

A woman with reddish-brown hair in a bun, wearing a light blue long-sleeved blouse and a black skirt, stands with her back to the camera, looking out over a vast canyon. A river flows through the canyon floor. The scene is bathed in the warm light of sunset or sunrise, with golden light hitting the canyon walls. The woman is holding a straw hat in her left hand.

Kimberley WOODHOUSE

SECRETS of the CANYON
—BOOK TWO—

A GEM of TRUTH

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Kimberley
WOODHOUSE



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A Gem of Truth • Kimberley Woodhouse

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This is a work of historical reconstruction; the appearances of certain historical figures are therefore inevitable. All other characters, however, are products of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

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This book is dedicated to Garry Hogan.
My amazing dad.
The guy my kids lovingly called “The Walking Encyclopedia.”
A man of science. A man of theology.
Chemistry Professor.
Genius.
Pastor.
Husband.
Dad. Grandpa. Great-Grandpa.
You taught me what it was to love the written word.
By starting me on The Word.

It hasn't been a fun year for you.
In fact, the past few haven't been all that great.
But to hear you praise God through it all challenges
me to be a better child of God.
So . . . here's to you, Dad.
A man who loved to read the manuals for everything.
A man who loved knowledge and learning.
A weaver of stories.
I learned so much from you. I'm *still* learning from you.
I love you.
Keep on keepin' on.

Dear Reader

I'm so excited to have you join me for another journey back to El Tovar, the Grand Canyon, and the inimitable Harvey Girls.

This time, we not only go back to 1907 and the height of the Harvey Empire, but the story brings in a legend from 1540. The legend is purely from my imagination, but it was *inspired* by a very true story—the history behind the Spanish exploration that brought a small band to the Grand Canyon by accident almost five hundred years ago.

Cibola. (*National Treasure: Book of Secrets*, anyone?)

There's a lot surrounding the legend of Cibola. Because the Spaniards conquered the Aztecs and the Incans and took what was an immense amount of wealth, the legend of vast cities of gold has been fueled for hundreds of years. What happened to the treasure? To think that this expedition of men abandoned a sight such as the Grand Canyon in search of gold completely blows my mind. But they did.

Unfortunately for them and their pockets, they never found Cibola.

It was this rich and fascinating bit of history that inspired my own legend that I use in this story.

So, of course, I used a bit of artistic license to bring this to life. But rest assured, I did the same amount of intense research that I always do for my stories, and I hope you enjoy *A Gem of Truth*.

For more details about the history included in this story and interesting facts, make sure you check out the Note from the Author at the end of the book.

Lastly, I have to mention a best friend from my childhood, Julie Schultz Leavitt. We were thick as thieves decades ago until my family moved away, but I have carried around beautiful memories of her. Then, one day, a few years ago, she came to one of my book events, and we reconnected. She is such a lovely, amazing woman with the most incredible family (four gorgeous daughters!). Thank you, Julie, for allowing me to name my heroine after you. And for not clobbering me when I dragged you to sing in front of the church.

Enjoy the journey,
Kimberley

Prologue

JUNE 1889

DENVER, COLORADO

No child should ever witness a scene as gruesome as the one in front of her.

“Mama!” The scream tore from Julia Schultz’s throat, threatening to rip her in two. Tears gushed from her eyes as she bounced along the road, dust stirring in a big cloud and, for a moment, wiping away the scene. “Daddy!” She choked on the word. The ground rumbled beneath the hooves of the horses and the wheels of the wagon. As if it couldn’t wait for them to be away from the chaos.

“Hush now, child. They’re gone.” The words held impatience. And a bit of disgust.

A wiry arm tried to yank her from her kneeling position. The tailgate of the buckboard bit into her hands as she held on with every ounce of strength she had. But it was no use. One more tug and splinters filled her fingers and palms as her backside hit the hay. The burning and stinging produced even

more tears. But the pain in her hands was nothing compared to what she felt inside. Her gut twisted in knots, and a deep gnawing made her want to scream.

Clamping her eyes shut, she tried to erase what she'd seen. Just like washing the blackboard in the schoolhouse. She'd always been good at that when Teacher asked. Probably because she was good at making up stories and daydreaming, which helped the job pass faster. Maybe she could do that now.

But she didn't want to make up a new story. Didn't want to daydream about picking apples, or playing dolls, or running by the stream.

The horror of what had just happened couldn't be real. She needed it to go away. To vanish from her mind's eye. She wanted her mama and daddy back.

