screaming, fainting, scrambling to get back aboard, closing the windows.

Some of the passengers cower – others join in the melee.

Nanny pokes with her umbrella. Lynette swings her ‘priming satchel’ to ward off attackers.

A gunman on top of the tank is sniping. Sheriff shouts warning, shoots.

Jane exciting climb to top of tank and ju jitsus him over the side, she pauses and surveys the battleground.

She sees Sheriff behind a barricade, picking off attackers. They exchange signals. It's clear to her that these are no Indians, despite their leather pants, bare torsos, and painted faces. For one thing, many of them have beards, others, curly hair and freckles. (Look like a metal band.)

Jane sees Franca, who had set up for a shot of the watering, instead documenting the attack. A guy comes at Franca with a tomahawk raised and she punches hm in the face.

Jane sees Rhys and Victoria fighting an “Indian” who has climbed atop the engine.

Jane shoots and the attacker falls to the ground, grasping on to engine parts as he slides. A friend pulls him back into the woods.

Hidden in the woods, Brandt, Scout and the Kid watch the progress of the raid. Scout is critical/proud/offended?? of her pseudo-Indians' behavior. The Kid is freaking and protests to Brandt. “We were just supposed to scare them!”

Rhys and Vicki have the tank closed again.

Jane yells, “Get her moving! We're sitting ducks!”

The passengers are crowding back onboard.

Jack has been shooting at would-be boarders. He shouts to Rebecca – “Get us out of here!”

Rebecca starts twisting knobs and throwing levers. She's got this! Maybe flubs a bit, but recovers. She's driving a train!!

Jane runs to a new vantage point atop the water tank. She sees the Lady reporter scribbling furiously in her notebook a light of ecstatic triumph in her face. What a scoop! It will be the making of her!

Jane sees Kitty, crying and stomping her foot in frustration as she continues to yell at the drunken scientists.

Jane sees Lydia, trying to corral some runaway children while their mother comforts her shrieking baby.

Jane sees Lydia, snatched from behind and pulled kicking and screaming into the mail car by a half-naked bearded "Indian."

From the woods, the Kid sees Lydia being abducted. Raises his gun to shoot the attacker, but is restrained by Brandt. They fight ferociously.

With a jerk that makes Rebecca wince, the train starts moving. The noise is immense. Rebecca is intense.

Jane rides the spout cable down to the top of the engine, runs full speed along the tops of the cars, jumping between them (as in earlier scene), dodging attackers, to the mail car door. The train has picked up speed, bells clang, whistles are shrieking, echoing off the cliffs. Among the sounds are Lydia's screams.

In the woods, the fight continues. The Kid has a knife to Brandt's throat, but is overpowered – he's much smaller than Brandt – Kid is knocked out.

Jane bursts into the mail car – it's very dark and suddenly quiet in the mail car. Lydia is lying on her back, a man on top of her. He's dead. A screwdriver protrudes from his eye. Lydia is unconscious, with cuts and bruises on her face and arms, but she's alive, Jane sees.

CHAPTER 43: AFTERMATH OF THE AMBUSH AND ASSAULT

In the woods, the Kid comes to, alone – scrambles to catch the departing train, fails, runs for his horse, tethered in the woods. It's gone. He cries.

Jane pulls the corpse off Lydia's body and comes back to tenderly rearrange her clothes. She covers Lydia with her long duster and gets to work. She rolls open the door, right at her feet is a sheer drop to the river below.

She goes to the body, removes the screwdriver and tosses it over the abyss. It bounces and jingles on its long long way down, but the train is moving on. Jane must work fast.

She rolls the body as close as she dares to the open doors, then she finds railing to grasp securely and lies on her back and pushes the body out with her feet, timed to a bit of a reverse curve where there is less chance of being observed.

She closes the doors. Lydia is coming to. Freaked out. "He's gone!"

"Yes, you wounded him but he got away. You are safe." She doesn't want Lydia to know she killed a man. One trauma – the rape? – is plenty, she thinks. She hugs Lydia. Goes back to her job to get Kitty to go to Lydia.

Kitty is rushing towards mail car, freaked out, shaken. Whispers "I saw."

"Wait," Jane says. "Did anyone else see?"

"I don't think so," says Kitty.

"Good," says Jane. "No one need know."

"They must have seen her get taken."

"Yes, but then he jumped."

"Yes," says Kitty, "He must have jumped."

"Send Lynette to Lydia, tell nanny to make a hot drink and join them. Swear them both to secrecy, I need hardly say."

In Dakota City, word of the ambush has raced up and down the wires. The crowd that meets the train, the snapping flashbulbs, etc. elicit feeble smiles from the exhausted girls, till Jane rallies them and they "perform Victory."

The girls walk quietly towards the station.

Mrs. Ickes is filling them in as they walk. There's been a development – and it's that Duncan Campbell is back on the job! Here he is!

He greets Jane with open arms and much concern. He says, "Some of the old crew are back in town already, others are on their way. We've got it covered."

He has to make payroll and Jane says she'll get the money. But Rebecca notices that Jane looks worried. "Money is not a problem, I've got plenty," she says to Jane.

But in general the return of Duncan and crew, the lifting of this weight off Jane's and all the girls' shoulders at this moment is a great blessing and they feel it. They talk about it as they wash, change, help one another, etc. Everyone is keeping a concerned eye on Lydia, who is deathly quiet.

The Professor comes in to the changing room, makes the girls sit down. Puts an arm around Jane on one side and Rebecca on the other. "I am so proud of you all, of your capability and incredible bravery. But it must stop right now. The girls are all too sobered to attempt to fight her.

"You did it girls. You kept the trains running, together, as a team."

"We ran a railroad and we got famous," says Kitty. "That's something to be proud of."

Franca takes a group photo of them in their street clothes with the engine, but Lydia hides in the back of the shot. She speaks at last. "I need a bath." There is silence as the girls feel her pain.

CHAPTER 44: JANE INVESTIGATES SOME MORE

Jane is back in DC early the next morning.

Friendly session with Duncan Campbell, but he needs \$ badly for crews.

Jane's next stop is the bank. Banker is old family friend, but he says rapid expansion has tapped the limit of their credit.

The next stop is the Sheriff. They review yesterday's action. She thanks him for his help in the fight. Very bonding. (What is he doing about the attack? Is it his jurisdiction?)

They recap whole case as it now stands, trying to tie Henry's death to the moves on the railroad.

He tells her Sydney is due on the afternoon train. A tip off.

She goes by the works of Burnham & Shipworth. Panorama of activity. Climbs stairs to Paul's office.

Fergus is alone. They talk.

Paul comes in. They talk. Paul needs \$\$\$.

Paul strongly recommends that she sell the RR, the resort, the whole portfolio of holdings. His analysis is very depressing.

She meets the newspaper guy in the street and goes back to his office for a cup of coffee.

He asks very good, insightful questions that help her see the case "clearly." To her, it all points to Philip Sydney.

CHAPTER 45: DOC-WIFE AND TEDDY VISIT THE LAB CAR

Back at the Dartmoor, the girls slept in, bone tired and giddy at the same time. What an amazing accomplishment – they praise one another. A story for their grandchildren to tell their grandchildren!

Lynette is helping Lydia get dressed. Lydia is banged up and shaken, but she's strong. She's dressed very loosely and plainly. Lynette thinks to protest but stops herself. She bundles up yesterdays' sweater and overalls." I think those overalls saved me!" says Lydia. "It could have been so much worse!"

She tells Lynette not to put out a dress for Maud's card party that night. She doesn't feel like going out – especially with her face smashed.

"But you're a hero!" says Lynette. Lydia smiles, but it hurts. She's very depressed, thinking the Kid was part of the attacking gang.

Mrs. Ickes reminds Rebecca that Doc-wife was invited to bring Teddy to lab car. Suggests today might be a good day? She noticed Doc-Mom boarding the train to Dakotah City that morning. Great! Get Doc-wife alone.

Rebecca picks up Doc wife and Teddy in her carriage and makes small talk as they drive to lab car.

She has Nanny with her, and Nanny engrosses Teddy so Rebecca can talk to doc-wife.

Rhys is on hand at the lab car to involve Teddy, while Rebecca pries info out of timid Doc-wife in luxurious saloon car. (Extensive description of sensuous, deluxe car so when Syd comes we know what's behind that door.)

Rebecca leads Doc-wife to talk of Henry and the poor woman can finally share her grief. She loved him. He was everything noble and good. She wishes she were dead.

When pressed on events of day of murder, she staunchly defends Doc's alibi – almost pre-emptively – as if by rote.

Rhys sees Doc-wife home. She relapses into listlessness. The boy is afraid of what the Doc and Doc-mom will say and do. Rhys cheers him up.

Nanny has shopping in town and will take a cab home, but first, she has a serious talk with Rebecca. She's a sensible old woman and not undiscerning. They talk about things – Sydney, marriage, responsibility, her parents' hopes for her. The importance of a dynastic alliance.

CHAPTER 46: THE PROFESSOR IN THE NOVELISTS' LAIR

Meanwhile, the Professor is lounging on a sofa in the Colonel's study. Wiggins is coming and going. If the Colonel's easy camaraderie with this Italian woman bothers him, he doesn't let it show.

"Please do sit down, Mr. Wiggins," says the Professor. "I'm longing to know what your next romance will be about – besides romance, of course." She looks from one man to the other, acknowledging this co-creatorship.

Wiggins unbends.

"Well," he says excitedly, "we're thinking *girl heroes!* – action, adventure, *and* romance."

"No more shrinking violets, eh what, Wiggins?!" says the Colonel. "Superwomen!"

CHAPTER 47: LADY MAUD'S CARD PARTY

At Maud's house – Maud and Alec watch out the window as Charles works on rope tricks outside. They speculate on whether Charles can get Jane to marry him.

"There's more than one way to get control of that right-of-way!" says Alec. "Buck him up, get him to make a move at the party tonight. Is Sydney coming?"

"Yes," says Maud.

"Arrange something to distract him from Jane," says Alec.

Maud's party – talk of yesterday's ambush, glad girls are okay and done with railroading. Girls aren't so sure. They liked the hard work and the excitement. Speculate who and why did it. Jane incensed. Blames Sydney.

Sydney's late entry. He's charming, likeable, attractive, but Jane hates him. Won't even look at him, except to glare. She's hanging close to Rebecca.

Lady Maud sweeps in, to secure Rebecca for her card tables. She trusts Miss de Steyne plays cards, and won't mind being partnered with Philip Sydney against Doc and Doc-Mom.

They settle themselves at the card table. Rebecca opposite Sydney.

Doc and Doc-mom play like an experienced old married couple.

Alec turns to Charles. "Your girlfriend is alone and looks a bit bored. Go tell her about your castle and the highland lodge, deer-stalking, grouse-shooting, you know the sort of thing she likes. Ask her to visit Scotland."

Charles, who is after all, very young, take this in and sets off to captivate the cowgirl. Soon they are talking very animatedly indeed. She's almost jumping around.

Jane is regaling Charles with her derring-do stunts during the ambush.

"But why? Who?" asks Charles.

"Him!" says Jane, glaring at a very enchanted Sydney, playing cards with Rebecca.

Rebecca and Sydney are winning big! She's an amazing card player, a mature and canny partner. Sydney is developing tremendous respect for her. He's also starting to find her hot.

Rebecca and Sydney's card play is somehow erotic. The Colonel watches them play and stores the scene up in his memory for future fiction. Sex is in the air.

Winning becomes Rebecca. As they collect their winnings, her eyes glow, her cheeks are pink, though she was poker-faced during the play. The dance of glances and chances with Sydney has roused something deep within her. He is a worthy equal.

Doc-Mom chats up Kitty – "Where is your beautiful friend tonight? Not unwell, I hope, after your escapades?"

Kitty says, "Strictly speaking, they weren't escapades, which implies triviality, but adventures, which are noble." She walks away.

At the Dartmoor – Lydia wasn't up to going to Maud's card party. She is sitting on the balcony of Uncle's Dartmoor apartment. She's given Lynette the night off to see Rhys, no doubt. She's thinking, playing guitar.

She hears another soft guitar join the song from below the balcony. A voice begins crooning a cattle-soothing sentimental ballad.

Lydia goes to the edge. Her face, cleaned up, is not too bad. It's the kid down below, of course. His face is banged up from his fight with Brandt. He looks up at her with big, liquid eyes – says nothing, asks nothing.

"Play another one, please," she says. She rests her head on her arms on the railing and quietly thinks.

There's a silence as the song gently ends.

"I fought like the devil, you know," she finally says.

"I love you," says the Kid. He climbs up to the balcony and they sit, holding each other. "I love you," he says, over and over.

At Maud's party, guests are saying goodnight. Sydney catches Jane as she puts her cloak on. He explains that he had "nothing to do with the violence."

"And nothing to do with the ambush?" asks Jane.

Sydney says, "I had hoped to make your customers think twice by demonstrating the potential hazards of the route, under feminine guidance."

"A plan that backfired," says Jane.

"The violence against you girls was never sanctioned by me. I have severed my association with employees who unfortunately overstepped their boundaries."

"Good. You got a murderer fired," says Jane. "I am to get one hanged!"

She leaves, staring him in the eye. It's clear she means him.

Outside Maud's – It's still light out – a beautiful midsummer evening. Rebecca has chosen to walk to the station. Not very far, where she will once again sleep on her luxurious train.

There are people about, but one particular set of steps seems to be following her.

She has taken to always carrying a gun, and she reaches for it now, as the footsteps quickened behind her.

She turned to face her pursuer. It was, as she suspected, Philip Sydney.

"Put away your gun, Miss de Steyne. Surely you can't think me such a villain as to intend to offer harm to your person?"

"You are one who holds his cards close, Mr. Sydney. Who knows what you intend to offer?"

"I had hoped to offer you my arm. I'm going your way."

She looks at him steadily. Jane thinks he's a murderer; she thinks he's a scoundrel.

"Perhaps another time." She won't take his arm but they walk on together, in silence at first.

At last, Rebecca says, "I am no naïf, Mr. Sydney. Sharp dealings are the norm in business. I know that. But what you did yesterday is beyond the pale. I've seen evil. My god! I've dined with Jay Gould! Even my own father is among the canniest bankers alive, but you sir, go too far."

"I have the utmost respect for your experience and sagacity, Miss de Steyne, and you are the sort of card player who makes the game hardly at all about chance. I admit, yesterday's exercise exceeded my mandate. The responsible party is no longer in my employ."

He continues, to her silence...

"I regret you all were inconvenienced, but that was the point. It needed to be shown that clever as you all are, you young ladies are not fit to guarantee the safety of passengers nor the security of freight. You are all charming, I'm sure, but unfit, I say, for a man's work."

"So, apparently, is everything that is interesting or daring or fun or remunerative," says Rebecca.

"Surely you can want for nothing, Miss de Steyne. The world is your oyster."

"Nonsense!" she retorts.

They are passing a row of tethered horses.

"I am as free as those mares and geldings. Free to wait to be led by the nose at my master's will. Free to submit to his bidding with patience and his clumsy handling with gratitude. Free to obey. On all fours, should he so bid."

"You excite me strangely, Miss de Steyne," says Sydney.

They have come to the door of Rebecca's saloon car.

"Let me in," he says, touching her. "Obey me."

And she can't help herself. She unlocks the door and he follows her in. As the door shuts in our faces, we hear her laugh.

CHAPTER 48: THE DEATH OF BETTY SIMPLE DISCOVERED

In her bed at the Dartmoor, Jane is dreaming – she’s a little girl, walking through fields of wildflowers with Uncle Henry. They come to some tracks with weeds growing up between the ties. He lies down on the tracks and goes to sleep. She can’t wake him. Then in the dream, she hears the train coming. Through his eyes, she sees Mr. Sydney standing over him, his face furious. She’s got his POV as train approaches. His eyes wide open as it bears down on him and the dream ends. Her eyes are suddenly wide open, and she almost vomits.

In Dakota City, the roundhouse doors are pulled apart just before dawn. It’s very spooky. With a clatter of rattling equipment Franca and Victoria – their voices echoing in the cavernous space -- set up to photograph the roundhouse light effects. The DC&M rents spaces for their engines in the large storage and maintenance yard in Dakota City, where the D&RG is the main occupier. Their engines are larger, newer, more powerful than Jane’s, but Jane’s now got the *prettiest* of them all, in *Destiny*.

(The fires had been banked last evening, the boilers full, the stack capped with just a crack, a good-sized bank in the back of the firebox. No watchman.)

Victoria is starting to get into the photography thing now, and her “old master’s” knowledge of lighting and composition are making Franca’s photos works of art. They were impressed with the Roundhouse and are setting up to shoot when light comes up.

They are hurrying to get their stuff set up so they can get their shots before – and after – the crew arrive and get to work. They see it as a story – a film if you will.

Engines are “head in” – facing the row of windows where sun rise will illuminate them.

They’ve timed the shot to that moment, which reveals and records the state of the body in the cab of Jane’s prime engine (not *Destiny*).

Roundhouse. The sun comes out. All is revealed. Looking through the lens finder, Franca sees what’s in the cab.

Sends Vicki to investigate.

Eeek! It’s Betty Simple, dead!!

On the de Steyne train, Sydney is stroking his bristly chin as he looks in the mirror and finishes dressing in Rebecca’s sumptuous train car. Rebecca’s hand comes around and strokes it too, he had seen her over his shoulder. He kisses her hand.

As the sun comes out, he steps out onto the observation deck, steps quickly down and over the tracks and outside the station hails a waiting cab to Dakota City and the main line and is driven away. Rebecca watches from a window.

Rebecca is very pleased with herself and hums as she dances a bit as she tidies her room before Nanny sees it. Then she goes to her lab car and works happily, losing track of time.

Rebecca is working in her lab car. Jane bursts in with the news. Betty Simple! Dead. Murdered. Vicki and Franca found the body.

“When was she killed?” asks Rebecca.

"Last night, I guess," says Jane, "sometime after they knocked off for the night. Body was stone cold, Vicki said."

"Let's get over there!"

Big busy railroad yard and roundhouse for the D&RG, DC&M and other short lines. Lots of noise, smoke, steam, activity.

When Jane and Rebecca get there, the crime scene is a madhouse, overrun with curiosity seekers who have climbed on the engine to gawk at the girl's body in the cab.

"So much for evidence!" says Rebecca.

Duncan Campbell is talking to the Sheriff and the two men join Jane and Rebecca.

Workers are insisting they need to get the engine in service and the body out of there.

The doctor is climbing out of the cab and wiping his hands. "Strangulation, I would say," he pronounces. "Not surprising, a cheap whore."

Arlette arrives, hastily-dressed and accepts responsibility for burying the girl. "Poor silly fool," she says. "She pushed someone too far; it was only a matter of time. She had talent, but lacked finesse."

Victoria looks keenly at the corpse as it is manhandled out of the cab, put on a stretcher or door, covered with a dirty tarp.

The newly-arrived undertaker and his boy advance to get the body. Jane notices that the boy is in tears.

"Franca," says Vicki, "Quick. Get a shot of the body before it's gone!"

Vicki stops the bearers – "Here, she says, taking off her beautiful silk-fringed shawl. "Cover the poor girl with this instead."

She whisks off the tarp and Franca gets the shot. Vicki lays the shawl kindly over the young girl's pale body and face.

"Did you see that?" asks Vicki, joining Jane and Rebecca. "That girl never died of strangulation" (Grandfather/anatomy classes/etc.) "Lace was put around neck post-mortem. It's not what killed her."

"What then?" ask the girls.

"I'd almost say drugs!" says Vicki.

She turns to Rebecca, "Did you see what she was wearing? A day dress that would never have done for an evening visit of any kind. Her work clothes, as it were, not what she would show to a lover/wear to a tryst."

The DC newspaper guy is there and Vicki sees him interviewing Franca, and goes to join her.

"Hi," she says to the fellow. "I'm Victoria Van Leyden – LEYDEN -and as you know, this is the Honorable Miss Francesca Frawley of Dakotah Springs. We are appalled at what we saw, but have no comment."

Rebecca is thinking about the doctor giving a “mistaken?” cause of death. Why? Just couldn’t be bothered for a common flirt? Or could there be more to it?

“We need to get that lace!” says Rebecca. “Who wants to go to the undertakers?”

“I do,” says Jane. “That boy was a bit too sad.”

“Crime passionel, do you think? She was very ‘popular’.” Says Becky.

“Or something more sinister,” says Jane. “Certainly not coincidence that she was killed on our railroad! Another try to shut us down by that damn Philip Sydney. I know you like him Becky, and I’m sorry, but that man is a cold-blooded killer, and I bet it will prove he was with Betty last night.”

Rebecca can’t bring herself to alibi Sydney at the cost of her own reputation. And she hates keeping secrets from her friends. But if anyone find out about time #1, there will be no time #2! And she very much wants there to be. What a conundrum.

“I’ll go with you to the undertaker,” she offers in expiation/penance.

A few minutes’ drive brings them to it. They go around to the yard and work shed in back, where the body is being worked up. Rebecca hates this part.

Undertaker is sort of like the morgue doctor in TV shows.

“Bit of an odd thing,” he says to Jane. “These marks on her neck, made by this lace, look exactly like the ones on your uncle’s wrists. Same off color and size and shape.”

Jane and Rebecca look at one another. If Betty was tied after death, maybe Henry was too? Therefore dead before being hit by the train. This is a sad comfort to Jane. Picturing his horror has been hell for her.

The undertaker’s boy is sobbing as he unties the lace around Betty’s neck. It’s a very stout corset lace. Presumably from the corset of a very stout lady!

Boy hands lace – with loving regret – to Jane, and wheels body away.

Undertaker says, “He’s a good boy. But a fool. Everyone knows what that girl was. A blackmailing whore. Don’t I know it!”

Rebecca says, “She was reputed to be a very good seamstress. And so young. I hope she rests in peace.”

Undertaker boy comes back and tries to hand Jane the shawl Vicki used to cover the body.

“Please keep it in memory of her,” says Jane – thinking in horror of giving it back to Vicki!! The grateful boy now worships Jane.

“We’d better go rescue Vicki and Franca,” says Jane.

They walk to the Sheriff’s office/jail. Charles hails them and walks along, through the busy commercial streets. Mix of business and frontier/cowboy looks. Plenty of foreigners, too, for the eclipse.

“I say, Miss Jane,” Charles begins, “Highlands are ripping in the Fall. Honored if you’d be my father’s and my guest up at the old castle, you know. Hunt, shoot, come stay with us, long as you like, forever, if you like. Tell her, Miss Rebecca.”

Serious as the Betty Situation is, Jane has to smile as the boy’s awkward adorableness.

"Thanks," she says. "Got work, school. But nice idea. Thanks."

"OK, then," says the boy. They've come to the jailhouse.

It's cool, dark, quiet inside the jail house, except for periodic flashes and clicks and flares. Franca is discovered, shooting portraits of the sheriff and deputy and prisoners. Victoria is smoking a cigarette and yarning through the bars with a prisoner in a cell.

"I say!" says Charles (who says I say too often), "Take a shot of me. In jail. Getting arrested by the Sheriff! My father will love it!"

A series of silly poses ensue. Everyone laughs. Shot of all four girls behind bars.

While the hijinks go on, the girls are very intelligently recapping their actions and discoveries so far.

Betty's past, potential enemies, reputation (he knows), insinuations, evidence of corset lace on neck, condition of the body, daytime work clothes.

CHAPTER 49: TROUBLES ADDING UP

In the Dartmoor hotel Dining Room, The Professor and Kitty are at a large convention of eclipse scientists, enthusiasts, with lectures by authorities. People can't stop talking about the **disgraceful, sensational murder** of Betty Simple. That men routinely shoot one another in the West was part of its romantic appeal, but women are expected to live and die discreetly, even in barbarian lands.

The Professor is well-known and recognized by her colleagues. Some are respectful, some condescending.

"**You've let your girls run wild**, I hear!" says one. Another adds, "Murder!" "What next!?" says a third.

This does not redound well to her prestige, the school's reputation or the girl's future prospects in academia. She's worried. It gets worse.

"I, for one, refuse to ride that railroad. I'll take a carriage and be bumped along rather than encourage that unfeminine behavior."

There's a worrisome chorus of agreement and if Rebecca were there to hear it, she'd be buying stock in the stagecoach line.

"**Murder is very bad for business**, it seems," remarks Kitty as a reporter scribbles away in the background.

Back at the jail, the girls are being questioned by the Sheriff, a very intelligent man with tolerance of humanity's foibles, but no compromise with evil. He is incorruptible and therefore a target of vested interests. Rebecca mentally makes a note to be sure he gets reelected.

"So, **when will you arrest him?**" Jane is saying. "You've got to admit he's guilty!"

"I do not. I do admit you've raised some question about what went on that day at Brakeman's Halt. I promise you I will look into them and if Sydney is guilty, I promise you I will deal with him."

A shopkeeper sticks his head in the door. Gunshots popping, horses panicking, in the background.

"**Elmer drunk again?**" asks the Sheriff.

"Yup." Says the shopkeeper.

"Chester, see the ladies out, please. Excuse me," says the Sheriff, strapping his guns on, putting on his hat as he leaves.

Coming out of the jailhouse, Rebecca and Jane bid adieu to Vicki and Franca and Charles. Maud was waiting. She's very upset. Sick to see Franca in trouble and personally and professionally worried about what all this crime is doing to her sales efforts.

"But look how busy we are!" says Jane.

"It's all because of the eclipse. A once in a lifetime event. Our success depends on reputation and recommendations and your stubbornness is destroying both."

Jane is stunned, about to retort, but Rebecca squeezes her hand and Jane bites her tongue, bids Maud and Franca goodbye.

In Maud's carriage – Franca is vivacious – well out of her normal apathy – fired up by the adventure, the comradeship, the sense of purpose and belonging. Her face is glowing. **Maud rethinks her promise to Alec.**

"We have to pick our battles," says Rebecca as the others drive away.

Rebecca says, "Jane, I know you don't want to hear this, but **we have to face the finances**, and it starts with knowing where we stand. Let's go have a look at the books."

Surrounded by ledgers, etc., in the DC&M RR Office, Duncan is shaking his head sadly. "I appreciate that the railroad was the moneymaker of the whole Dakotah Springs development, and it was a sound arrangement until sometime before your Uncle's death, when the RR assets were steadily drawn down."

"Whenabouts?" asked Rebecca.

"I'm not accusing anybody, but it seems to coincide with my replacement by Mr. Donnelly."

"Do you think my uncle knew" asks Jane.

"I wonder. **Perhaps he found out? That why he was killed.**" Says Duncan. "Now, I have had private chats with our banking friends and they won't advance a penny to us, **no loans** at all while the status of the RR is up in the air. We've got to resolve some things or find another source of \$\$. "

Jane is thinking fast. "We know that Donnelly is somehow afraid of Brandt, who works for Sydney. Donnelly is Sydney's plant, I bet. Put in the job to run down the RR."

"But why would your uncle let that happen? What power could Sydney have over him?" says Rebecca.

"I don't know," says Jane, "But I aim to find out."

"Be careful, Jane," says Duncan. You could be so focused on the devil in your sights that you don't hear the devil sneaking up behind you. I could be wrong, you know."

"I could be wrong, too, and although I respect your opinion, Mr. Campbell, I feel this one in my bones," says Jane. **"I won't rest till I discover where that snake Sydney spent every second of last night."**

Rebecca thinks she is going to vomit or faint. Duncan insists on escorting them all the way to the Dartmoor, so Rebecca has no chance to discover if she has enough courage and integrity to admit that she is Sydney's alibi. But if Jane digs deep, it will all come out.

Arriving at the Dartmoor, Jane is surrounded by reporters the minute she walks in the door; Rebecca is whisked away by her waiting entourage of Nanny, Rhys and Mrs. Ickes.

Jane waves that she's okay. Rebecca waves, too. Smiles sickly.

There's a thick package waiting for Rebecca at the Dartmoor, and she waits till she's alone in her room with both Nanny and Mrs. Ickes dismissed, before she opens it, gets in bed, takes out **a sheaf of reports** and settles in for a cozy read.

A moment later, she jumps out of bed, ring for her maid and starts dressing and packing. “Mrs. Ickes, **get me on the Denver train**. Make them hold it for me. An overnight bag, quick!” Mrs. Ickes hurries off.

CHAPTER 50: REBECCA TAKES THE ORDINARY TRAIN TO DENVER

Jane drives Rebecca to DC station to make the Denver train. They talk on the way. Agree that Rebecca will take a partnership interest in the RR in exchange for abundant cash\$. Over the past week, Rebecca has been in touch with her Dad, who has contacted Mr. Bettermore and instructed him to make the deal with Rebecca and Jane's estate – Bettermore has power of attorney – and that de Steyne will back it.

Fun to see Rebecca on a regular train, even though she's got a first-class compartment to herself. She's going to Denver to arrange for cash and file partnership docs.

Establish and reinforce Rebecca as "sheltered, indulged, princess" though four years of college have softened it and given her some self-awareness.

On the train, Rebecca alternates between analyzing the case so far, and re-living her night with Sydney. She's not sure what she thinks. One thought leads to the other. E.g. "Why is the doc so 'careless'?" vs "How deliberately he touched my body."

Rebecca plays solitaire on the train while she's doing all this thinking, puts the pretty little deck back in her bag.

To clear her head of sex thinking, she takes her time with the sheaf of reports that came in that thick package –

- Arlette – killed previous employer?
- Doctor – successful at luring investors, not much use as a doctor. Facts about wife and child and doc-mom.
- Paul and Edward – gay, may be trying to hide it. Illegal, after all.
- Maud – left penniless – entail – beholden to brother the laird, a sharp businesswoman, (Franca facts?)
- Alec – specializes in shady operation, despite seeming mildness
- Colonel – more scholar than soldier, disappointment to family. OK guy.

Rebecca comes to the report that she didn't get a chance to read before the Bettermore news propelled her out of bed. It's about Sydney. She reads it now, slowly, thoroughly, but we don't know what it says. But it leaves her thoughtful, puzzled. Then she thinks of his body and is lost in dreams again.

CHAPTER 51: PAUL AND FERGUS AND THE CAUSE OF DEATH

Meanwhile --- Jane waves as Rebecca's train departs for Denver.

She strolls over to the DC&M station and approaches the ticket window. The platform is empty. The ticket seller lady and the telegrapher speak of cancellations, business being strangely slow. Hints that men are grumbling.

Jane sees Paul and Fergus. A freight car of luxury furnishings and materials has been shunted from the D&RG to the DC&M for delivery to customers in the Springs. Paul and Fergus are there to check the bill of lading, supervise, etc.

"Good morning, Mr. Shipworth, Mr. Fraser," says Jane. "An impressive haul. Looks like you got half a European castle in there!"

"That's fairly accurate, Miss Brakeman," says Paul.

"Seems funny to me that they leave England to travel half way around the world, just to look at what's in their own backyards."

"And Englishman's home is his castle, they say," says Paul, "and we make sure he can take it with him wherever he may be."

"Mr. Shipworth – Paul – how could you have deceived me about my uncle's death!? Why not tell me he was missing? Who gave you authority to disguise the means of his death? To let people think it could have been suicide?! How could you?!"

Paul doesn't have a good answer to this. He works on, silent for a moment.

"Edward and I were very fond of your uncle. He understood us and we loved him for it. When we heard he was missing, we were frantic. We all joined the search. Fergus and I took the area along the riverbed. It was clear your uncle has fallen from a great height – the cliffs rose almost sheer above the spot where we found him. His hands were bound, yes. He must have been on the tracks and pushed off by the pilot of the locomotive heading back down to the Springs. The horror of our discovery was extreme. We were sick thinking of his agony.

"Edward and I have a habit, born of self-preservation, of hiding anything out-of-the-ordinary. We could picture the sensation a murder in such lurid circumstances would give rise to – the damage to his reputation – people would of course start digging for dirt.

"But most of all, my dear, we thought about you – and we couldn't bear the thought of you being made part of a sordid tale for the man-in-the-street to consume with his morning tea!"

All this was said with great kindness and Jane's anger drained away.

"At least tell me more! Give me facts. Did you change anything else? What was he tied with?"

"A thick silk lace, like those ladies use in corsets."

"Indeed!" said Jane.

"They gave me his effects. But is it everything? What was on him when you found him?"

Fergus ticked off on his fingers – "Eyeglasses; watch; plain man's handkerchief; fancy woman's handkerchief; a few coins, keys. Spectacles in a case. Everything was dry. He hadn't been in the river."

“Why did he have a woman’s handkerchief,” Jane wondered as she strode back up the main street.

“You back already?” says the undertaker as Jane entered the hushed and dimly lit front office. The door bells are like heavenly chimes.

“Yep,” says Jane. “You forgot something when you sent my uncle’s effects to the hotel.”

“Not again!” sighs the undertaker, heaves himself out of his chair, parts the curtains to the back room and calls, “Boy! Up front please.” Boy is working over a dead body, dressing it.

Undertaker says over his shoulder to Jane – “He can’t stop himself, and the dead don’t much mind if they go under minus a pipe or a handkerchief. He never takes money, nor watches.”

“It’s a handkerchief I came to ask about – a fancy ladies handkerchief.”

Boy has joined them in the front room. Hangs his head.

“If it was fancy,” says the undertaker, “he probably gave it to that whore.”

The boy bristles.

“Did you?” asks Jane kindly. “Did you take a ladies’ handkerchief from my uncle’s body and give it to Betty Simple?”

“It were ‘broidered.,” says the boy. “With little flowers. She likes ‘broidery. And lace. I always saved the best for her. She likes nice things.”

CHAPTER 52: JULIUS AND DENVER

Rebecca comes out of her reverie as the train slows as it pulls into the unimpressive D&RG station in Denver. Rebecca had heard talk of the various lines clubbing together to build a more-convenient and prestigious "Union" station.

Waiting on the platform is the tall, nonchalant figure of handsome Julius Bettermore. Rebecca is surprised to find her libido perking up at sight of him – Jane's lawyer. WTF?, she thinks.

Julius Bettermore, Esq. (Benedict Cumberbatch, young.) had been already on his way to San Francisco on firm business and was instructed by Dad to get off in Denver and accomplish the partnership papers and filing for Jane and Rebecca. He can only delay his SF business for a day, so haste! Julius is excited to be seeing Rebecca again. He digs her.

As she greets Julius, the consciousness of her sexy thoughts gives her a demure but percolating attractiveness that is not lost on the young man.

"Partnership." He says to her. "Splendid idea!"

"Excuse me?" laughs Rebecca.

"Partnership papers, for the Brakeman railway," he clarifies.

"Yes, indeed," she says, "But first, cash!"

The bank manager is waiting for us. Shall we go straight there?"

He hails a cab, takes her overnight bag, and they drive through Denver (July 1878)

As they ride along, Rebecca explains to Julius that her goal is to provide immediate operating cash to the railroad, while fencing it in from possible interference from the Directors or other branches of the Brakeman enterprises. Too many unknowns and a possible killer among them!

The bank is grandiose. Rebecca feels right at home!

They are greeted by the manager's secretary, a girl so hot that Rebecca suddenly feels like a little grey mouse beside her. She announces them to the smiling, welcoming manager. They go in and the door closes.

In no time at all, the door opens again and the manager is bowing and shaking hands and Rebecca is gracious and grateful.

The hot secretary hands Julius back Rebecca's bag and Julius's cane/umbrella. His hands full, she puts his hat on his head, two-handed, her body against his. Rebecca watches, thinks.

Bank business successful, Julius and Rebecca proceed to their hotel, the Charpiot.

Rebecca is greeted like Royalty by the hotel staff and given their best suite. The sitting room has a large desk and they get to work.

Rebecca enumerates the terms of their partnership, and Julius glances at her with admiration as he notes the points.

At last, she's done and Julius gets down to writing it all up in legalese.

Rebecca, for her part, was growing impatient of being pent up in a hotel room. She and Julius had outlined the agreement, and he was drafting it up in legal language; she had nothing to do until they reviewed it. Rebecca, restless, stands by the window, noting the bustle in the streets below. She sees Sydney! No. She was wrong. Definitely not him. No reason to think he'd be in Denver, anyway.

"Mr. Bettermore, come out with me, just for a bit. I'm jumping out of my skin, cooped up here."

"You know I'd love to, my dear Miss de Steyne, but I must press on with this contract or my boss will have my hide."

"You're right. she would," Rebecca grudgingly admitted. Then, brightening. "I have an idea. I'll just pop down to the lobby and look in their little store for some souvenirs for the girls and pick up the newspapers."

"And come right back?" demanded the lawyer, engrossed in his writing and only glancing up at his young client. "Promise?! Half an hour at most. And you don't set foot outside the hotel."

"Promise," said Rebecca, crossing her heart with one hand and with the other, crossing her fingers behind her back. Rebecca looks in the mirror, primps a bit, sees herself pretty realistically, compared to the bank hot girl, sighs, and heads out the door, with a final admonition from Julius to not leave the premises and to be back in so many minutes.

And so, checking the contents of her deep pockets – watch, key, money, multi-tool - she set out alone to explore the Denver Palace Hotel's mysteries and attractions. "Wouldn't it be amazing if he were here, too," she thought to herself, as she advanced down the hallway to meet her own reflection in the enormous looking-glass in the grand stairwell. As she passed each door, she listened for his voice, half-ashamed, half thrilled at the thought of encountering him. But neither in the lobby, the shops, the restaurant, the barbershop, the bootblack, nor the bar, was there such a slim, elegantly tailored back, no fair head, no green eyes to be seen. The broad veranda in front of the hotel held many loungers, but not the one whose image filled her imagination. The half-hour was up, the trinkets and papers were bought, and still not quite believing that fate hadn't thrown the handsome tycoon in her way. and with rueful, self-deprecating embarrassment, she prepared to put her fantasies behind her and settle back down to working with the lawyer.

Meanwhile, in a very pretty rented hall in a different part of Denver, Maud looks on approvingly as Lydia addresses an adoring crowd of women and girls and a few supportive men. Reporters of both genders line the back wall. It's S.R.O. – Maud is good at promoting an event. Lydia is stunning.

Lydia's speech is a dramatic re-enactment of the water tower ambush, (minus the assault), and a "vindication of the rights of women." But selling the Railroad Girls/Dakotah Springs experience for sure. Governor's wife applauds.

Lydia is now 'radicalized' and on the path to becoming a suffragist-type public figure.

The Gov-wife and Maud congratulate one another on their 'find.'

Lydia comes to the end of her speech and looks out at the audience. The mysterious man from the ball – Cornelius! – is among the press! He sees her seeing him and leaves.

CHAPTER 53: JANE IN ARLETTE'S LAIR

Meanwhile, in Dakotah City, Jane's next stop is Arlette's workshop cum home. Jane had only been to Arlette's posh storefront in the Springs. Here, it's all business. Big tables, huge scissors, sewing machines. Girl/s working.

They go upstairs. In a bright, top-lit *atelier*, women are doing intricate beadwork and embroidery.

In an ironing room, a neatly uniformed maid is pressing newly-laundered, delicate, priceless items.

Jane stops, asks Arlette – "Wasn't there a story Betty told about the Doctor and a missing handkerchief?"

"Yes," says Arlette. "He came into the shop in a passion, said either we were thieves or else his wife was a whore. Swore there had been a set of six lace embroidered handkerchiefs, a gift from his mother to his worthless wife. Now the useless thing could only account for five. Betty called him an old fool and told him only five had come in for laundering."

"My God!" says Jane. "He sounds a right bastard to that poor little woman."

"But remember Miss," says Arlette, "in England, Dr. Enderleigh is the prime promoter of the Springs among the medical men who refer their patients here! He is vital to the economy of the place. You must not antagonize him."

Laundress has been trying to get a word in and now she says, "Pardon, Madame, these were brought in yesterday by the Enderleigh's maid. There are six handkerchiefs again. But one has a stain I can't remove and I am afraid he will be angry all over again."

CHAPTER 54: WE MEET AGAIN

Snacking from a bag of bon-bons, entertained and energized by her hotel explorations, Rebecca climbs the staircase to her suite. A maid with an armful of linens ducks her a curtsy and Rebecca offers her a candy which she accepts with a smile.

"Did they send my gifts up yet? She calls to Julius as she takes off her hat and checks her hair in the mirror in the foyer.