But that wasn't possible . . . was it?

Imagining an endless blackboard in front of her, she visualized herself with a giant bucket of water and a rag. Every time she doused the rag, she swiped at the pictures in her mind. Until it was all black.

There. That was better. At least she didn't have to see it.

For several minutes, the blank slate behind her eyes helped her to calm down. The tears stopped. She gulped big breaths until her breathing slowed and her limbs stopped trembling.

But then she opened her eyes. Her imagination couldn't change what happened. Or where she was. The road behind the wagon stretched back to where her parents drew their last breaths. She couldn't see them anymore. Couldn't hear the crowd. Couldn't smell the flowers she'd just picked for her mama.

Instead, the smell of sweaty horses did nothing to mask

the scent of the woman beside her. She smelled like liniment and sour milk. Nothing like the sweet smell of her mama.

And the man driving. Well, he was scrawnier than any man she'd ever known, with a mustache too big for his face. He hadn't said a word. Just drove the wagon. Away.

Far away.

Risking the ire of the woman, Julia went back to the tailgate and gripped the rough wood.

Another hard yank brought her back to the hay. "I told ya to sit. Ain't nothin' you can do about them now."

"But it's not right to leave . . . it's not." She clenched her jaw as hard as she could. She had to be the strong one. There was no one else left.

"The sooner you learn about how hard life is, the better. Your parents are dead. Gone."

She dared a look into the woman's eyes. What made her so hard? So unfeeling? She was nothing like her mother, who had always been so full of smiles, hugs, and laughter. Dread built in Julia's stomach. "What're you gonna do with me?" She pulled her knees to her chest and wrapped her arms around them.

The harsh woman let out a huff. "Never you mind. You're just another orphan that needs feedin'. Just keep your mouth shut and your head down. Do what you're told and maybe some family will take you in permanently."

The woman prattled on about rules and such and what a burden it was to have another mouth to feed, but Julia was still caught up on the word *orphan*. An hour ago, that word didn't apply to her. It wasn't true. It couldn't be.

She knew what happened to kids who didn't have parents. Unless some new family wanted them, they were tossed aside. Sent to orphanages. Or worse, left on the street.

The woman before her said she had babies at home and that she needed help. At least that's what Julia had overheard her tell the preacher man when she agreed to take *the child*. Her. But what would happen after that?

Julia didn't want to stay with these people. They weren't nice.

They weren't even happy.

But most of all, they weren't her parents.



FOUR MONTHS LATER

The pillowcase in Julia's hands held everything she owned in this world. That, and the clothes on her back.

As yet *another* wagon bounced down *another* strange road with *another* set of bedraggled people taking her away, she gripped it tighter.

She slid her eyes closed and made a list of the contents.

A small tintype of her parents that Mama had shoved at her in those last minutes. Two sets of underclothes. One dress. One nightgown. A hairbrush.

If she had any money, she'd take her meager belongings and run away. But where?

Why didn't anyone want her? At eight years old, she was tall and strong. She worked hard. She had good manners. Tried to fit in with each family. But that was just it—they already *had* families. And she wasn't a part of them.

She was a castoff. Another mouth to feed. A burden. An *orphan*.

The awful word kids used to make her feel about as good as cow poop being scraped off a shoe.

The word that caused people to whisper to one another.

The same word that made others cringe and be horrified by the “grotesqueness” of such a child.

Why did grown-ups think that just because she didn’t have a family it meant that she was from the devil? It wasn’t her fault her parents were gone. She’d tried her best. She had.

But here she was, being carted away at the mercy of yet another couple that looked like they’d been sucking on lemons.

No matter what she did, no one wanted to keep her.

Two hours later, the wagon stopped. The inky black of the moonless night made Julia shiver. At least they weren’t in Denver anymore. People wouldn’t know what happened to her parents and why. She’d simply be an orphan. And that was bad enough.

“Get out, girl.” The man tipped his head toward the shack. “You gotta stay with us a few days before the next family comes through to get ya and take ya to Texas.”

“Texas?” Her voice squeaked as she stood from the bed of the wagon. This was the farthest she’d ever been from home. Wasn’t Texas hundreds and *hundreds* of miles away?

“Apparently the people who want ya don’t have any children of their own. The first orphan they got put a snake in their bed. Wife got pretty sick after being bit. That’s why they asked for a girl this time.”

What did any of that have to do with her? Did she really have to go to Texas?