"They only sent the one," said a now-familiar voice. Philip Sydney was sitting in Julius' seat, reading the papers on the desk. There was no sign of Julius Bettermore. "Your friend received a message saying you needed him urgently in the hotel stables."

She looks at him for a minute, then walks over and offers him a bon-bon. He takes a handful. She sits down in the chair opposite him and leans back and sighs.

"Where's your train?" he says.

"At the Springs."

"Where's your entourage."

"Wherever they like."

"You're not alone."

"No."

"You're with a man."

"No."

"I saw him. I sent him away."

"He's a lawyer."

"You don't need a lawyer."

"He's not my lawyer."

"He's your Man."

"I don't need a man."

He gets up, comes to her, looms over her – "You need me. You needed me last night."

She can't deny the excitement suddenly telegraphed throughout her body, the racing pulse that sends the blood to her cheeks and lips. Though she had been dreaming of coming face-to-face with him, pursuing him, one might say, this sudden discovery of him in her own private space has disconcerted her. And now, the blatantness of his intention to manipulate her through her passions and her seeming inability to turn off the switch that so exigently turned her on, almost – but not quite – served as a counter to those attentions' efficacy.

It occurred to Rebecca that Sydney might know of her soon-to-be-majority share in the DC&M. She left the doorway and walked to the desk where her attorney had been working before falling for Sydney's ruse. Would that scion of generations of circumspect lawyers have been incautious enough – perhaps panicked enough for his old friend's well-being – to rush off to find her without first carefully securing the contracts? No, she was relieved to see that the only papers on the desk were a miscellany of letters, playbills, telegrams, visiting cards, and newspapers. The paper Sydney had

been regarding so intently when she entered was only a colorful broadsheet extolling the theatrical troupe currently making the rounds.

Sydney was watching her. She laughed and turned her back to him, both to hide her agitation and to relieve it by removing the visual source of stimulation. He certainly was a very good-looking man, she thought. Just exactly what a man should be. Crossing the room to the fireplace, she took up the poker – a sturdy brass utensil of considerable weight – and stirred the fire. Then turning to him, poker still in her hand, she asked again.

“Why are you here?” She stood very straight and looked well-prepared to defend herself. “It is not my custom, Mr. Sydney, to be found alone in hotel rooms with strange men,” she went on.

“Then Miss de Steyne, we must not be *found*.” He smiled at her and laughed. “And you must confess that I am not at all strange! I act as any man would in the presence of such *interesting* attractions. Why am I here?” He seemed genuinely perplexed for a moment. “I’m not entirely sure. But I certainly come in peace, my dear Miss de Steyne.” He looked amusedly but respectfully at the poker in the young woman’s hand and took a stance near the fire. “No, of course I’m sure why I’m here. I want the Brakeman girl’s railroad.”

Would Sydney try to marry *her* to get the railroad? How shallow could he possibly be? Or – seductive thought – perhaps he was really taken with her, saw her as more desirable in every way than any other woman he had loved. Seductive thought indeed. To be the most special. Was this whole eclipse passage to be a journey inward? She consoled herself with the thought that since she was so young, the retrospective work would not be overwhelming. Meanwhile, here he was, still as stirring to her senses as ever. She thought that to lose the moment would be a pity. She stepped up to him and put her arms around his neck and kissed him. His response was immediate and very, very professional. Her fantasy dissolved immediately. She was nothing to him, nothing beyond a stepping stone to his ambitions. Still, she had little enough experience being in the arms of an experienced lover, and decided to let the moment linger, and learn what so many women had learned before her – that there was a skill to taking a woman, and this man had it in spades. Rebecca wondered how far he would go, how far she would let herself go; but what this embrace might have led to was moot, for they were not to be left unchaperoned for long. A knock gave them just enough time to draw apart, before it was followed by the entrance of Lady Maud. Rebecca’s cheeks are burning. Sydney’s got a hard-on.

“Forgive the intrusion, my dear Miss de Steyne,” began Lady Maud. “Why, Mr. Sidney! How do you do? I hadn’t realized you were in Denver.”

“Delighted to see you, my Lady,” says Sydney. “I had understood that Mr. Bettermore was to be met with in this suite and I had hopes to interest him in a projected scheme of mine.”

“How glibly he lies,” thought Rebecca. “Lady Maud seems totally oblivious to his duplicity, and as charmed as ever by his manners.

“I’ll wager you did!” says Lady Maud. “Always the businessman! Rebecca, my dear, the Governor’s wife insists that you dine with her here in the hotel – a wonderful restaurant – the Delmonico’s of the West, they say. She is so eager to enlist you in her latest cause! It’s votes for women she’s promoting now. Imagine!”

“I will be delighted to join you. I must await Mr. Bettermore’s return and the completion of our business.”

“Of course. Do I discern a spark of romance there, young lady? I’ve heard him spoken of as a very handsome young man.”

Sydney shot a glance at Rebecca, who was perfectly aware that he was watching, and allowed herself to feign a shy consciousness that confirmed Lady Maud in her suspicions.

“Well, you certainly could have any man you fancied, couldn’t you, my dear? Might as well enjoy yourself with a good-looking youngster. Don’t you agree, Mr. Sydney?” she asked, turning to him and catching him looking very uncomfortable indeed. Rebecca wondered if she was teasing the not-very-young railroad tycoon, and professed ladies’ man. “Plenty of energy there, plenty of fun to be had for a girl, with those very vigorous young ones.”

“I haven’t heard Miss de Steyne announce an engagement. Till I do, I’ll withhold judgement. You can’t expect me, Lady Maud, to prosper the cause of a rival.”

“How amusing you are Philip. A rival indeed! A man your age! Off I go, Miss de Steyne. Come, Mr. Sydney, give me your arm as far as the top of the street.”

Sydney, gathering up his hat and gloves, managed to be the last to leave the room, and he took his moment to speak quietly but urgently to Rebecca.

“I’ve seen the pup. He’s no match for a woman like you. Youthful vigor is overrated. In the long run, you will find experience and technique to be a far-more *satisfying* friend to a healthy young person, I assure you.”

And with this somewhat terrifying promise, he left to join the bon-ton of Colorado society at what passed in this raw and raucous society, for elegant dining. Rebecca retreated to her room, to change her gown, and await the return of her gallant, but all-too gullible, lawyer.

CHAPTER 55: JANE IN BETTY'S LAIR

Meanwhile, Jane follows Arlette's instructions to find Betty's rooms, upstairs over a photographers, approached by a flight of stairs off the back alley. Very discreet. She uses Arlette's spare key to let herself in. The heavy velvet curtains are drawn against the morning sun.

The room, like Betty herself, was neat as a pin and yet slightly decadent. Decorated on a lavish scale discordant with the modest amounts entered in an account book she found, where sewing, serving and laundering were docketed.

Her closets revealed a modest assortment of gowns, but all in excellent taste and meticulously executed, along with what Jane took to be fancy dress outfits – some quite risqué – along with a half-dozen wigs in assorted colors.

Her lingerie drawer yields a bonanza!

Under very impractical undergarments, she finds a much-handled photograph of a much-younger Philip Sydney!

He looks to be in his late twenties in the photo, and there is a pronounced air of sensuality in his down-turning eyes and sensitive mouth. Jane is repelled. Rebecca would be creaming. He doesn't project this so rawly anymore.

Jane is convinced Sydney is the killer. (She dismisses hankie evidence as not bearing on the case, because she can't tie it to Sydney. Blinded by prejudice.)

It's late in the day when Jane gets back to the Dartmoor. A process-server is waiting, and we see him hand her some papers. We see her open them and curse in disbelief.

CHAPTER 56: DINNER AT THE DELMONICO'S OF THE WEST

The maître d' greets Miss de Steyne at the entrance to the Charpiot's Restaurant. Like Delmonico's, it is a quintessentially-clubby, wood-boothed steakhouse.

Rebecca sees Julius, alone at a table, writing as he eats. She waves, he waves.

Lydia wafts over to the door to greet Rebecca. "We saw you arrive. Gov-wife insists on a booth that allows monitoring of arrivals."

"Why are you in Denver?" asks Rebecca.

"Maud changed her mind and decided to help us fix our reputation." But Lydia can't help whispering. "Whatever were you doing alone with Mr. Sydney this afternoon? Odious man!"

The girls sit and join the conversation. The Gov-wife wants Rebecca's patronage of the women's workers' right she is passionate about.

Rebecca listens, smiles, nods, thinks of Sydney and their encounter. "Whatever could he have meant? Could he be jealous of Julius? Ridiculous."

"Ah," says the Gov-wife, who had the clear view of the door – "Isn't that Philip Sydney, the man who wants Jane's railroad? And what a beautiful girl!"

Lady Maud was looking keenly at Rebecca who was determined not to show interest in Sydney's arrival, but when she heard "beautiful girl," she could not prevent herself from swiveling around to have a look.

Sydney is escorting the very sexy hottie from the bank! She nods to Julius who is regarding her with admiration, chuckling.

Sydney and Hottie are seated in the adjacent booth and sit together, back to back with Rebecca and Lydia in their booth.. Voices carry.

In Sydney's low murmur she picks up the accents of the same endearments he had used towards her just last night!

She's having a very hard time paying attention. The older ladies are deploring young women who are "man crazy."

Bank-hottie's giggle is adorable and obscene. Sydney's low laugh in reply is a stake in Rebecca's heart. She's never been jealous like this in her life! The waiter brings champagne to Sydney's table. She sees his hand, his ring, she wants him.

Lydia picks up on Rebecca's genuine suffering. She must like the man after all! Lydia has caused a lot of jealousy in her day, though she's never felt it – at least not about a man. Now, she says loudly "Rebecca, I do so hope you marry that handsome, rich young lawyer. He's clearly crazy about you."

There is suddenly silence in the next booth.

Gove-wife, who can't stop watching the door, now says – "Ah, what's this? Let's see who is here tonight that is important enough to receive telegrams at the table. Imagine in a few years when we will put our forks down to answer a summons to Mr. Bell's telephone!"

The telegram is delivered to Rebecca on a silver tray. Excusing herself, she reads it. Exclaims incredulously "It's from Jane. She was just served. The railroad is under an injunction and must not operate for any reason until the suit is settled!"

"How can that be?!"

"Who would do that!?" are the cries.

Rebecca, pale with anger, stands and addresses Sydney, lounging with his hand down hottie's bodice, caressing her nipples (oh, oh, looks like writing this scene got me hot.)

Rebecca feels like vomiting. "You are the lowest, Sir," she seethes.

"Oh, I don't know about that. Won't you join me and Miss Bell? Room 406, directly after dinner. Together, I'm sure we will be able to entertain you."

Rebecca spits in his plate and heads for the door.

"I hate to say it," sighs the Gov-wife, "but that girl needs a husband."

As Rebecca, holding back tears, storms towards the door, she is clasped in a pair of strong arms, turned around and kissed hard and long – by Julius Bettermore.

She plays along with it and finds herself enjoying it a lot.

"Thanks," she says, "let's go." They go out arm in arm, not looking back.

That's better," says Gov-wife loudly, "much more suitable. I shall give them an engagement party." In the next booth, silverware clatters on china. Sydney steers hottie roughly out of restaurant.

Maud and Gov-wife raise their eyebrows.

"And old story, I'm afraid," says Gov-wife.

Julius is seeing Rebecca to her room. She can't think straight. He sees how it is, regretfully.

"When this is all over, "He says to Rebecca, "I hope for another chance to repeat that kiss. I shall never forget it."

As she says good night and closes the door, Rebecca sees that Room 406 – Sydney's room – is directly opposite the door to her suite. There's no escaping him. What was he hinting at, she wonders?! She undresses and leaves her things just as they fall. She's never had to hang her own stuff up in her life. (The girl's shared a maid at college?)

She walks to the windows and stares out into the street. She walks to the hall door and shames herself by listening for signs of Sydney and hottie Miss Bell.

At last, she hears a key in the opposite door, a door opening and closing. No voices. She thinks, only one set of footsteps, but she can't be sure and it keeps her up half the night.

CHAPTER 57: REBECCA CONFESSES TO JANE – IT CAN'T BE SYDNEY

The next morning, the maid bringing her tea tray delivers a small bunch of flowers and a note: "You make me make a fool of myself. Stop it immediately. Yours, Philip. P.S. The injunction was not of my doing. Good luck. The judge is a gambling man."

Her heart soars. "My god!" she thinks, am I to have no control over my emotions?"

She dresses haphazardly and brushes her hair, washes, just in time for Julius to arrive to breakfast with her in her suite.

Julius arrives, all business. "Jane's on her way. Arriving on the Noon train. I've made an appointment with Judge Devereaux. Let's hope he is a persuadable man."

They are reviewing the partnership papers when a knock at the door – a peremptory knock – heralds the arrival of the Marshall. A vain, self-important, big, tall man. His grooming is extreme. His clothes are tightly-fitted to emphasize his masculinity.

The Marshall "has been despatched by the Gov-wife to render Miss de Steyne any assistance she might need in addressing certain anomalous events surrounding the DC&M RR and its operations. However, he feels he must advise the young lady that Mr. Sydney is a very powerful player in the railroad game and the promotion of the newly-minted state of Colorado and an amicable handover to him might be best."

The Marshall, though he take his orders from the Gov-wife is contemptuous of women's abilities and rights. A real Neanderthal. Rebecca doesn't waste time on him.

The Marshall leaves. Julius and Rebecca head out through the hotel into the bustling Denver streets. The place is jumping.

The train from Dakotah City pulls into the Denver&RioGrande station. Julius and Rebecca wait on the platform, scanning the carriages for Jane. At last, they hear Jane hailing them from behind and turn towards the head of the train to see Jane climbing down out of the cab of the locomotive. She rode with the friendly engineer and fireman.

Jane says "I'm famished! Where shall we eat?"

Rebecca says, "Anywhere BUT the "Delmonico's of the West. I never want to set foot in it again!" And yet, she thinks, the emotions, the passion! Jealousy is thrilling in a way. A bad way!

They find a nice café and plan their approach to the judge.

Jane says begrudgingly, "If it wasn't Philip Sydney who brought the complaint, who was it? Who else is our enemy?"

Julius reports, "Here's what we know thus far: the injunction was sought by an entity calling itself the CCC – *Concerned Citizens of Colorado*.

"Never heard of them," says Jane.

"Their address leads to a rented one-room office in the same building as Lloyds. A contact of mine, an old school chum – at Lloyds declined to comment when I asked if the CCC was connected to the firm. That's very telling I think, that he had no comment. However, they may have worded their complaint to look like they only care about propriety – although I think it's *property* they are targeting – your property."

At the end of lunch, Jane sends Julius on an errand “My fate!” he mock-laments – “to always miss the best parts!”

“It’s not that good Julie. I’d tell you the good stuff,” says Jane.

When he is gone, Jane leans in to talk seriously to Rebecca. She shows her the photo of Sydney from Betty’s room. Rebecca’s stomach does flip-flops and she puts down her wine glass and take the picture into her own hands. “I’m a fool for him,” she thinks.

“Becky, I know you like him. I understand – I mean, I do NOT understand why you like him, but I can see that it’s so. He’s a killer, Becky. A villain. A thief. Faithless. Without scruples or pity. He killed Betty Simple, lord knows why, and he could kill you too! I beg you. Stay away from him.”

“Too late,” says Rebecca.

“You mean you’re already in love with him?”

“I mean I already went to bed with him. The night she was killed, Sydney wasn’t with Betty Simple, he was with me on my train, the whole night.

At that moment, Julius comes to the door of the café – sees Jane’s look of shock – and what else? – and he turns and goes out again.

Jane thinks, bites her tongue, finally says. “That doesn’t mean he didn’t kill Uncle Henry.”

“But think, Jane,” Rebecca says, “the similarities in the two murders. The same lace, the same port-mortem tying, the macabre railroad elements. They must be the work of the same killer and that cannot be Sydney. You’re right about the rest of his sins, I’m sure...but I love him, I think. I certainly never felt this way before. And I think he loves me.”

“Oh, Becky, I wish I had never let you come to Brakeman’s Halt!” cries Jane.

Indeed, Jane’s mind reeled at the revisions it was being forced to make. Everything she was certain sure of turned out to be false, or was changing in ways she didn’t like.

Jane was wrong!! Eats crow. Jane is thrown.

- Syd not the killer

- Rebecca not a virgin

- no suspect for killings

- afraid judge will be unmovable

Julius returns from errand (telegram to father to get him to prep superior court judge to lift injunction if Devereaux is resistant – suspense??) and the three friends set out for the courthouse.

CHAPTER 58: IN THE JUDGE'S LAIR/HIGH STAKES

When Jane, Rebecca and Julius get to the courthouse, and ask for the Judge, they are directed to the courtroom where his is in process of instructing the jury in a capital case. The defendant is young, cocky, guilty as hell, confident of getting off.

The jury retires to deliberate and the judge (Stephen Frye) exits the bench. The Clerk ushers the three into the Judge's chambers – he's playing solitaire and drinking Champagne.

"Boring," he says, looking up from his game of patience as they enter. "I know they're going to hang him; he knows they're going to hang him. Boring waiting. Oh, well, should only take a few minutes."

Julius speaks first as they had agreed. "And I'm sure our business will only take a few minutes of your time. We'd like you to reverse your decision and lift the injunction on Miss Brakeman's railroad."

"No can do," says the Judge. "It's a done deal."

"Here are the citations and our petition. It's all very clear and I'm sure any Superior Court judge would agree."

"My word is my bond, Mr. Bettermore," says the Judge," and I gave my word to shut down the girl's train."

Jane tries to expostulate, but Rebecca and Julius simultaneously pep her down.

Rebecca has been watching the Judge shuffle and deal the cards while they talk. She make a guess.

"Do you play poker, Your Honor?" she asks.

"I do," he says, suddenly interested.

"I'm learning the game," says Rebecca. "I enjoy the wagering but I find the pots too small to be sufficiently exciting."

"What do you call a good pot? Worth the play...?" he asks.

"The Railroad," says Jane, who sees what is going on. "I'll wager Rebecca can win our Railroad back from you."

The clerk sticks his head in to say that the jury has reached a verdict. Judge says he'll be right there.

He sizes up Rebecca. "Are you any good?" he asks.

"I was once Junior Ladies Champion Whist Player at the Hudson Valley Charity Tournament," she replies.

"Just once," he says thoughtfully. "If you win, I rescind the injunction, and if you lose?"

"If I lose, I send you a case of Port, and a case of champagne from my cousin's vineyard. My cousin, Alphonse de Steyne." The judge looks intrigued, but not convinced.

"A case every year on your birthday for ten years," Rebecca counters.

"For life, and it's a deal," says the judge.

“Deal,” says Rebecca. “Let’s play.”

The clerk sticks his head in again – then comes into the room. “The jury has reached a verdict. The prisoner would like to know when he’s gonna die.”

“Later,” snaps the judge, waving him off.

From his desk drawer, from her handbag, each pulls a deck of cards and lays it on the desk. Like a duel, an impasse.

“Why not use the deck you were playing Solitaire with?” asks Jane. “Nobody cheats at Solitaire.”

“Your innocence is touching, my dear” says the Judge, pushing the cards towards Rebecca to shuffle. “And demonstrates, by the way, that you are too young to run a railroad.”

The clerk again, “Defendant would like to know if he’s a-gonna hang, your honor.”

“Later!” the judge.

Rebecca and the Judge agree on which poker to play and begin. Jane watches intently for a few minutes then gets up and paces restlessly. Everything is at stake. Rebecca seems to be playing abstractedly.

The Judge watches Rebecca carefully – as she picks up her cards. Rebecca can’t repress an involuntary smile. She’s picturing Sydney sitting opposite her at Maud’s card party. Despite her smile, it’s a losing hand; the judge wonders if she’s a fool, an amateur, or sneaky and deep.

The judge assumes she must be a good player or she wouldn’t have suggested such a high-stakes gambit, but the disconnect between the genuine emotions he perceives her experiencing and the hands she plays, confuses him.

She frowns angrily at a perfectly nice pair of queens, thinking of Maud and the Gov-wife disapproving of her attack on Sydney. This frown and winning-hand combination confuses the judge, but he concocts a theory of her mind that he relies on. She is after all, a female.

She yawns at two pair, thinking of languid stretches after passionate embraces.

The clerk sticks his head in to remonstrate, but instead comes to watch the game and is hooked.

Jane is biting her nail, Rebecca sees, snaps out of her reveries and starts playing the expert rational way that won her that junior – and many another – championship.

The shift to calm, professional play is finally the Judge’s undoing as he bets hopelessly wrongly and Rebecca wins. He stands up and shakes her hand, says’ he’ll honor the deal immediately”, gives instruction to clerk.

“But first, let’s go hang that scoundrel.”

“That’s just it, you’re honor,” says the clerk. “It’s a hung jury.”

“So they got to one of the jurors,” says the Judge. “Likely kidnapped his daughter or stole his prize bull.” He puts his robe back on, and head for the courtroom. “Just not my day. Goodbye folks. Thank you Miss de Steyne for a most entertaining game.”

Rebecca make a mental note to see that the wine is sent asap. The judge is more bored than evil, she thinks.

As they pass the courtroom, they hear cheers and groans. The very bad man comes strutting out the door, self-satisfied, tips his hat – smirking – to the ladies. (Brandt walks out behind him. Makes Indian woo-woo gesture to Jane and Rebecca.)

Jane goes for her gun, is restrained once again.

“Let’s get home to peace and quiet,” says Rebecca.

“And I must get to San Francisco, so let’s wrap up this paperwork. I must say, you played that game brilliantly, Miss de Steyne.”

Rebecca says, “On the contrary, I played it very stupidly – almost tragically so – and I apologize. I was saved by sheer dumb luck.”

“I’ve got my train back, get word to Mr. Campbell” says Jane. Let’s go home!”

Exultant, relieved, the trio comes down the courthouse steps together.

But what the hell!? Lydia is hurrying towards them, pursued by reporters. Maud making up the rear, trying to be heard.

When reporters recognize Jane, they shift their questions to her. Julius tries to interpose – but Jane wants facts.

“What’s happened?” she asks.

The voices ring out. “Another murder!” “Another railroad murder!” “Will you sell it now?” “Is it safe to ride the DC&M with a killer on the loose?”

“Who do you think this killer is?”

Rebecca grabs Lydia – “Lydia, darling, whatever is going on!”

“Murder!” says Lydia. “Again!”

“Who?” asks Rebecca, realizing her dread that it could be Sydney.

“Mr. Donnelly. That man Jane fired,” says Lydia.

Maud catches up. “Don’t talk here. Jane and Julius can handle the reporters. Come around the corner.”

Julius is saying “No comment.”

Jane wants to get a message out.

“Print this,” says Jane. “If this lowdown killer thinks he can scare me, bully me, make me run, he better think twice.”

Lydia seems inclined to join Jane on her soapbox.

“Quick,” says Maud, “help me get them on the train before they start a riot!”

At the train station, they take leave of Julius. His goodbye to Jane is brotherly, but to Rebecca it’s something more. “I wish I could kiss you goodbye,” he says.

She touches his lips lightly with hers. “I’ll always be grateful,” she says.

CHAPTER 59: TACKLING MITCHELL DONNELLY'S MURDER

On the train back to Dakotah City, Lydia and Maud and Jane share Rebecca's compartment, speculation about Donnelly's murder is the topic that consumes them all. Lady Maud dominates the conversation with optimistic and unfeeling schemes to turn these tragedies into an attraction. (Desperation?)

"But Ma'am," says Rebecca drolly, "having promised it, the only way we can guarantee the murder experience is by providing it ourselves! Do you propose special murder excursion trains?"

"That's genius!" says Maud with genuine respect.

"Not *real* murders, of course! At least I hope not!" says Lydia. "Actors, I imagine."

"Brilliant," says Maud, "Could be a real moneymaker."

"Perhaps the Colonel could oblige us with a script?" offers Rebecca.

"We have a script," says Jane angrily. "An innocent man, the host, goes missing from his own party. The guests – his best friends and business associate – leave without him... (Maud looks pained.) His poor body is found (and here Jane can't help but choke up), hands tied, at the foot of a cliff. Pushed off the rails by his own train. The guests all alibi one another – except when they don't – when the alibis don't hold up or someone is lying."

"Or everyone is lying," contributes Lydia. Jane nods.

Maud is aghast. "You're saying it was one of us?"

"It's the same killer, there can be no question of that. He strikes again – a young woman this time, one who didn't deserve to die for her sins."

"What was her connection to your uncle?" asked Lydia. "I can see the tie between your uncle, the railroad, and Mr. Donnelly, but where would your uncle Henry have encountered Betty, outside of a nodding acquaintance?"

"On the other hand, we do know that they were all tied to Mr. Sydney," says Maud.

"It's not him," says Jane and Rebecca together.

"One thing for sure," says Jane, "until we know a lot more, we're all in danger."

Maud and Lydia go to the restaurant car. Rebecca and Jane have the compartment to themselves..

"So you're in love with him," says Jane.

"I don't know," says Rebecca.

"Will you marry him?" asks Jane.

"Certainly not!" says Rebecca. "I'm a fool, not an idiot."

Even if he turns out to be not as evil as I thought," says Jane," that doesn't mean he isn't a dangerous man."

"I don't know," says Rebecca, again. "He's dangerous as a business adversary. A night of cards taught me that. But he's not a murderer and I can't believe he's a crazy, obsessed person. He's a businessman, I've known his type since I was a child, and for them, business is a game, a challenge, a

sport, and for most – an identity. And being a businessman, he must have a pretty compelling business reason for all this determination to control the DC&M RR.”

“This is not a mystery,” says Rebecca. It’s more of a puzzle. And a puzzle is like a machine that can be taken apart, analyzed, and put back together again in a way that makes sense.”

“My god, I hope you’re right,” says Jane, and both girls fall quiet, thinking.

At last, they are pulling into the station in Dakotah Springs.

On the platform of the DC&M in Dakotah Springs, the janitress is eagerly looking out for the girls. The telegraph lady told her they would be aboard. But the crush of regular passengers, plus the newspaper reporters makes it hard for her to be heard.

The janitress accosts Jane. “Begging your pardon, Miss, I was the one as found him.”

“Were you indeed?” says Jane.

“Yes, Miss, and the Pie Lady, too.”

Reporters are descending on the scene.

“Well, Miss,” the janitress is enjoying settling in for a nice gossip. “I come at my usual time – very punctual, I am, and pride myself on it.”

“As well you should. And what is your usual time?”

“Six-fifteen a.m., rain or shine, winter or summer. I turn on the heater, open the shades, clean the toilet rooms, etc.”

“Very admirable! I hope I pay you well,” says Jane.

“Well enough, thank you Miss, though I’m not saying that I couldn’t do with a bit more.”

“And you shall have it, my dear Janitress, but now, tell us what you saw!”

The Lady Reporter calls imploringly out of the press crush. “Miss Brakeman, is this tied to your uncle’s death?”

Jane stops, turns, and says, “Good question. Let me know if you find the answer.”

Jane’s friend. The Springs newspaper publisher, catches her eye and she gestures to him that they’ll talk later. He touches his hat.

To the janitress, she says, “There’s no privacy here, come to the Dartmoor at the end of your shift.”

“Give me a couple hours, Miss and I’ll be right with you.”

“Here,” says Jane, handing her some money. “Please take a cab. It’s a long way up the hill to the hotel.”

The janitress takes it, puts it away, resolving to walk anyway and save the cab money to buy some ribbons for her little girl’s hair. She’s not sure the pie lady would agree, so she probably won’t tell her.

Afterwards, “You’re very generous,” remarks Lydia. “I like that. And it was a smart move, too. Her goodwill is invaluable.”

“At this point,” says Jane, “It’s facts that are priceless. The woman is sensible and observant. I got in trouble guessing wrong before, and I want cold hard facts this time.”

Another reporter calls out – “Miss Brakeman, I hear you fired the victim. Did you kill him too?”

Maud grimaces and hustles them away.

As they exit the station, the doctor is driving by,, his mother on the seat beside him and his wife behind him, his doctor bag on her lap.

They pause to chat. “Another death, Miss Brakeman. Bad form.”

“Strangulation, you say, Doctor?” says Jane.

“Certainly suicide. Were you perhaps too hard on him? I wonder?”

“Poor man couldn’t take the humiliation,” says Doc-mom, “fired by a woman, a girl.” No fault of yours, my dear, I’m sure.”

“Sell, Miss Brakeman,” orders the Doctor. “There are good offers on the table. It is irresponsible to your investors not to sell.”

“I am the majority investor, Doctor, and now my friend Miss de Steyne has bought a substantial interest. We are in agreement, and I will run the railroad as I see fit. And I will not sell to any man. Thank you for your opinion, Doctor. Good day.”

Doc-mom makes a cute, deprecatory face. Doc-wife in back seat has been looking scared for Jane, defying the lord her husband.

CHAPTER 60: FRANCA, THE MARSHALL, AND THE PIE LADY/MYSTERIES OLD AND NEW

When they get to the Dartmoor, Jane and Rebecca and Lydia find an eager audience for their news. Vicki, Franca, Kitty, Mrs. Ickes.

The girls are a little surprised to find Franca there.

Kitty explains: "To solve an equation, eliminate the unknowns. We thought we could help by clearing up some of the mysteries that didn't bear on the problem."

"As for example?" asks Jane, as they settle in around the tea table in uncle's sitting room.

Franca says, "As for example, the mystery of me and my grandmother. I know you've been wondering. Anyone can see I look nothing like her, fair as she is."

"That's very common in families," says Rebecca.

"But listen," cautions Victoria, who had a protective arm around Franca.

"Better yet," says Franca, "just read." She hands Jane a faded newspaper clipping.

The clipping was an advertisement for a five-year-old child, a beautiful little girl, to be redeemed at auction – sold – and the ad listed all the particulars of where, when and how much she was expected to fetch, based on her potential as a future intelligent, light-skinned beauty.

"A slave..." murmurs Jane.

"It's me. I'm that little girl!" says Franca.

A knock on the door at that moment ushered in an unlikely threesome - the Marshall, and in his bulky shadow, the diminutive figures of the janitress and the pie lady. Wise as they were, they edged in and found seats in a corner by the fireplace.

"Where's the old lady? She should hear this, too." were the Marshall's words of greeting. Kitty slipped out the door and hurried get the Professor from the Dartmoor's well-appointed library, where she was writing.

The Janitress and Pie Lady are looking about themselves with satisfaction. Janitress runs her finger along the top of the wainscoting and shakes her head in disapproval of the dust on her finger.

The pie lady is eying the iced cakes and finger sandwiches on display.

"You ladies listen up," the Marshall begins, "I've had enough of this nonsense. Riling up the folks over the deaths of some no 'count woman and half-assed man?"

The Professor arrives, trailing Kitty and she instantly takes charge. "Take off your hat and be seated," she tells the Marshall.

He is taken aback by her tone of authority. She's been teaching for decades. "Take your hat off, be seated, or leave this room and do not attempt to return till you have been taught some manners."

Lydia is holding a chair for him and shoves it behind his knees aggressively. He sits in an undignified way.

Vicki and Franca are regarding the Marshall closely and comparing notes as if he were a side of beef. Vicki is sketching with a look of distaste, and the thought that he could do as Holofernes in a biblical painting.

"Shall I take shorthand notes?" asks Mrs. Ickes in her very businesslike voice.

"Splendid idea, says Jane. "Verbatim, eh Marshall, your words, exactly. How can I help you?"

"Miss Brakeman, I am here on official business in re the suicide of your former general manager, Mr. Mitchell Donnelly, " he begins.

At the word "suicide" an angry bustle had broken out in the DC&M corner. Jane notices, and repeats gravely, "Suicide." Janitress snorts and Pie Lady giggles.

"You disagree with the Coroner's verdict, ladies," asks the Marshall.

"Coroner, my foot," said Jane.

"There's been no inquest and certainly no verdict," says Rebecca.

"Well, your own medical man certified the death as strangulation by hanging, all signs pointing to suicide, he says."

"And why are you here?" asks the Professor.

"Why, to tell you all to keep out of it. To do your little science project and go back home."

"I am home," says Jane with finality. "And here I stay."

The Professor and Lydia maneuver him out, taking digs as they go. "I'm sure you have real work to do, besides threatening women."

"Come to the fire, gather round, please," says Jane to the Janitress and Pie Lady. The get resettled and are given tea and cakes, yum.

"What a waste of a beautiful man's body," says Victoria. "What a hit he would be as a model! But I couldn't bear his personality long enough to paint his person."

Franca snorts her amusement, and Vicki glances over, pleased. They don't bicker as much these days – less competitive, more co-operative. Working on the railroad has bonded them all. Changed them all – except maybe Kitty?

"So," Jane starts, "you came to work – both of you? yes? At around six a.m.?"

"Six-fifteen exactly for me, Miss by the station clock. Very punctual I pride myself. The railroad won't clean itself, I say," says the Janitress.

"And the pies ain't a-gonna bake themselves, neither," chimes in the pie lady, "but I never seen the like!"

"Nor I," agrees the Janitress.

"A hanging there by his collar from the mail hook!"

"By his collar?!" said several voices at once.

"Oh, yes, Miss, that's what was so strange. He had something tied around his throat all right, but the hook was pushed right through a hole in his collar."

"How extraordinary!" says the Professor.

"An ordinary hanging shouldn't have caught our attention like that, Ma'am, ordinary hangings is much too common."

“I see,” mused Jane. “Perhaps we are meant to find it peculiar.”

“Peculiar it was, Miss. With that string around his neck like a tie. But I’d best be getting along. The little ones will be wanting their tea.”

“Thank you, ladies. Mrs. Ickes, will you please see them safely to a cab.”

Franca says she has to leave anyway and will see the ladies home in her grandmother’s carriage. They like that.

Before she leaves, Franca says “My father was Lady Maud’s only son. His wife – my mother – was well, NOT English, shall we say?” She exits.

Victoria beams with pride. “Isn’t she brave? Isn’t she amazing!” She whispers to Lydia, who smiles.

CHAPTER 61: A LESSON IN MURDER ANALYSIS

Rebecca says, "Jane you got your facts now. Donnelly was murdered and in the same outré, misleading way, by the same man, no doubt."

"Can we be sure it's a man?" asks Kitty.

"Well, almost certain," says Jane.

"Evidence, please, Miss Brakeman," says the Professor.

Jane replies, "All the murders have involved the transporting of corpses..."

"Corpses are dead weight," says Kitty.

"How do you know the victims weren't forced into their final positions and then killed?" asks Victoria. "And why were Betty and Donnelly strangled after death?"

"Evidence, Miss van Leyden," demands the Professor.

"In Betty's case, we saw firsthand the lividity, the depth of the depression from the ligature. In anatomy classes, I witnessed the dissection of cadavers."

"Accepted as fact, pending professional confirmation. For now, Mr. Donnelly's condition is only conjecture."

"I'll visit my friends the undertakers," says Jane.

"I'd like to examine motive," says Lydia. "What does Jane have that is worth three murders?"

"The DC&M," says Jane. "My railroad."

"Yes," says Rebecca, "We've examined the books and as far as we can see, the line is profitable, but just barely at the moment thanks to Donnelly's bad management. Are there any factors that could change that? Increase the value?"

"More tourists?" says Lydia.

"Sure not enough for murder," says Rebecca. "I like the idea of clearing up mysteries as we go. As I said on the train, there must be a business reason for a businessman like Sydney to pursue a seemingly minor deal so aggressively. Mrs. Ickes, don't you have a list of Mr. Sydney's holdings in our files?" (Rebecca knows she does because she put it there. It was part of the dispatch she read in Denver.)

"Certainly," says Mrs. Ickes, as she leaves to go get it.

"I'd like to know what he owns around here," says Jane. "There's maps of this area in my Uncle's library."

There's a scramble to get out of the study and into the library. Jane shuffles through maps till she finds the one she wants, unfolds or unrolls it, and pins it up on a wall.

Evidence of the room's use as a temporary dormitory makes it even more chaotic than the typical Victorian clutter.

"Wait a sec," says Vicki, pawing among piles of clothes and painting gear. "Here's tracing paper. She tapes it over the map. Using the map as a guide, under Jane's guidance, she sketches in the

DC&M route, stations, Brakeman's Halt, Dakotah City, D&RG route, and main landmarks, mining towns, etc. Most RR lines are shown.

As they work on the map, Kitty has been examining the titles on Henry's bookshelves. Fordyce's Sermons, Boswell's Life of Johnson, Rousseau, Greek and Latin classics, etc. She sees the lone sketchbook – like the one at Brakeman's Halt – and takes it down. "What a funny man he must have been, but strange," says Kitty.

Jane bristles a bit. "What do you mean?" she asks.

"The books from your childhood had Latin inscriptions that were jokes – you said they were jokes – but these are just disturbing and scary." She reads some examples, "Marks. Bruises. Listless, etc."

Vicky takes it from her. "There are dates. It's like a diary of observations. But of what or whom?"

Mrs. Ickes comes back with the list of Sydney's holdings and the focus shifts back to the map. She starts reading off the legal names of the entities and Jane and Rebecca decipher what they represent. Many are local railroad lines, that Jane didn't even know had changed hands.

As the list continues, the color in the routes of the lines involved until a conclusion becomes obvious.

"My god!" exclaims Jane, "The only short lines he doesn't control are mine and the XY&Z RR from Ridgeburg to Crooked Creek."

"He just bought the XY&Z," says Mrs. Ickes. Here's the addendum."

"So are you saying," says Rebecca, "that the reason he wants the DC&M is just to complete his collection?"

"That makes sense to me," says Lydia. "I see him as a man driven by fears and self-doubt, needing constant reassurance."

"That describes almost every man," laughs the Professor.

"He didn't strike me that way at all," begins Rebecca.

"You should know," snorts Jane, somewhat cattily. She not happy about having been wrong about Sydney. And she's possessive of Rebecca. The girls perk up their ears and glance at Rebecca, but Jane doesn't elaborate. The Professor looks very concerned.

"Girls," she says, "I have been remiss in my duties to your parents by letting you pursue these dangerous paths. The laws now has these investigations well in hand. They will sort the wheat from the chaff. Let us get back to your studies, preparation for the eclipse, and having summer fun."

"I will say this," she went on, "If you feel you must pursue this investigation, be objective, be systematic, be patient, and be careful. We still can't rule out the possibility that the killer is someone we socialize with, see every day."

"The Professor, on her way back to the Reading Room, pauses at the door to say, "But you can take the Colonel off your list of suspects. He and I are getting married." She continues on out.

"That could have been predicted," says Kitty, "based on the behavioral data from my observations."

"If you mean to say it was plain as day that they were in love, I agree completely, says Lydia.

"Will she leave teaching? Leave the observatory? The college!" said Rebecca in some alarm. It was the de Steyne Observatory after all.

"I predict she will continue as before," says Kitty. "Hers is the dominant personality of the two."

Looking at the map with the squiggly routes of mountain railroads, Rebecca remarks, "Jane, didn't you say the DC&M was meant to run all the way to Crooked Creek?"

Jane says, "Yes, first the Panic of '73 stopped it, and then the mines were played out anyway!"

"But your mother - the DC&M, rather - still was granted control of the right of way between Milltown and Crooked Creek?" asks Rebecca. "You control it now?"

"I guess I do," says Jane. "That could be it, but why? We have some more investigating to do, I guess," she continues. "Don't tell the Professor!"

CHAPTER 62: BARN DANCE AND ROMANCE

The girls weren't surprised when, after dinner, the Professor drew on her gloves, set her hat, pinched her cheeks and sallied out for a rendezvous with her ancient cavalier.

Lydia and Kitty go out to sit on one of the hotels broad verandas, where they are soon surrounded by swarms of admirers.

The German scientists are especially attentive and grateful for a pretty girl to look at and laugh with while they speak German and discuss serious things with a plainer girl.

Over the polyglot chatter, Lydia hears a whistled melody – the song she and the Kid played together the night of the attack.

It's getting so close to the eclipse – to the new moon – that it's quite dark out. The whistle comes from farther away.

Victoria arrives just then and takes a seat.

Lydia says to Vicki, "If you'll keep Kitty company, I think I'll go inside for a bit. Goodnight gentleman."

She wafts in, then switches to hurry-up mode and following the whistle finds the door to the side garden.

That air is mild and fragrant. The Kid waits in a shaft of mellow lamplight. His hat is in his hands.

"I missed you," he says.

She comes into his arms.

"There's music tonight at the Stage Coach Inn. Want to play?"

"Wait for me," she says and runs upstairs. Lynette is putting out Lydia's night dress, but is herself dressed to go out.

"Forget that, Lynette. "I'm going dancing. The blue sprigged calico, please, just one petticoat, light stays, just this once, and low-heeled boots, I think."

"May I have the night off, Mamselle? M. Jones has invited me to a dance just out of town. Dans le banlieue, at ze Coaching Inn."

"I'm going to the same party, Lynette! We can be each other's chaperones. Let's go!"

Before the two young women, mistress and maid, step out into the garden, they pause to listen at the door, realizing that both Rhys and the Kid are waiting there, smoking. The Kid is saying that he's done with Brandt and will go back to being a cowboy on long cattle drives. Lydia hears, thinks "No!" but wtf?

The girls joins the boys and they get into two carriages. The Kid has borrowed a beat up jalopy; Rhys has a sleek, upscale one.

"So you have dances on nights with little moonlight?" Lydia asks the Kid.

He replies, "Yup, folks want to dance, play, court, same on a dark night as a bright."

Light, music and laughter were pouring out the windows and doors of the old, two-story Stage Coach Inn. The jollity spilled out into the yard, where an hostler came running up to lead the horse and

carriage away. Rhys and Lynette, in their speedier carriage, had beaten them there by ten minutes. They rendezvous inside.

As the men ladle cups of punch for the girls and get mugs of beer for themselves, the Kid says he's more comfortable in the saddle than on the seat of a gig.

"Are you committed to an outdoor life, Sir?" asks Lydia.

They look into each other's eyes.

"Only if you are," he answers. "It's the only life I can offer."

Rhys, overhearing, says, "For a clever lad like you there's no end of opportunities. Just have to pick one. Like apples off a tree."

Still looking at Lydia, the Kid says, sadly, thoughtfully, "I picked one I could never reach."

Lydia shakes her head a tiny bit, bites her tongue, says "I thought we came here to play! Let's go."

They ask to play, are invited up, perform beautifully. They are more in love than ever. He's in heaven, her eyes are starry. They kiss.

Lynette interrupts. Speaks rapidly in French, admonishing. Lydia's smile fades.

She pulls herself together, looks almost tragically at the Kid as she says she will ride back to hotel with Rhys and Lynette.

She takes her guitar case from him. She's crying. They leave.

"Tough luck, mate," says Rhys. "Rich girls run by different rules."

CHAPTER 63: BARROOM BRAWL

Next morning in Dakotah City, the bell jangles as Jane opens the door to the newspaper office, Mr. Publisher's feet are up on his desk as he smokes his pipe and admires his morning edition.

"Should I stop the presses?" he asks her as he folds up his paper, disentangles his legs, gets up, and sets a chair for her.

"I'm good for a story a day," she jokes. "How could you manage without me?"

"Believe me, "I value you highly both as a generator and a consumer of news. Which is it you come as today, I wonder?"

"We have three murders," Jane begins.

"Three?!" interrupts Mr. Publisher. "I grant you your uncle looks might suspicious, and there's no question Miss Betty Simple met a violent end, but surely your number three is not this suicide today?"

Jane says nothing. Mr. Publisher thinks. "If it's not suicide, it's a story for sure. Thanks. Now what can I do for you in return?"

"I'm looking for a reason someone would want to monopolize the routes to Crooked Creek," says Jane. "Or who would kill to prevent a monopoly?"

"I've heard rumors of new strikes up that way – lead maybe, silver maybe, not gold."

"Yes," thinks Jane aloud, "and those people – the secret investors – they don't want their moves to be news. Not until the deal is done, then you can praise them to the sky."

"It's true, they're a vain bunch at heart," says Mr. Publisher. "Maybe you can catch them in the society pages! They can seldom resist a photo with a lord or a lady."

"Great, can I see the back issues?" asks Jane.

"Sure," he says, opening a closet crammed floor to ceiling with newspapers. "Help yourself."

Jane laughs.

Jane comes out of the newspaper office, takes a deep breath and heads to the undertakers.

"I don't have him," the undertaker says as she opens the door to the accompaniment of the heavenly chimes.

"Where'd he go?" she asks.

"Not here." He replies.

"Did they plant him already?" she asks.

"No, he's sitting in a purty box, waiting for his sister to come out from Illinois to bury him."

"If you don't have him, how do you know so much? Asks Jane.

"Fools didn't think to check before they shipped him down the line. It's my wife's brother as got him which is same as us getting him, for your sakes."

"What did he die of?" asks Jane.

"I hear Doc says strangulation," says the undertaker.

"What do you say?" asks Jane.

"I say nothing, but my brother-in-law who was a doctor before his spot of trouble, says he died from a needle in his arm."

"A needle?! Drugs?" Jane is thinking hard.

"Same corset-lace as the others; same post-mortem tying on," says the undertaker. "And come to think of it, I wonder if we had another look at Miss Betty if we wouldn't find a needle mark in her too?"

"Should I get the shovel and ropes?" asks the undertakers boy.

"I'm not going to dig her up, and neither are you!" says Jane to the boy.

"I wasn't thinking of that. Nope. No. No point." He shakes his head wistfully. Caresses the fine cashmere shawl he now wears as a big scarf. The shawl that covered Betty's corpse.

The undertaker widens his eyes and gives a sickly smile.

Jane needs some fresh air.

She goes out onto the boardwalk and stands in the shade and thinks.

Then she heads off down the street.

At the door to the assay office, she bumps into Charles Kincaid, just coming out.

Jane had intended to make inquiries about recent claims activity, but she turns with Charles and proceeds to the gunsmith, where he's meeting Alec by arrangement.

Charles seems thoughtful. "Do you think you would be happy in Scotland? He asks.

"For how long?" she ask. "A month – the right month – sure."

"Forever," he says.

"Not me! I'm too American!" says Jane.

"That's what I told Alec!" he blurts out "but he told me I had to ask you."

"Tell him to mind his own business," she says.

"I think it is business," he says. "There's something I don't understand and they won't tell me. Don't be mad at me, Jane. You know it wasn't me," he cries. "I like you just as you are."

"I know, Charles," she relented, "but everyone and their cousins has designs on me! I feel like Little Nell in a melodrama!"

"I says, what a great idea! If only we could have a play. I've seen a troupe of players hereabouts lately. They'd have scenery, costumes... "

"No, no, no!" cried Jane. "I have a railroad to save, a murder to solve and an astronomy class to pass! No more projects!"

Jane takes her leave of Charles and goes into the Sheriff's office.

In a nearby eating house, Alec Macallum is having lunch with an earnest businessman, an Englishman by his accent. Kitty sitting with the German scientists at a long table, is scribbling eclipse diagrams on the paper tablecloth as the Germans mutter agreement or dissent, make jokes, ask questions.

Kitty and the Germans exit. They go off in one direction and she heads to the depot. She's ripped her diagram out of the table cover and is engrossed in it as she walks.

She bumps full-frontal into someone. It's Brandt. Three or four of his bad guys are with him.

He's a good foot taller than she is, and he looks down at her and says, "You're asking for it, aren't you? You want it, don't you?" The bad guys are guffawing at Kitty.

"Want what?" she asks, wide-eyed.

"This he says, sticking his tongue down her throat.

Passers-by laugh, bad guys break up. Hilarious.

Alec has come out of the restaurant and witnessed this from a distance. He hurries- strides – towards the pair, but Brandt sneers down at her and continues into the Saloon, flanked by his 'posse'.

Coming up, Alec says "Kitty, go to the station and don't leave till I get there."

"Why?" she says.

"Do it!" he yells, angrily.

People are still laughing at her.

He goes into the saloon.

She still stands outside, thinking.

Inside the saloon, Alec spots Wiggins having a drink at the bar and watching Rhys playing sax with the piano and banjo players.

At a table Brandt and his crew are giving their drink orders. Bad guys are laughing it up. "Did you see her face?"

"She was gagging for it."

Brandt loudly orders a whiskey. "Got to wash this garbage taste out of my mouth." He spits.

Kitty, having come into the saloon, hears it all.

Brandt registers Alec watching him and sneers at him. Alec walks around behind him and slips a cord around his neck and pulls tight. Surprisingly strong, thinks Wiggins, watching.

"You've talked enough Mr. Brandt," says Alec.

Brandt is flailing, clutching at his throat. Bad guys aren't sure what to do.

Brandt is way taller than Alec and it becomes quite a fight when he makes it to his feet.

Bad guys try to get a shot in, or pull them apart. Rhys carefully cases up his sax, puts it behind the piano, rolls up his sleeves and dives into the fight. Wiggins puts down his beer, wipes his lips and joins in.

It appears Alec knows martial arts – god knows from where - and he uses them for a Bruce Lee style fight with a gangly bully.

Soon, it become a general melee, in time-honored western fashion.

Meanwhile, Jane is kicking back with the Sheriff, his feet up, a cup of coffee in his hand, when the sound of gunshots is quickly followed by an excited deputy rushing in.

“Is Elmer drunk again? asks the Sheriff without disturbing his relaxed position.

“I imagine so,” answers the deputy, “but this here fracas is the work of that Brandt and his gang and a bunch of foreigners from the Springs. Those Scottish cousins, for one.”

“Alec and Charles?” says Jane.

“Let’s go,” says the sheriff.

And he and Jane grab rifles and run to the saloon. As they bust through the swinging saloon doors, guns at the ready, the first thing that greets Janes eye is Kitty, with a table leg in her hand, hitting anyone who comes in range. The second things she sees is Charles, bloody and ecstatic! For Jane, the Scottish cousins look like illustrations from Mr. Scott’s novels, warriors with halos of fire around their flaming red hair, alight with the joy of battle.

The Sheriff and Jane shoot into the air and the Sheriff yells a warning. The fighting subsides.

Kitty is looking with concern at the bloodstains and rips on Brandt’s gorgeous clothes. She walks up to him and fingers his once-beautiful brocade vest and broadcloth coat.

Alec is in much better shape, as Kitty can see. He’s quickly restoring his gentlemanly appearance.

Kitty says to Brandt, “In the wild, if you were a stag, for example, this defeat by a rival of superior potency would spell the end of your breeding career. Is it the same here? Are we in civilization? Or in the wild? Have you become the prey?” Maybe Kitty’s more with it than she seems.

“May I have a whisky please,” she asks the bartender, “to get the taste of loser out of my mouth,” Jane snorts with laughter.

Brandt scowls at his posse as they seem inclined to laugh, too.

Sheriff says to the multitude, who are slowly setting the place back in order. “Folks, we have five thousand eclipse nuts hereabouts, and we have one chance to make an impression on them. If they want a frontier experience, let them buy a ticket to a wild west show. Let’s not send them home saying they couldn’t get a drink without risking their hides.”

Rhys grabs his case and says he’ll walk the girls back to the station.

“I’m headed to the bank,” says Jane. “I’ve got business.”

Kitty asks, “Is the gold coming today, Jane?”

“Not today, Kitty,” says Jane. “Soon.”

Brandt hears this exchange. He rounds up his guys and and they mount up and ride out of town.

Jane and the Sheriff grin at one another.

Sheriff says quietly to Alec, “Son, how does it happen you carry a garrot in your pocket?”

“Ex-military, Sheriff. It’s an old habit to be prepared.”

Jane registers this fact. Suspect? How?

When Jane gets back to the Dartmoor, the apartment reeks of oil paints, and drop cloths are shrouding the furniture while Victoria paints a study of Lydia in a pink dress with a white rabbit in her arms.

"Where'd you get the bunny?" asks Jane, grabbing an apple and munching on it as she watches over Vicki's shoulder.

"That apple was part of the composition, by the way. I got the bunny by calling room service."

"Hi, Jane," says Rebecca, strolling into the room and sitting in the window embrasure right behind Lydia.

"You're in the frame!" complains Vicki.

Lydia sneezes. Sneezes again. Her eyes start watering and she's alternately petting the bunny and rubbing her itchy nose. It's not a pretty sight.

"OK, enough for today," says Vicki, starting to clean up. "How many times have I done this for my grandfather?" she wondered aloud. "I don't think I can go back to it. I think I've changed."

"I think we've all changed," said Rebecca. "And since I'm done with school, I wonder what's next?"

"Well, I know what's next for me," says Lydia. "A trip to Paris as soon as we get back. If I don't get to Worth in time, I'll have nothing to wear! I'll have to hide in a hole and miss the Season!"

Kitty had joined them while Lydia was speaking. "What about that cowboy with the guitar?" she asked. "Is he going to Paris?"

"Kitty, you are very trying sometimes," says Lydia.

"I know," says Kitty. "I tried especially hard this afternoon with Mr. Brandt."

"Excuse me, Misses," says the hotel porter, tactfully entering the room. Mrs. Ickes is right behind him, shooing him away, "Put them in the library. This way, please."

"Very sorry, Misses," he says, grinning and touching his cap.

Through the open sitting room door, the girls see dozens of bundles of newspapers being delivered. "I ordered back issues of all the DC and DS papers, including the Illustrated," shouts Jane. "Come on girls! We're going on a manhunt!"

Distinguished visitors to the region, whether they stay in the Springs of DC or not, are invariably noted in the society and news pages of the many local papers. The girls fall on them and start digging, making lists – Mrs. Ickes as stenographer. Lords and ladies in ill health are ignored unless – like Lord Lofton – a Scot owner of mines. Make a note to check him out.

Victoria is studying the photographs. "Why look, isn't this a fun fact! A photo of Lord Lofton with William Darby, fellow of the Royal Geological Society, and Etienne Giscard, famed designer of railroad bridges and tunnels. (Very chummy, along with Lady Lofton and the Viscount, their son.) All right here in Dakotah Springs."

"Now you're talking!" enthuses Jane.

"Let me make a few calls," says Rebecca. "Can't be just coincidence."

"This Viscount seems to be Alec MacCallum's age. Wonder if they were at school together?" asks Lydia.

"Don't ask him!" warns Jane. "Let's all play our cards close to our vests. We don't know who's our friend and who's an enemy. Even Alec, even Charles."

"Right." They all agree to be discreet in their inquiries. "Not all bad guys wear masks," reminds someone.

CHAPTER 64: BANK ROBBERS

Coyotes howl. An out-of-tune harmonica plays. The outlaws/cowboys are camped out and gathered around the campfire. Card playing, drinking and fighting are the diversions, along with maudlin singing.

Brandt rides up. Talks to the ringleader. Have your men ready to ride.

"This better not be another one of your cockamamie schemes, like that Indian raid. Whipped by a bunch of girls. The boys are fed up. This better be good!" says the ringleader.

"It's a shipment of gold. That good enough for you?" sneers Brandt. "The de Steyne girl is bringing in bags of her daddy's gold to keep the railroad running for her little girlfriend. It'll be a piece of cake. No security to speak of."

"When do we pull this off?" asks the ringleader.

"I got a contact in Denver who's tipping me off when the gold ships. It could be soon. Be ready. Get em sobered up and fed."

Brandt leaves. Bad harmonica continues.

In Denver, Hottie watches as bank manager supervises loading of bags of gold into armored vehicle, under heavy guard. They go back into his office. Hottie pours the bank manager a drink, brings it over, has his attention. She's seducing him.

"Bit early for a drink," he says, downing it.

"I so admire Miss de Steyne! – that was her money, wasn't it? – I admire all those girls, content to live without the comfort and protection of a big hard man. I could never do that."

"No, I should hope not," says the manager, copping a feel. "A big, hard man."

"I hope her money will be safe!" worries the Hottie. "I can't sit still, worrying about it," she says making to get up off his lap, wiggling a lot.

"The lady's gold is safely on the train," says the manager, pulling her back down. "Don't you fret."

Brandt and Scout are lounging on the porch of the Station Hotel in DC when a bell boy brings him a telegram. He reads, says to Scout, "The 4:15. You know what to do?"

Scout nods. "They are to follow your instructions to the letter, and in no case use their own initiative."

"Good girl, off you go." He slaps her horse as she takes off, kicks her horse into a gallop and rides out of town.

The pie lady and the janitress have come to DC for a bit of shopping and are sitting on a bench in front of the station. They observe this exchange and nod sagely. "Up to no good," they agree. "No good at all."

At the D&RG station, Rebecca and Rhys and two heavily-armed, uniformed guards are waiting for the train from Denver. A closed wagon stands waiting, the driver holds a shotgun across his lap as he waits.

A crowd is gathering. This is not an ordinary occurrence. The train pulls in. The baggage car is padlocked., The conductor joins Rebecca and Co. on the platform. Unlocks the car. Two armed men inside, slide the doors open.

Heavy canvas sacks are handed out to the waiting guards, who load the van while the driver covers them. They padlock the van. Guards get up, front and rear, and they move through traffic, followed by Rebecca and Rhys in a carriage.

Pull up to bank, more guards, transfer of bags, through front door of bank. Rebecca waits at door. Guards dismissed. Rebecca shakes hands with banks manager, her old acquaintance. She and Rhys leave.

Gunshots and thundering hooves announce the arrival of a gang of a dozen or more masked mounted outlaws.

Townsppeople scatter for shelter – Rebecca and Rhys watch from safe doorway.

The gang pulls up outside the bank, two of the youngest men dismount and grab the reins of the others horse and hold them ready for the getaway.

Two big beefy guys, each with two long guns, post themselves at the door.

Brandt, “disguised, though his height gives him away, leads the rest into the bank. They are all shouting to intimidate. “Hands up!” Get on the floor!, etc.”

Exciting, military-style raid.

But surprise.

The lofty marble banking hall is silent as a tomb. There’s not a living soul to be seen in the bank.

The bags of gold are stacked against the wall, behind the high grill that separates the teller’s windows from the hall.

“Boss, look!” Scout shouts. Climbing/vaulting nimbly over the barrier.

Several others follow her over. Scout goes to open the bags, slitting one with a knife.

Brandt is worried, thinking fast.

“Don’t touch them. It’s a trap!” Brandt screams.

But Scout has slit one open, the bag breaks and stones fall out with a clatter.

The bag says, “Property of the U.S. Government.” If they hadn’t touched them, it could be argued that they hadn’t committed a Federal crime. Brandt figures this out.

But no one has seen them do it, Brandt thins, but the bank staff have locked themselves into the manager’s office on the mezzanine, and from here they have watched the whole abortive raid.

Brandt looks up, sees them at the windows.

“Damn those bitches,” he yells. “Get out of here quick.”

They exit, mount and ride out of town without resistance and without any bags of gold.

Rebecca steps out of the doorway she was observing from. The D.C. publisher runs up to her. "Did they get the gold?" he pants.

"What gold?" she asks.

"The payroll gold that came on the 4:15," he says.

"Don't be ridiculous," says Rebecca. "Real money doesn't move around in bags. What we did at the Denver bank was create a line of credit for Jane to draw on, via the local bank, and backed by an account my father allocated to this project. Bags of gold, indeed. These guys are living in the past."

"Then why...? What...? What were the bags for? The big show of security? Oh! You devil! A story a day Jane promised me, and she isn't letting me down."

Riding full-speed, the outlaws flee. At the edge of town they are fronted by the Sheriff and a posse that includes Jane and Charles(?). They try to turn the gangs' horses back towards town.

"That's it, Brandt," yells the Sheriff. "I got you now."

Brandt kicks his horse straight through the posse. "Bullshit!" he yells, answering with shots at the Sheriff. "You gotta catch me first."

The bad guys take off and the posse is on their heels.

Charles has somehow got hold of a well-bred hunter-jumper and is treating the pursuit like a steeple chase.

Brandt is very effectively getting shots off over his shoulder, scoring a couple of hits.

Jane kicks her horse into overdrive. She gallops alongside Brandt, stands on her saddle and leaps onto Brandt's back, knocking them both to the ground. Agile and quick, she's on top of him with her gun to his face.

"Get up slowly," she says her eyes peeled on him.

He laughs at her. She catches the flicker of his gaze an instant too late and is knocked unconscious. Everything goes black.

CHAPTER 65: JANE IN THE DOCTOR'S LAIR

Jane comes to slowly. First her sense of smell, carbolic acid, and ...lavender. She opens her eyes – to blackness. Her eyelashes brush against cloth. She's blindfolded. And gagged.

She hears a whining twittering as of a very small blade being vigorously honed. And voices.

"How pleasant Mrs. Enderleigh-the-elder's voice is," thinks Jane. The pleasant voice says, "Shall we leave the marks?"

"Not yet," says the doctor.

"What the hell!?" shouts Jane. At least she thought she was shouting. Only a feeble whisper comes out, muffled by the gag. Her head is splitting. She would very much like to be sick but controls it.

Her slight stirring did alert the Doc and his mom that she was conscious. And their conversation ceased.

Jane tried a tentative move. She felt she was on the doctor's familiar examining table, but tied to it.

The doctor's hand caresses her throat. "Say 'Ah', say it," he commands. With one enormous hand around her throat he grabs her nose and forces her head back to make her mouth open. He sticks his fingers in her mouth.

She tries to bite him and he lets go, curses and slaps her blindfolded face.

"Oh, dear," says Doc-mom. "The blow to her head is serious. It has deranged her. She needs treatment at once. Shall I prepare? (scalpel sound here.)."

"No, mother. She is too young. Her organs aren't developed," says the Doc.

Jane is thinking as fast as she can but can't see a way out. Is she delirious? What is real?

"It's a pity that Indian killed her," laments the mom. "So young. So much promise."

"She's not dead, Mother," says the Doc.

"Won't be long," says Doc-mom, pleasantly.

Jane recalls that Doc has ironclad alibis for murders (uncles and others?) but, they're provided by his wife and his mother. She hasn't investigated him enough!

Sudden commotion – Professor's voice – loudly – "You've had her for hours! I demand to see her." Doc-wife is trying to deter her.

Doc-mom turns up lights. Doc undoes restraints, puts his shirt and jacket back on etc.

All the girls are with the Professor. They grab a bath chair from the outer office put Jane in it and wheel her away, wrapping her in their shawls and caressing her kindly.

"I'll not be responsible for her condition," says the doctor. "She is in no state to be moved."

"Yes, dear boy," says Doc-mom, soothing his anger. "I'll explain it all."

Jane in the chair, her head lolls, her eyes roll, she's lifted and placed into a closed carriage. Rebecca gets in with her, crying.

Doc-mom comes to the window of the carriage, charming as always; says, "Brain injury – no lights – violent spasms, restraint, all absolutely standard procedures. He means well!"

Rebecca's anguish is real, and as she cradles her young friend's inert form, she feels her clever scheme is responsible for Jane being led into danger.

Rebecca casts doc-mom a look of disgust only slightly leavened by pity. "You should have controlled him!"

She pulls down the window shade emphatically!

Jane, as soon as they are underway, casts off the shawls and says, "Woof! Saved by the skin of my teeth. Thanks. And if anyone asks, I don't remember a thing – and I won't! I didn't come to in this carriage, ok?"

"What happened? Did they hurt you?" asks Rebecca.

“What happened,” says Jane, “is that I am now certain that our esteemed medical director, our chief recruiter, board member, investor, pillar of the community, is stark raving mad!”

“Mad enough to kill? Repeatedly?” asks Rebecca. “Why?”

“I don’t know, but we’d better find out,” says Jane. “When we get to the hotel, follow my lead.”

Everyone has heard of her exploit and is waiting at the Dartmoor. Reporters are swarming. Jane’s a celebrity – a hero. She outwitted the bank robbers. Victoria and Franca have photos of her doing stunts to share with the papers. She’s superwoman, except...

The doorman opens the carriage door and Jane, much-assisted by Rebecca is lifted out, weak, shaky, dazed, confused, mute. To questions thrown at her, she gives an uncomprehending look of painful confusion.

“Let her rest,” insists Rebecca.

The Professor looks grim, Kitty puzzled by something. Lydia is crying attractively. Victoria helps clear a path to bring Jane through. Jane is on her feet, but barely, supported by Rebecca and Nanny, who hurries out as the carriage approaches and seems more concerned with Rebecca’s well-being than with Jane’s!

Rebecca says to the assembled crowd, “Thank you all for your well-wishes. Miss Brakeman – my friend – is an extraordinary young woman. We have hopes she will eventually recover the power of speech, but for now, please just let her rest.”

The other girls have run on ahead and cleared up their clutter to make a bed for Jane on a couch in the sitting room. Lights are turned down, drapes are drawn, Jane is helped in and settled on the couch.

The servants are dismissed. Doors firmly closed.

Girls can’t wait to get their questions out, but Rebecca shakes her head, holds up a finger...wait...tap tap at the door.

Mrs. Ickes taps as she enters, seeing if she can help. Jane lies blankly on the sofa. Rebecca tells her to stay up front and handle the press and the hotel management, and not to report back till sent for.

“I’ve only known her two months,” explains Rebecca to the others. “Can’t be too careful.”

“Careful about what?” asks Kitty.

“About my being fit as a fiddle!” says Jane.

“Jane!” they all exclaim.

The Professor looks like a heavy weight has been taken off her.

“Thank goodness!” say the girls. “We were so worried.” “Are you hurt?!” “What happened?!”

“I’m fine,” says Jane, “but not a word to anyone. Keep on crying Lydia – in public – go around with long faces, all of you.”

“But why?” asks Kitty.

“Because I have an idea who our killer is,” says Jane, “and I want to put them off-guard. Here is what I’m thinking...”

Jumping off the couch, she commences her usual pacing as she talks.

“Ouch!” she suddenly says, staggering a step as her aching head starts spinning. Nanny makes her sit down and applies an ice pack. But Jane continues talking intently to the rapt circle of girls, laying out her plan.

At the Dakota Springs Men’s club, members are breakfasting, while chatting or reading the papers.

The club is buzzing with eclipse excitement, and the scientists from around the world are thrilled to find wild west adventure right under their noses. They will dine out on this story for the rest of their lives.

Alec and Charles are just finishing eating, wiping their fingers and mouths, pushing back their chairs...

“I don’t care if she’s unconscious,” Alec is saying to Charles. “Get over there and do exactly what I told you.”

Charles looks miserable. “Oh, all right,” he says.

At a table alone overhearing this conversation, a member is reading a paper. The headline is “Local Heiress Felled in Daring Exploit. Prognosis Grim.”

He closes the paper to reveal it is Philip Sydney. He takes out his pocketbook. He writes a note, gives it to an attendant with some coins. Sits and thinks.

At the Dartmoor, Rebecca receives a note. Announces she’s going down to her lab car for a bit. Nanny will continue to “take care” of Jane, so no servants catch on to her deception.

Sydney is waiting when she gets to her train. He seems nervous and even shy. He apologizes for Brandt’s evilness. Says he either hadn’t known or hadn’t cared, but now he does. He can’t help being competitive, he says.

Rebecca thinks, says “I can’t help being in love with you, but I don’t have to trust you.”

“How can I fix things?” he asks. “What will convince you?”

Rebecca feels he still wants the railroad. She still thinks he’d lie, cheat and steal to get it. This is hard.

“Jane will never be the same,” she tells him. “But the railroad will go on. We’re soundly financed now. We have good management. It will succeed. I’ll make it my personal business that it succeeds.”

It could be “our business” Rebecca, together,” says Sydney.

Rebecca looks at him for a long minute. Picks up her bag and leaves. “No,” she says as she opens the door. “Never.”

The undertaker’s boy, with a bunch of second-hand flowers – lilies – in his hand, has come to the Dartmoor. He’s concerned for Jane, but also sees her as a potential client if she’s dying. Told that he’s here, Jane instructs Nanny to let him in.

Jane lies on the sofa as if laid out for burial. Boy chokes up, lays the lilies on her folded hands. Tweaks her collar. Crying, he asks Jane to forgive him for “giving Missus Enderleigh’s handkerchief to Betty. Betty said it would come in very handy. She said she could use it.”

It’s all Jane can do not to pop her eyes open! Confirmation and a new concept. Betty the Blackmailer, armed with Mrs. Enderleigh-the-younger’s handkerchief, retrieved from the pocket of the dead Reverend Henry Adams! The circle is closing. But still confusing.

She realizes she only missed making the connection sooner because she was so convinced that Sydney was a killer. She could kick herself.

As the boy is ushered out, the sheriff is ushered in by the Professor, who says to him, “Be prepared to be very shocked.”

His face is long and his hat is in his hand as he sits beside Jane’s inert ‘body. Like a wake.

“Poor kid,” he says.

Jane opens her eyes, looks right at the Sheriff and winks! “Howdy, Partner,” she drawls.

“Ha!” he says, jumping up. “I should have guessed as much. Never so happy to be wrong in my life.”

“Get this man a drink,” says Jane happily. Here’s an ally she can share her new theory with. “Pull up a chair,” she tells him, “and I’ll prepare *myself* to be shocked. What the heck happened to me? Did you get Brandt?!”

“No, I’m afraid not. He’s still on the loose,” said the Sheriff. “I’ll explain later,” he says. “Now tell me your big news.”

Lydia, guitar case in hand, knocks at the Enderleigh’s door. She knows the doctor is in his surgery and she watched Mrs.-the-elder, basket on arm, take off for her usual morning shopping, accompanied by her maid.

“Miss Laurence! I’m afraid the doctor is not in,” says Mrs.-the-younger. “I’m alone.”

“I was hoping to give Teddy the guitar lesson we spoke of,” says Lydia.

“Did we?” says Mrs. E. “I’m so forgetful these days.”

And it’s true, she does seem odd. Lydia wonders if she is taking drugs, perhaps while the doctor and his mom are out. But Doc-wife seems inclined for chat.

“They give me drops. And pills. I have to take them or they get very mad and have to punish me,” says the dazed little woman.

It dawns on Lydia that the wife is drugged by her husband to keep her subservient and quiet while they’re out. For the new, radicalized Lydia can conceive of thoughts the flirt and fashion-plate would never have entertained.

“Your dress is so pretty,” says Mrs., dreamily fingering the rows of little satin bows down the bodice of Lydia’s gown. “I wish I had pretty clothes. They say, ‘Cover up! Cover up!’ Long sleeves, high neck, winter and summer, day and night.”

“Would you like to see yourself in this dress?” asks Lydia.

“Oh, yes!” sighs the wife, quickly unfastening her own gown and letting it drop to the ground.

Lydia stifles a cry. The woman's body is skinny and malnourished, and a mass of bruises, cuts, rope-marks and burns. Lydia takes off her own silk gown, and puts it on Mrs. Enderleigh, who looks in the mirror, her glassy eyes shining. The dress is much too big for the poor skinny woman. Lydia is in tears.

At the Dartmoor, the Sheriff is saying, "So you don't know what Betty could have been planning to blackmail Dr. Enderleigh for?"

Jane says, "Well, it must have been something that would destroy his reputation."

"The success of the Springs is built on his reputation, isn't it?" asks the Sheriff.

"Yes," says Jane. "And the railroad depends on the Springs business. It's a house of cards."

"Now don't jump on me," says the Sheriff, putting up hand, "but a reasonable person could be excused for wondering if there wasn't a little love thing between your uncle and the doctor's sad little wife. These things do happen, you know...The doc got jealous, maybe..."

"Yesterday, Sheriff," says Jane, "I would have argued that even if your assumption was right – and it's preposterous, by the way – a jealous man doesn't act like this – he lashes out, punches, shoots – the lover or the wife. He doesn't dream up bizarre ways to torture and murder his rival. He doesn't tie his host to the railroad tracks during a dinner party."

"You'd be surprised," says the Sheriff.

Jane grimaces, and goes on.

"I said that yesterday, I would have argued that. But today, I know the man is insane. Look."

Jane unwraps the scarf around her neck. The fingerprints are clearly defined bruises on her neck.

"I'll kill him," says the Sheriff, his face flushed with fury. He can't sit still. He seems coiled to strike.

"Do me a favor, Sheriff," says Jane. "Sit down, order up a big fat steak dinner from room service. I'm famishing here. Can't order food for an unconscious girl. Do it for poor starving me."

He laughs. Gives a friendly cuff on the shoulder that she turns into a hug.

CHAPTER 66: A PAIR OF PROPOSALS

Meanwhile, the storefront that housed Edward Burnham, F.R.I.B.A., was the most beautiful of all on that elegant street.

Fergus was in the outer office when Victoria came in and he greeted her with a smug smile.

Victoria has a tube of drawings under her arm.

"May I see the great man?" asked Victoria, ignoring the overtones and grinning back at Fergus.

"On business?" asks Fergus.

"A friendly chat," says Victoria.

"Let me check," he says.

The door he opens reveals a shaft of glorious north light, an artist's dream light. Fergus comes back out in a moment, not happy. He's carrying a roll of drawings, fits them into a tube, puts on his hat and excuses himself. "Go right through. You'll find him alone," says Fergus.

Victoria pats her tube, gives him a thumbs up, as he leaves to make his delivery.

Edward is like an ascended master in a halo of light, working at his drawing board. He starts to get up, painfully, it appears.

"Please don't," says Vicki, hurrying over. "Thank you for seeing me, Sir."

"It's my pleasure, my dear," says Burnham. "How is Miss Brakeman? I hear very alarming reports."

"I have confidence in her ultimate recovery; put your mind at ease, sir. May I show you something?"

He gets up with difficulty and leads her over to a big table where she lays out her sheets of drawings. "I thought perhaps, if I stayed here, I could be of use to you as a draftsman."

"Very neat work, indeed, a nice line and very elegant. Yes, I could certainly use a hand. Mr. Fergus is a great help, but I fear his ambitions lie elsewhere."

Vicki expresses her pleasure. But Edward continues.

"I know how indispensable you must be to you grandpapa," says Edward.

"Please don't tell me I have to be tied to him forever," cries Vicki.

"No, not at all," says Burnham, "but think twice before you transfer servitude to one old man for servitude to another!"

Victoria, thinking, focuses on a drawing pinned up on the wall. It shows a very grand, unbuilt building. "Is that to be built?" asks Vicki. "It's magnificent!"

"I'm glad you think so, and I only wish I could get the Doctor to concur," says Burnham. "That's the new Infirmary, to be the lynchpin of the new expansion plan for the Springs. Lady Maud is only waiting for the doctor to approve the rendering to include it in the marketing materials for the investor group," says Burnham.

"Why won't he approve it?" asks Vicki.

"He won't even look at it!" says Burnham. "I took the drawings to his house especially to make it convenient for him to review them."

"What happened?" asked Vicki.

"I'm almost ashamed to say. I witnessed such an instance of cruelty as I never thought possible. The poor woman. Death would be a release to that one."

"Who?" Asks Victoria. "Mrs. Enderleigh, his mother?"

"No," says Burnham. "Mrs. Enderleigh, his wife. He made an excuse for his blows. Said she was hysterical. I was nearly hysterical myself. I left. So abruptly that I literally ran head on into that man from the railroad who just committed suicide."

"Mitchell Donnelly? He was going into the Doctor's place?" asks Vicki.

"Certainly. Very rude, would not accept my apology, almost threatened to hit me, but of course when I realized later that he committed suicide that night, I understood his mood. I wonder why the doctor couldn't have prevented it. Given him something to make him sleep or something?"

Meanwhile, at the Dartmoor, Jane was doing handstands against the wall when Nanny, sitting knitting by the window, spotted something down below.

"Here's that Kincaid boy, come to see you, no doubt. He doesn't look happy," says Nanny.

"Of course not," says Jane, concentrating on balancing on one hand, "I'm dying. He'd be a brute to smile."

Nanny didn't pass on that Charles had just tipped his hat and smiled broadly indeed at a lovely young lady he passed.

"How dead should I be, I wonder," says Jane.

"If you don't stop that monkey business and lie down, you won't fool anyone. Your cheeks are as rosy as a milkmaid's," says Nanny. And indeed, the blood has rushed to her head.

"Problem is, he's a kid," says Jane, arranging herself on the sofa-bed. "He means well, but he hasn't got an ounce of sense. Well, I guess I better hear him out, but I'm staying mute and dazed till we're sure of our man."

"You know best, dear," said Nanny placidly.

"Nanny, find an excuse to leave us alone. I'm curious what his mission is," says Jane.

"Of course, dear, if you're sure it's safe," says Nanny.

A knock at the door announced Kitty, ushering Charles into the sick room. He took the seat by her couch. Jane allowed herself to warily open her eyes, stare uncomprehendingly into Charles's eyes, then flutter them shut.

"It's my fault," says Charles, choking up. "I should have saved her. I was so busy treating it like a game, that I failed her when she needed me most."

"Jane doesn't need you," says Kitty. "Here, have a cake."

Nanny puts down her knitting, stands up and says, "Kitty, come with me please to the library."

"I just got here," says Kitty, not moving.

"It's about the eclipse," says Nanny. "A scientist needs your advice."

"Really!" says Kitty, starting up at once.

Charles is left alone with 'unconscious' Jane. He gets up and starts pacing. There are tons of girl-thing around the room. It's awkward. He's having a hard time getting started.

He kneels down beside her couch. "Miss Brakeman – Jane –" he begins- "Jane, if you get better, I want you to marry me. I know Alec says I have to say that, but I really mean it. You're the girl for me."

Jane, her eyes closed, smiles ever so slightly. Charles seeing it, can't resist kissing her. She can't resist responding, but as if in sleep. He strokes her cheek, her hair. The door behind him opens.

He stands, grabs his hat, bows to Lydia, who has just come in, and he makes a hasty exit.

Lydia carefully closes the door behind him, and Jane sits up, a little dazed for real.

"I finally got kissed!" says Jane. "While I was playing possum!"

"Well," says Lydia, "you probably never sat still long enough for a boy to get a run at you!"

Jane thinks that's funny. "Darn straight!" she says. "He asked me to marry him, and he said Alec *made* him propose to me.

"Alec?" exclaims Lydia.

"Now, why would that be, I wonder?" says Jane.

"Do you love him?" asks Lydia.

"I've got no time for love!" says Jane. "Now tell me what you learned at the Enderleighs."

"He's beating her, Jane. Cutting her. Choking her. He's a monster," says Lydia.

"As I learned," says Jane. "And his mother barely has him in check."

"You have to stop him, Jane." Lydia is tearing up. "You have to save his poor little wife."

CHAPTER 67: THE TRUTH ABOUT CORNELIUS

Dartmoor at twilight.

Rebecca is leaning on the parapet of the terrace, whose drop-off had terrified her that first day.

"I'm better," she thinks to herself. "I'm stronger, healthier, happier, less fearful, more mistress of my own emotions" – and yet, thinking of Sydney, and of her 'No, Never!' reply to his offer – "...and yet, if he were here and asked me to jump off this cliff with him, I believe I'd be just fool enough to do it."

She hears footsteps coming up behind her. "I won't look," she tells herself. "I won't feed this obsession." But she does turn – look – and freak –

It's the mystery guy, Mr. Cornelius, right there. In her surprise, she almost backs up over the edge. Cornelius grabs her and prevents the fall. She's shaken and sinks down among her skirts onto the pavement.

Concerned hotel staff are hurrying her way. She waves them off.

"Who are you? What do you want?" she says.

He sits down on the pavement besides her. "I'm a private detective," he says. "An enquiry agent, hired by Henry Adams."

"But why?" asks Rebecca.

"Because he was being blackmailed [by Mr. Philip Sydney]", says Cornelius.

Rebecca blanches.

He shows credentials.

"You'd better come inside," says Rebecca, as he helps her to her feet and they enter the lobby.

"Hold all visitors till further notice," says Rebecca to the manager, who bows his assent.

The staff is curious. Jane is famous. "Who is he, do you think?" said the porter to the chambermaid.

"He don't dress like a doctor, a priest, or an undertaker, so I guess she ain't died yet," answered the chambermaid.

Rebecca is eager for info, "Have you determined who killed him?" asks Rebecca.

"I have not, not yet."

"Do you know who didn't kill him? That could be helpful."

I've ruled some out – some I'm not sure of – there are secrets aplenty in this little "English village," he says.

They climb the stairs.

They enter Henry's apartment, head for the sitting room, where the women are all gathered.

Rebecca whispers, "Jane's playing possum in the sitting room. We're trying to keep it from the staff that she's fine. The word would be out in a flash. While she "can't talk" she's safer from the killer." As they walked through the suite, Rebecca was talking over her shoulder to Mr. Cornelius and so forgot the likely reception from Jane, to whom he was a dangerous enemy.

Her hand is on the doorknob – the door opens, Jane spots Cornelius and in two seconds, like a cat, she was sheltering behind the couch, and aiming two guns right at the hapless P. I.

“Hands up!” she shouts and he of course, complies.

Rebecca, caught off guard, throws her hands in the air as well. She regains her presence of mind to close the door carefully behind her while reassuring Jane.

“May I present my card, Miss Brakeman? And my invoice?” he says.

The women, who had assumed defensive positions, now sit back down, curious as can be.

“My legal name is Andrew Cornelius Lewison Fitch,” the stranger says. “With such a wealth of names to choose from, I change them often.”

“Who are you today?” asks Kitty.

“Cornelius will do, thanks,” he replies.

“Well, Mr. Cornelius,” says Jane. Start at the beginning. Who are you?”

“As I told Miss de Steyne,” I am a private enquiry agent,” he began. “I have worked at many professions over the years and take on the coloration that suits the moment.”

“You were a reporter in Denver,” says Lydia.

“Yes,” he replies. “A perfect excuse to ask rude questions.”

“What did my uncle hire you to find out?” asks Jane.

“There was an attempt to pressure your uncle to persuade you to sell the railroad.”

He’d never agree to that!” says Jane. “He reported the offer Philip Sydney made, but he never pushed me to accept it.”

“What in the world could someone use to blackmail your uncle,” asks Rebecca. “He was a saint!”

“No man is all saint,” says Cornelius.

“Why were you at my birthday ball?” asks Rebecca.

Jane says, “Why did you chase me on the train? Who were those men who were shooting at me?”

Cornelius explains that he had gotten a tip-off from a fellow PI who knew he was on the Brakeman case. This PI had been asked by a wealthy investor – whose name he withheld – to procure a pair of undercover agitators – union busters – the DC&M was specifically mentioned as the target of the mischief.

The trail had led to New York, where he discovered their plot to disrupt the birthday ball. They hoped to harm or abduct Jane during the confusion. Forewarned, Mr. de Steyne – yes, he was in touch with Rebecca’s father – had added security, both uniformed and plainclothes, and they had scared the brothers away. (our front ‘riot’.)

Cornelius had left the ball not because of Rhys and Alec but because he saw Jane was well-guarded and wanted to be out front observing the riot. There could be other agents, he had reasoned.

He had caught up with those brothers in Chicago, followed them onto the train and was trying to pump them – in the guise of a reporter – for info about what they were travelling west to do. They had just started talking about a Mr. Brandt, when one of them spotted Jane and recognized her – even in

disguise - they had been shown her picture before the attempted kidnapping and were on this train because she was. They had jumped up and pursued Jane, and Cornelius had pursued them.

He had intervened at the door of Rebecca's coach, and though he, too, knew it was Jane in disguise – (She's crestfallen. He had pretended to swallow the story to misdirect the bad brothers.)

Their work was successful, they had sown dissatisfaction, so that when Brandt offered them a sweeter deal, they walked *en masse*, he says, and they collected their money and went back to Baltimore. They're specialists.

CHAPTER 68: THE TRUTH ABOUT THE DOCTOR'S WIFE

"But that doesn't explain what happened to Reverend Adams," says the Professor, "What on earth could he be blackmailed over."

"A certain person had items that appeared to indicate an intimacy between your uncle and a married woman," says Corny.

"The doctor's wife," mutters Lydia. "Poor little Mrs. Enderleigh."

"Apparently, the woman had written to him in very affectionate terms, and a local girl had actually delivered the letter – and read it!"

"What was it like?" asked Rebecca. "How was it delivered?"

"I believe it was written in violet ink, wrapped in a handkerchief, and tucked into the Reverend's jacket pocket in the vestry while he was officiating in his cassock and robes," says Cornelius.

"There was that bit of visiting card in your uncle's prayer book," reminds Rebecca.

"Yes," says Jane. Violet ink. We laughed at it as old-fashioned and in poor taste."

Was this go-between the blackmailer?" asks Kitty.

"According to your uncle, no," says Cornelius. "This go-between is a poor misguided soul who deserves pity. The blackmailer is a villain from hell who must be stopped."

"The go-between gave or traded or sold the info to a person who used it to threaten exposure if your uncle didn't comply," he goes on.

"It's not a sin or a crime to be on the receiving end of a crush," says Jane.

"No, it is not, But the woman's husband is violent. The girl had witnessed that, too, and your uncle thought that vengeance would be wreaked on the wife – enough of a threat to concern your uncle considerably."

"I think we can stop fooling around, and just put names to these people," says Jane. "Tell me if I'm wrong."

"Philip Sydney couldn't get my railroad by fair means, so he hired thugs to disrupt it. It was he who was threatening my uncle – using poor Mrs. Enderleigh's misery as a lever to control my uncle."

"Betty Simple was the go-between. Poor dazed Mrs. Enderleigh had no one else to turn to. Her mother-in-law watches her like a hawk," Jane continued.

Cornelius says, "I wasn't able to confirm the identity of the letter-writer, but it seems likely to have been her."

"The evidence of the handkerchief establishes some correspondence between them – either written or verbal."

Vicki says, "She's very religious, perhaps a sort of confessional?"

Lydia says, "And the state of her poor body is evidence of what the correspondence could have been about."

"Wait!" says Kitty. "Those Latin inscriptions... 'bruised lip, plum marks, ' could be wounds she let your uncle see – as proof of what she was telling him."

"What wounds?" asks the PI.

"I saw her half-dressed," says Lydia. "Those marks were never self-inflicted and the scars were of different ages – this is a regular program of abuse."

"They've only been married three years," says Jane. "He never married before he came here."

"I know about that," says Rebecca. "Mrs. Jennings, my London informant, says the mother picked the girl out of a home for unwed mothers and took her and her little boy to make an instant family to enhance the doctor's image. At 47, he was still single and people were insinuating things that were bad for business."

"A man doesn't learn cruelty overnight," says Jane. "He must have been a brute in secret till then. His mother must have been appalled when she discovered it!"

"In London or Paris or Berlin, such a predilection can be indulged and concealed, but in a tiny community such as this, it couldn't have stayed hidden," says the Professor. "A sham family was the mother's solution, it seems."

"And a captive wife who was a friendless victim and who couldn't escape or even complain to the law. What a man does to his wife is nobody's business but his own."

"Lydia says, 'I got the impression he threatens harm to her child to keep her quiet.'"

"They have no other kids?" observes Rebecca.

"She says she doesn't menstruate," says Lydia. "She said he took all that out when they got married."

"What a monster!" says Vicki. "And yet this charming, delightful mother raised him. Is it medicine itself that warps a man – makes him want to play God?"

"There are monsters and saints in every profession," contributes Kitty. "Statistics prove it."

"The professor says to Cornelius, 'I'd like to review what we all have discovered about the other mysteries among our initial suspects and see if you can shed any light. Scientists don't like loose ends.'"

The others all assented and took on their 'pupil' personas as the Professor took on her official mien.

"Let me set the example of candor and thoroughness – intellectual honesty –" she began, "by addressing the case of Colonel Sir George Batten-Bowles."

"I had known him, as a boy – a young man – but boyish still – when my father lectured at Cambridge. I remember meeting in the dean's parlor at a sherry after Evensong. He was a poet then – for an Englishman, he was unreservedly Romantic."

"The colonel is still so Romantic!" says Lydia. "For an old man, he's very handsome, and for a soldier, he's sort of sweetly wistful. I always think a great heartbreak adds appeal to some older gentlemen."

"The Professor looked at her sharply, with a glance that said, 'He's mine!'"

"I'm so glad you're getting married," said Kitty.

Cornelius looks up sharply – this is news he hadn't heard.

Kitty continues, "Your mind has not been on our work, Professor. Once you're married, all that love distraction will stop."

The Professor looks amused. "Perhaps," She says.

"If you were in love, why didn't you two get married then?" asks Lydia.

"We were eloping – actually in a carriage on our way to Gretna Green – when our coach was overtaken by a troop of Grenadier guards – George's father's regiment. George was made to accompany them. He went kicking and screaming. I was left to find my own way home."

"Are *all* men monsters!" cries Rebecca. "No, I know that is not true. My father is the most upright man I know."

"Mine was the bravest," says Jane.

"Mine the most loving," says Kitty.

Vicki, the orphan, and Lydia, daughter of the war profiteer, stay silent.

Lydia feels guilty about her silence. "My father, in private, is a kind and generous father. And indulgent. His public actions I would not care to defend."

"But what about the Colonel? What happened to your fiancé?" asked Kitty, accidentally doing the socially sensitive thing for once.

"He didn't come back to Cambridge. He sent me a letter, care of my father, categorically denying any claims I might make in future, and enclosing a document to that effect, to be signed and attested to. I threw it on the fire. His name was on it, but he tells me he never saw it."

"So he became a Colonel," mused Kitty "and you became a professor."

"Not all at once," laughed the Professor. He served honorably and deserved the commission his father has purchased for him. I studied. [I married my astronomy professor], I threw myself into my work and believed I had forgotten about him."

"You never forget your first true love," cried Lydia, thinking of the Kid in retrospect, even though their drama had not yet played out. Like her father, and despite her gauzy air, Lydia was at bottom a realist it seemed.

"I didn't forget him," says the Professor. "In a way, I always remained true to him. At nineteen, he was too young, too tender, too proud. I never forgot him, but I stopped trusting him. I waited six years for him to come back to me – and then I gave up."

Lydia is crying, and Rebecca is yearning for Sydney with her whole heart.

Jane says, "Well, happy ending, but what has he been hiding? Why was Wiggins always sneaking around? And where does the Colonel get his money?"

"One explanation covers all those questions, Jane. He is – under a nom de plume – a very successful author – of books that would make your mother blush."

"Everything makes my mother blush," says Kitty. "She quite enjoys being shockable, I think."

There were lots of those kinds of books in Betty Simple's room," says Jane. "They didn't make me blush, but they did make me itchy. These were all by a woman author though, so not the Colonel."

The Professor just coughs meaningfully.

“Oh!” says Jane. “You mean...”

“Several names actually, puts in Mr. Cornelius. The ones set in the Civil War – the English Civil War – are by Elizabeth Cromwell; the ones set in an English village are by Violet Gardiner, etc.”

“Is that why he observes us so closely?” asked Rebecca. “It had occurred to me that it might be for his writing. That it’s racy makes it a bit weird.”

The Professor reassures her that the village series is quite innocent – the love scenes never got beyond a kiss and a yearning.”

“The love scenes sell the books to lonely old maids,” says Cornelius.

The Professor says, “I have urged him to try his hand at more adult eroticism, but I fear he is heading in the opposite direction – so impressed by your exploits that his next series will be pure adventure stories for girls.”

That’s better,” says Kitty, effectively ending that conversation. “Who’s next?”

CHAPTER 69: THE TRUTH ABOUT FRANCA

Vicki raised her hand. The Professor called on her. "Yes, Miss Van Leyden?"

Vicki begins, "Franca has told me as much as she knows, but there are many gaps. Did you discover anything more? Can you make sense of the story?"

Taking out one of the reports, Rebecca starts, "Thanks to the invaluable Mrs. Jennings, we know that for years Lady Maud Frawley – mostly at the insistence of her husband, Sir Kenelm Frawley – was effectively estranged from their only son and heir, Digby Frawley.

"The boy, having been sent out to his father's plantations in the Indies, had fallen in love with the beautiful daughter of a local dignitary, had married her without his parent's knowledge or consent. A year later, a daughter was born and the proud parents shared the news with Digby's parents.

"Sir Kenelm, who had often spent long working visits to the islands, knew the dignitary, knew the girl, knew her grandmother was a woman of color – a servant – a slave.

"The news was staggering. Sir Kenelm took it in icy silence while Maud sobbed. (?). The estate was entailed upon the boy. Sir Kenelm could do nothing to prevent that, but he could and did cease all communication and cut the lad off without tuppence. The young mother – her name was Francesca, as was her baby's – cared not for Digby's rank or money. They were happy. He worked for his father-in-law.

"Through a pair of trustworthy servants, Maud kept in touch with the young family. She sent news and money. They sent love and photographs of the darling child. The letters were often and regular. Little Franca grew prettier by the month.

"Then came silence.

"Grumbling over his newspaper at breakfast one day, Sir Kenelm complained that the damned cholera epidemic was wiping out the workforce in the Indies. No class was being spared the awful fate. Whole families were being wiped out, gone overnight.

"Maud turned pale but said nothing."

Then word came that her son and his wife had succumbed, along with the wife's whole family.

"And the baby?" asked Lydia, misty-eyed. "Little Franca?"

"No one knew," says Rebecca, resuming reading. "Defying her husband and increasingly despising him, Maud sold jewels and spent every cent and every waking moment searching for Franca.

"The child was legally black. Maud feared that without family to protect her, she could be sold into slavery – a high-caste, intelligent, beautiful girl would fetch a premium at the auctions." Rebecca paused.

"She had the latest photograph duplicated and posted with a reward in papers throughout the Caribbean and American South and Northeast. Success came at last, when an abolitionist she had enlisted in her search saw the advertisement Franca showed you, and immediately redeemed the child, not waiting for instructions.

"The girl had been in slavery for over a year. She had been bought as a servant-companion to a plantation owner's children. But the wife had died and the man's next wife was a mean, violent-tempered woman. The four-year-old was in misery.

“At last, the new wife, who couldn’t take the tearful child’s silent reproach, insisted she be sold – traded in for a new child of her own choosing – someone blacker, less pretty, less “spoiled” she called it. She was advertised for sale. And that’s how Franca was found and saved and united with her grandmother.

“Sir Kenelm refused to have her in the house, so Maud and the child moved in with Maud’s sister – Alec’s mother – for a short time – then were settled, on a small stipend, in a cottage in the West country by an implacable Sir Kenelm.

“In that quiet retreat, the grandmother sought to replace for the child, a home filled with love and security. The tot had happy memories of being dressed up and photographed and chatted of it happily. She loved the cameras, their bulk, sounds, flashes, and the magic of seeing her mood of the moment captured for all eternity.

“The nearby market town had a photographer’s studio and to indulge her charge, Maud would often take her there. The somber, precocious child was happiest when the photographer, a middle-aged woman with no child of her own – would let her help dust the studio. Her visits became a regular, much-welcomed thing.

“And as the girl grew up, she learned the trade, the way a boy apprentice would have. From the first, she wanted to control the scene, operate the cameras, develop the plates, print the negatives. She loved it all. And she was very good at it.

“Imagine her unhappiness when her grandmother announced that they were moving to America. Sir Kenelm had died, his estate went to a distant cousin, who was every bit as racist. What he hadn’t had the courage to do in his life, Sir Kenelm arranged for in his death – Maud’s stipend was revoked. She and the girl were left penniless.

“What she did have left was her title, her aristocratic bearing, her circle of friends and her fierce desire to protect and provide for her guarded and vulnerable granddaughter.

“She approached her brother, the Earl of Kilbrae, with a proposition.

“The Earl was a restless, ambitious man, much-occupied in schemes to increase his income and influence. Maud offered to put the research and organizing skills she had discovered in herself during her hunt for Franca, in his service.

“The Earl had just invested in a new health resort for British consumptives, in the mountains of the American West. The effect of the pure mountain air was said – by the spa’s promoter and chief medical officer, a Dr. David Enderleigh – a most imposing man – to be capable of wondrous cures.

“Maud’s job would be to create a congenial society for British ex-pats. Merely showing up meant you were included, yet Maud was to create an illusion of competition for society’s favor – something to give purpose and spice to a placid – or perhaps doomed - existence, and spur competition for ever more costly goods and amenities.

“The Earl proposed that his sister should represent his interests in this project. She would be given a salary, housing, and a percentage of the new business she brought in by way of tourism and real estate transactions.

“Her name and rank and social graces would lend credibility and *ton* to the endeavor. She felt she and Franca had been hiding in the woods long enough. Here was adventure! And a solution to their woes! She felt sure she could succeed in this new role.

“What she felt less sure of was Franca’s happiness and safety back in the country that had enslaved her. But the West was the land of freedom and potential, if anywhere was. She accepted her brother’s offer with thanks and went home to break the news to Franca.

“I think your Mrs. Jennings has been much influenced by picaresque novels,” remarked Mr. Cornelius. “I myself am a great fan of Humphrey Clinker, Joseph Andrews, and that tribe.”

“Tom Jones,” muttered Lydia, who had sneaked a peek at that risqué classic. “Yum.”

Rebecca, raises her eyebrows, resumes her story.

“Fortunately – or perhaps by design – Franca’s photographer friends were great fans of all things Western and convinced Franca that no 15-year old girl could wish for a better adventure. This reconciled the girl, somewhat to her enforced removal.

“With the advance from her brother, Maud outfitted them for their journey with wardrobes designed to be impressive and eye-catching. There was no telling when they might meet with a competent dressmaker again, and Maud needed to look the part of society leader.

“Franca – like any self-respecting girl of fifteen, despised her grandmother’s taste in fashion and dressed – if left to herself – in dull, shapeless garments that almost rendered her invisible. Apricot satin, Mechlin lace were wasted upon her, and yet, like her mother, she was dark and lovely. So lovely and so dark in fact, that as she matured, her grandmother came to appreciate her desire to evade attention. The girl had never forgotten the events of her early years. Loud men, vicious women still caused her to shrink and fade.

“A few days before their steamship sailed for New York, Franca’s photographer friends presented her with a complete photography outfit: camera, German precision lenses, tripods, dark room supplies, all handily packed for travel.

“On shipboard, she became known as the photo girl, as every day of fair weather found her on deck, recording the delights and squalors of the various classes. She longed to invade the lowest decks, capture images of the mighty furnaces and pounding machinery that moved the ponderous vessel across vast and turbulent seas, but Maud forbade it.

“In New York, Maud wasted no time getting her promotional efforts underway. She had kept up a correspondence with many of the reporters and politicians, abolitionists and suffragists from her search for Franca a decade earlier, and now she charmed, cajoled, bamboozled and bullied them into touting the new resort – Dakotah Springs they were calling it – in their publications and among their friends.

“This job done, they had set out for Colorado and a New Life.”

Rebecca paused in her reading.

“What a wonderful story!” said Lydia.

“What a wonderful girl!” said Victoria. “So that’s when you met them both, Jane?”

“I remember the day I met them very well,” said Jane. “I was about twelve. Franca was sixteen or so – a grown-up in my eyes. My mother and uncle and I were in Dakotah City to meet the train from Denver. Tracks for the DC&M had been laid as far as Milltown and work was continuing on towards Crooked Creek. There was a Halt at our house in the mountains. They stayed with us while my mother and Lady Maud fixed up an old adobe hacienda for them on the creek in the springs.

"They'd only gotten started when something terrible happened and suddenly everybody was poor and out of work and there was little or no money to build the railroad over the hardest part of the grade."

"Yes," said Rebecca. "My father got out of it well enough, thank goodness!"

"It's hard to believe that was only five years ago! This place feels like it's been here for ages!" said Lydia.

"That's the genius of Edward's design," said Jane, "and it's what Maud sold to rich British invalids. Perfect climes. Perfect village. Like Heaven. Most of 'em die here anyway."

"Even in a depression," says Rebecca, "the rich are still rich as ever, with plenty to spend. Lady Maud went after them, I guess. The Doctor prescribed Rocky Mountain air, and the Springs put it in a setting that was as British as home."

"So Maud's income is tied to the success of the Springs," says Jane. "There's only one thing that means more to her, and that's her granddaughter. I had to consider that a threat to either of those might make a strong, determined woman take action."

"Surely, she'd no reason to harm your uncle," says Vicki.

"No," says Jane, "but I judged she might lie to protect her interests. She didn't tell me my uncle was missing. None of them did."

"You told us Edward says that was to protect you," says Kitty.

"I'm sure it was – but it just happened to also protect the project he was betting his reputation upon! Mrs. Jennings says his style is out of vogue in England. He's considered old-fashioned."

"The Springs was to demonstrate his genius as a planner and builder of nostalgic themed spas. Paul has hopes of copying this formula in other places – the desert for example - Palm Tree Springs – I think he calls it."

"Still", said the Professor, "I hear of no motives sufficient for not one, but three murders."

"Perhaps the second and third murders were to cover up for the first murder," says Victoria.

"We know Betty Simple was in the middle of the blackmail scheme."

"Maybe," says Jane, "but Mitchell Donnelly doesn't fit."

"Your uncle told me about that," says Cornelius. "He wouldn't give in on the demands to pressure you Jane, but to buy time, he agreed to let Sydney propose the man to fill the G.M. job after Mr. Campbell took off."

"I'm very surprised that Uncle didn't tell me," says Jane, looking downcast. "Nobody told me anything!"

"The Professor speaks kindly. "Jane, I've only known you a short time. You are proving yourself a woman now, but when you came you were still a little girl."

"You think they saw me as a child?" says Jane.

"Yes. They couldn't have known how you had grown," says the Professor.

"And no one takes girls seriously anyway," says Victoria, "except at school, thank goodness!"

CHAPTER 70: THE TRUTH ABOUT SYDNEY

“Lydia says, “I’m glad to have so much of this explained, but it seems beside the point – let’s address the real villain of this story – that odious Philip Sydney.”

Cornelius begins a recital of the man’s questionable business dealings. Rebecca can’t deny it to herself – his information matches that of her New York informants. That he is a ruthless competitor doesn’t faze her – it’s congruent with her upbringing but her family prides itself on its refinement and centuries of careful breeding. What she is hearing from Mr. Cornelius makes her nauseated with shame.

With due consideration for the sensibilities of the young ladies, Cornelius tells the story of the man who let women fund his pleasures – who named himself after a poet – an Elizabethan courtier. “He might as well have named himself after a beast of the jungle,” thinks Rebecca.

“This acting troupe that’s been playing the district,” Cornelius is saying, “that’s his mother and his uncle, and all his cousins too for all I know.”

The girls are sniggering and laughing and suddenly Rebecca hates them all.

“I’m going to my lab,” she announces, and leaves.

As the door closes behind her, she hears Jane says, “She loves him, I reckon.”

CHAPTER 71: THE TRUTH ABOUT ALEC, MAUD AND CHARLES

"Anything else we need to know?" says Jane, yawning. "I've had a long day."

"Nothing that can't wait till morning," says Corny, rising to take his leave. "Just one warning: be careful around Alec Macallum. He's the official representative of the British rail consortium."

"The ones who are trying to buy my railroad?" ask Jane.

"Yes," says Corny. "He's authorized to make any moves, any offers, that will get you to give up the railroad and defeat Sydney's plans for a monopoly."

"This whole time, *he's* been the one thwarting me? Says Jane.

"It was certainly he who filed for the injunction against you running the DC&M," says Corny.

"The low-down dirty snake!" Jane explodes. The servants hear, and scuttle off with the news.

"And that little lying rat of a cousin of his," she says, "He's been in on it too, of course. The whole damn family have been working against me. Lady Maud, my mother's best friend!" Jane is apoplectic.

"Her brother, the Earl, is a major investor in this British group. To go against him could be fiscal suicide," says Corny, "for Alec as well as for Maud."

"I don't care!" yells Jane. "It's not all about money! It's about lives. Our lives!"

CHAPTER 72: REBECCA OBSESSES OVER SYDNEY

Rebecca had (once again?) spent the night in the train car, with Rhys guarding against unexpected visitors. None had appeared.

“Does he know I know?” she asked herself a thousand times. “I never want to see him again. I hope he will be at the Eclipse party.”

Thus she went in circles – endless figures of eight of desire and repulsion. For a moment, his low origins brought on a more-intense wave of desire. She despised herself. She forgave herself. She couldn’t think. She couldn’t stop thinking.

And wasn’t it a sign of his power, his strength, his masculinity that he had created an identity for himself that let him wield the power of his magnetic appeal?

“I want what I want!” she said to herself, shoving her toe into a too-tight boot and cursing. Nanny came running to soothe her. “Not those boots! Your feet have swelled from the mountain air. You’ll be miserable. Here, this is better,” and with her competent hands, she soothed Rebecca’s ruffled feathers.

“Thank you, Nanny.”

“You’re welcome, dear.”

CHAPTER 73: SETTING UP THE ECLIPSE PARTY/TRAP

The news had gone out that Jane was recovered and would be hosting a party at Brakeman's Halt the day of the Eclipse.

Invitations had gone out to a group that happened to include every living member of the party who gathered for Maud's birthday.

The de Steyne train, plus a passenger car and a caboose from the DC&M are waiting on the tracks at Dakotah Springs (?) station. Some of our characters/suspects are already on board, the rest are boarding now.

Rebecca's infusion of cash had been put to good use and the station gleamed with fresh paint and polished brass. Wreaths and bunting lent a festive and patriotic glow to the happy faces. (Eclipse day, don't forget, crowds, activity?)

(?) Jane is brought in a closed carriage, and supported onto Rebecca's private car by Nanny. The shades are drawn. (I wish there was a reason to have Nellie the actress imitate Jane so she could actually be off doing something else.)

The other girls are already at Brakeman's Halt, setting up for the Eclipse.

The guests take seats in the passenger cars, decorated with eclipse graphics and props by Lady Maud, who's in charge of the party.

Wiggins and Rebecca's steward are supervising the loading of huge picnic hampers and ice chests, bushels of flowers, chests of plate and china and crystal. Tanks of live lobsters, crates of champagne on special gyroscopic holders.

Mrs. Irish is already at the Halt, catering to the girls and prepping for today's event with the help of a half-dozen nearly-identical, red-haired, snub-nosed nieces and nephews.

Bobby Bill comes in behind her and gives her a friendly hug and kiss.

"What are you doing here?" asks Mrs. Malloy?

"Happens this is the same crowd coming today that was here that day. I'm to make sure no one goes missing."

CHAPTER 74: SUSPECTS GATHER AT THE HALT, ACCUSATIONS FLY

Arlette: "It was him! Sydney. I saw it. I heard it, at least. He killed Betty too. She knew his secret. And that Donnelly was his creature, too."

Sydney: "For years I have revered the memory of my late father – a great actor, cut off too soon – by my Uncle, his brother, I thought, who took his place in my father's troupe and in my mother's bed. Shortly before you met me, Miss de Steyne, I learned that my Uncle, the man I reviled, is in fact, my real father. If I have been avid in my pursuit of success, it is to drown out the memory of my mother's fateful revelation. I have no more secrets. I have no high-born origins. I am what fate has made me. If I choose to tell my story my own way, that's my right. I am what you behold."

Doc-Mom of Colonel: "He writes smut." Professor replies, "He writes very passionate, very beautiful romances and I, for one, adore them!"

CHAPTER 75: JANE FINGERS DOC AS THE KILLER

Identify Doc as the Killer

Doc takes Doc-Mom “hostage.”

Doc fells Lawman with powerful blow.

Doc grabs lawman’s gun

Doc with hostage-Mom steals idling train

Train gets to scary trestle

Brandt has climbed trestle and is planting dynamite! (Could be – Brandt on ground with kitty as hostage? Has forced ?? to climbed trestle on suicide bombing mission. Who is climbing the trestle? The Kid?)

Jane has found a way onto the train and is crawling towards the cab

In cab, Doc-Mom is clearly no hostage – she’s shoveling coal.

Doc is big and strong but clumsy – Jane evades him during cab fight –

Jane reveals Doc-Mom did the actual killing. Doc posed bodies later (for alibi.)

Doc attacks Jane and she jumps on him – he bumps Doc-Mom and she goes head-first into the fire!

Jane can see Brandt placing dynamite.

Doc is enraged, insane monster.

Train is approaching trestle.

Doc attacks Jane – she does a gymnast move and he goes out the door and falls to the same death as Henry.

Brandt is amused as body falls past him.

Jane drives the train beyond the trestle.

Jane runs back along the tracks.

Eclipse is advancing.

Brandt shoots up at her.

Jane and Brandt both strive for silence.

Eclipse (around 3 p.m.) 3 minutes 11 seconds of totality.

The eclipse helps Jane climb down trestle “in the dark.”

The eclipse is ending, the peril worsening, the fuse is about to be lit.

Charles is climbing up from below. If Jane shoots, she may hit him.

Running out of time. He’s lighting the fuse.

Jane draws aim for Brandt. She shoots, but her shot is the second ‘crack.’

Colonel shoots Brandt with Jezail.

Jane doesn't have to kill anyone herself, thank you.

Help comes running to get everything safely back to Brakeman's Halt.

CHAPTER 76: ORDER RESTORED AT THE HALT

Back at the Halt, Madame Arlette lays out the cards. Says, "I told you so."

Wiggins brings round tea.

Fergus is working on a new poem.

Lady Maud is composing a press release and trying it out on whoever will listen.

The Colonel is cleaning the jezail.

Edward is nursing a brandy and staring into the fire.

Paul and Sydney are talking animatedly about plans for a new resort – elsewhere.

Cornelius is being pumped by Mrs. Ickes, the secretary/mystery writer.

Rebecca's nanny is looking after poor Doc-wife and little Teddy, just beyond earshot.

The railroad girls and the professor are absent, dealing with the eclipse astronomy.

The railroad girls come in, bursting with enthusiasm and pride.

The professor says it's time now to clear up mysteries.

Jane obliges.

Reveal scene

I've brought you all together here because you are the very people, and this was the exact place where Henry Adams was last seen alive and well.

His death was first reported as an accident. It was assumed that Henry Adams stumbled in the fog, landed on the tracks and was crushed by the oncoming train. No one had any explanation of why he would be outside, so far from the house, or why he went missing from the party that he himself had organized.

The first witnesses on the scene were Sol Wiggins and Fergus Fraser. It was the morning after the party and they were taking the supply-wagon back to town. The road runs on the opposite side of the creek from the tracks, but the day was clear, and they easily spotted something amiss. They crossed at the nearest ford and ran along the tracks till they came upon a scene of appalling carnage. Henry Adams' head and hands were crushed and battered; his body was relatively intact, but no longer connected to those extremities. He was dressed as they had last seen him indoors, in a tweed jacket, shirt, regulation dog-collar, light boots, and flannel trousers. No hat was found near the body. They removed his effects – a billfold, handkerchief, eyeglasses, prayer-book - from his pockets for safekeeping, wrapped the body parts in tablecloths, and placed them as respectfully as possible in the wagon. They brought Reverend Adams' remains to town, where Doctor Enderleigh, as coroner, pronounced him dead of natural causes resulting from the impact of the train. The inquest's verdict was death by misadventure. He is buried in the churchyard of St. David's.

Soon after the funeral, there began to be whispered remarks, questions about how an intelligent man could wander onto his own railroad tracks in his own backyard as it were, and wind up lying with only his head and hands across the tracks? Who had last seen him alive? He had been missed at dinner, around one. What was he doing between the time he was last seen, and when the train hit him? A few people remembered that he had seemed pre-occupied, anxious, some said, for weeks before his death, even slack in the execution of his priestly duties. This was quickly trumped by claims that he had seemed 'hunted' or 'fearful,' though no one could – or would – point to a cause. Was whatever he was frightened of enough to drive him to take his own life? Should a verdict of suicide have been reached? Was there a conspiracy – a deliberate cover-up, to save the reputation of a respected and beloved man of God? These were the questions many were asking.

Jane Brakeman has averred that her uncle would never have taken his own life, although he might give it up voluntarily in a noble-enough cause. We asked ourselves, did such a cause exist for him? Was there something or someone he would repudiate his faith for? Someone he would commit the gravest sin to protect or conceal?

We needed to discover the cause of the 'hunted' aspect noticed by friends who knew him well. I felt certain, almost from the first, that undue pressure was being put upon Jane's uncle to use his influence and authority to induce her to sell her railroad. I was suspicious of Mr. Cornelius. An unsavory man of skulking habit and repellent appearance, I could easily imagine him attempting to blackmail Henry Adams into forcing Jane to sell her railroad. I learned that while in New York, he had been investigating the Brakeman finances including the Dakota Springs Company and the DC&M Railroad. When making inquiries about any one of your circle, we repeatedly found that Mr. Cornelius had been there before us, asking the same sorts of questions. He insinuated himself into the birthday ball given at the Chateau de Steyne, during which the laboratory was broken into and vandalized. He left the ball abruptly when challenged by Mr. Jones and Mr. Macallum. Cornelius was spotted in close conference with two toughs, one of whom shot at Miss Brakeman as he chased her across the tops of speeding train cars. Madame Arlette has confessed that this Cornelius threatened her with harm to her reputation unless she did as he asked, and persuaded Miss Brakeman to reject the attentions of the man who had offered to buy her railroad.

"This bit of information caused me to look more closely at that man – Mr. Philip Sydney. Though popular with the smart set in Englishtown, I had concluded that Mr. Sydney was a vain, selfish creature, accustomed to satisfying his urges without regard to any harm he might cause. Although he pretends to be a respectable citizen, he travels with a gang of dubious reputation. He appears to take business defeats in stride, yet there were rumors of vengeance done to those who had bested him in deals. The Reverend himself had damned what he called Sydney's "*rapacious depravity*" towards an old actress who claimed charity from him. The same old actress who was later seen in Milltown, being browbeaten by Mr. Cornelius! We have found that woman; she is here today. Before you all, she will swear that she is the mother of this same "Philip Sydney" the railroad tycoon. She will show how he began life the unintended consequence of a liaison between a dissolute younger son of a baronet, a handsome but worthless bounder, shipped off to the colonies to be out of the way; and a clever, but susceptible, young Irishwoman, a lady's maid. This is the woman who stands here before you now. She did not abandon the boy, but raised him on her own, through the enterprising retailing of whatever talents for pleasing she possessed. She had genteel manners, learned from her betters, and a voluptuous figure, quite in the fashion of the time. She commenced actress, and soon had protectors enough to ensure that the child was raised in comfort and often, luxury. Had she sent him off to school, his story might have taken another turn; but she kept him near, and his mind and morals, from infancy, were corrupted. He was petted for his precocity; exploited for his beauty; and at an early age, introduced to the arts of romance, at which it was found, he excelled. His mother having impressed upon him his noble birth, and at the same time showed such contempt for the nobility, and for his father in particular, it was no wonder the boy grew up feeling gifted beyond his peers and

superior to them in every way, but needing constantly to prove his own worth to himself. His mother, caressing him, had told him from infancy that there exists a separate set of rules for Fortune's favorites, like himself. He might make his own rules, if he chose. So he did.

I believe that this man, Sydney, a man devoid of moral sensibility, was infuriated by the effortless superiority of Henry Adams, an American aristocrat, adored and revered by all. He determined to destroy him, and at the same time, gratify his own mania for monopoly. Ever observant of the emotional lives of those around him, Sydney soon felt he had found a lever with which to topple the man of God's placid goodness. He set out to blackmail Henry Adams with the threat of spreading anonymous accusations that, in falsely slandering a lady's honor, would endanger her life.

Certain hints from your own observations had led me to wonder if jealousy could be at the root of this tragedy. Doctor Enderleigh was known to be a domineering man: this trait, which inspired confidence from his patients, was in private life perverted into an unhealthy control over his wife. In every aspect of her life, he demanded a slavish obedience, which he did not hesitate to enforce with physical intimidation. From this hell of a life, Alice Enderleigh yearned towards the refined sensibilities and gentle rituals of her Faith – and in particular, she yearned towards the idealized gentleman that the Reverend Henry Adams represented. What Henry Adams felt towards her, we can only speculate – he was a very private man – but whatever kindness he showed Alice Enderleigh was enough to enrage her jealous husband. He redoubled his 'discipline' and his vigilance, and, we think, planned to do away with his rival, during the trip to Brakeman's Halt.

He wrote a note in imitation of his wife's writing, or perhaps he made her write it herself – she has so far refused to tell – wrapped it in the handkerchief he had stolen from her months before – he had used its disappearance as another excuse to discipline her – and as the group – in riding clothes – left for the horseback outing, Doctor Enderleigh found a way to slip note and handkerchief into the pocket of Henry Adam's tweed jacket. When they returned from the ride, Henry would presumably change out of his riding gear and find the note, but be unable to confirm it with Alice – because she would literally be tied-up in the bedroom – another of the doctor's favorite disciplinary procedures was to bind her, neck and hands, to the bedrails, gagged and powerless.

You all witnessed the doctor's consternation when Henry turned back from the ride almost immediately, and returned to the house! If the Reverend had found the note at once and sought out Mrs. Enderleigh to ask what it meant, who knows what she might say? Perhaps her husband trusted to her broken spirit, to keep her silent. In the end, his plan was saved by Mrs. Enderleigh's genuine illness, and Madame Arlette's officious protectiveness of the poor woman. Henry had come to the door, note in hand, but was turned away. Henry and Alice had exchanged not a word.

The Reverend set out some minutes before the time appointed, by his private office exit, and more felt than saw his way down the drive to the Halt, where he expected Alice to be waiting. Someone was there before him. Someone he knew. Someone he feared.

Though it's hard to point to *the exact* murder weapon in a doctor's bag – needles and drugs aplenty, unquestioned, and ready to hand – we can surmise that the doctor had always intended to kill Henry Adams in an untraceable way and then, as medical officer, declare him dead of a heart attack when the body was found. But that cold, damp Sunday, when he kept the rendezvous at the designated place, he found the reverend already knocked to the ground, with a great bleeding wound to his head. There was a slight pulse, I should guess, and the man might have been saved, yet! But the doctor had steeled himself for murder. He was aware that his jealousy had been noticed by the others, certain he would be the main suspect, afraid that with her lover dead, Alice would break down and tell the truth. A 'heart attack' death was regrettable, but explainable; a battered, bloody corpse was Murder.

Shielded by the dense fog, he saw another way. The boat house was close by. He loaded the body into a skiff and rowed it to the far end of the lake, out of sight of the house. At the end of the lake, he pulled the body out of the water – Sam noticed a place where the reeds were depressed – and dragged it around the bend, down the center of the tracks to avoid leaving footprints in the soft shoulder of the line. Choosing the place where the trains pick up speed as they start down the long grade, he arranged the body to look like a suicide. For Doctor Enderleigh, it wasn't enough that his rival would be dead; his reputation as a moral paragon needed to be destroyed as well. He returned the skiff, sneaked back into the house – we know his room has direct access to the outdoors, Signora Mancini remarked upon it when she stayed there – he then raped his wife again from sheer exuberance of spirits, untied her, and, with the usual threat that he'd kill Teddy if Alice talked, he bade her not be late for dinner.

Out on the fog-shrouded railroad line, Henry Adams regained consciousness and realized he was tied neck and wrists to the track. He succeeded in using one bound hand to pull the handkerchief out of his mouth. It was found clutched in his severed hand.

So, who killed Henry Adams? Was it the person who struck him down? The person who saw his wound, but callously walked away, leaving him lying there. Or was he murdered by the person who, coming upon the wounded man, chose to make him a not just a dead man, but a despicable one.

Why, you ask, were the clues of the handkerchief and the note left where they would be found? Because the killer wanted the *suicide* to be attributable to illicit love. The Doctor was tiring of his spiritless wife, and was avid to have her humiliated publicly to feed his lust. But he was disappointed of his vengeance. His wife's name was never mentioned in connection with the dead man. The community rallied around their fallen friend, and made sure no judgement of suicide was ever officially considered.

When we arrived at The Dartmoor, Jane found that her uncle's rooms had been entered and ransacked. We assumed something had been stolen, but we were wrong. Nothing had been taken – but something had been left for us to find – a planted clue. Jock, having taken charge of the effects of the murdered man, found himself curious about the Reverend's Book of Common Prayer. The service, he found, was vastly different from that of his wife's sect. He tells us he spent several hours reading the glorious prose, and he swears that no note in violet ink on stiff card was in that book from the time he took it out of Henry Adams' pocket, till he handed it to the authorities, who then returned it to Reverend Adams' apartments at The Dartmoor. So where did that telltale note come from? Who put it into the prayer-book for Jane to find?

With a little help from her friends.

Sydney was 'blackmailing' Henry by hinting he'll "spill the beans" about affair between Rev and Doc-wife.

Doc gave Doc-wife a hysterectomy because he knew his mother was crazy and doesn't want kids cause of family insanity.

It was Doc-Mom who followed Sydney down to the rendezvous with Henry. She hears Syd and Henry altercation, blow, fall. Sydney storming back to the house. She advances through fog, injects Henry, he's dead.

Doc-Mom goes back to house, interrupts Doc who is raping his wife, sends him down to deal with it. There is a path through the woods that comes out near the precipice. Body put on track. Doc hightails it back to house, appears at dinner. Excuse of wife sick for lateness.

The Kid is acknowledged to be a good guy and welcomed into the group.