This time the wife spoke up. “You won’t be a burden to these folks. They actually *want* a child. This will give you a whole new start on life.” The woman leaned over the seat and patted Julia’s shoulder, as if she’d just said something important.

The problem was, she didn’t want a new life. She wanted

her old one back. With Mama and Daddy still alive. But that couldn't happen. Not now. Not ever.

As she climbed the ladder to the hayloft, Julia did her best to shake off the sad thoughts that had been her companions for the past few months. She'd cried herself to sleep every night, missing Mama and Daddy.

She lay back in the hay, the only place this latest couple had to give her to sleep and let out a sigh. What if the people taking her to Texas really did *want* her? Maybe she would have a family again. People who loved her.

Closing her eyes, she allowed her mind to dream. Of something new. Of a mother and father who couldn't wait to meet their little eight-year-old girl. Of a big house with a picket fence and a flower garden on the side.

Of never being called an orphan again.

Of . . . being loved.

1



APRIL 1907

HOTEL CASTAÑEDA

LAS VEGAS, NEW MEXICO

Some days were not predictable.

Which was a contradiction to Julia's life as a Harvey Girl because it was for the most part pretty predictable.

Their uniforms were all the same. Their work hours were long and hard, and they had the same routine day in and day out. Even their customers were predictable—either the regulars from town who made the same orders every day, or the passengers from the train who arrived like clockwork and would be served in the forty-five minute window before getting back on the train and heading to other destinations.

Different faces, same routine.

Predictable.

As the new group of trainees waited for the head waitress to return, it was Julia's opening to regale them with her favorite story. "I couldn't believe it either." She had the whole group's attention now. "There I was, face-to-face with the richest man in the world."

Plenty of gasps rounded the room.

“To think that Mr. Rockefeller himself asked for my assistance in picking out a gift for his sweet wife on my day off. I was flabbergasted.”

Amelia had her hands clasped to her chest. “What did you do?”

“Well, I spent the entire afternoon helping the man, that’s what I did. The gift had to be perfect, you see.” She pulled a Morgan silver dollar from her pocket. “And this is what he gave me for my help. See the eight tail feathers? Mr. Rockefeller said that makes this one of the first ones ever produced.”

The six girls leaned in and stared.

Predictable.

“Miss Schultz?” The head waitress’s voice made them all jerk to attention. Her arms were crossed over her middle. But at least she was smiling. “Will you wait for me in my office, please? We have something of great import to discuss.”

There it was. The *un*predictable.

“Yes, ma’am.” With quick steps she left the girls to whisper and speculate as she made her way down the hall and to the office, the silver dollar in her palm hopefully her lucky charm.

Today was different. Julia could feel it in her bones. It had given her a lively bounce in her step from the moment she got up this morning. What could it mean? She took a seat and sat straight, her ankles crossed to the side, her hands folded in her lap.

Her mind could conjure up a thousand different scenarios. But none of them mattered, except for the real one. So she sat. Waiting.

All the years in this work had conditioned her to stay busy.

Sitting in a room with nothing to occupy her hands or her thoughts was just about pure torture. On top of the fact that she hated being alone.

Ever since her adoptive parents died mere weeks after bringing her to Texas, she'd been tossed around from one family to another. Alone meant time with her imagination—a wild and scary place where she could conjure up any of a million scenarios for what would happen next.

The click-clack of steps on the tile floor relieved her more than she anticipated. Julia straightened her back and shoulders as she watched Miss Sue Blaine—the head waitress—circle the room and sit down in front of her. All of a sudden, her throat went dry. She swallowed, the sound reverberating in her own ears.

“Why do you look like I’m about to eat you?” Miss Blaine grinned at her with one eyebrow quirked upward. “It’s just me, Miss Schultz. And you’re not in trouble. Although your story was quite entertaining.”

Julia put a hand to her throat. “What a relief.” Even though her brain told her to relax, it took several moments for her heart to stop trying to beat itself out of her chest. She *had* run into Mr. Rockefeller. That much was true. And he *had* given her the coin. What did it matter that she made the rest of it up? “Mr. Rockefeller did give me that coin, Miss Blaine.”

Miss Blaine laughed, and her head swayed back and forth. “You do beat all, Julia.” She drew in a long breath and tilted her head as her eyes bored into Julia’s. “And you are the most meticulous worker I have.”

Was there a *but* in there? “Thank you, Miss Blaine.”

The woman dipped her chin and folded her hands in front of her. “It will be difficult for me to say good-bye after all these years.”

She sucked in a gasp. Did that mean what she hoped it meant? Julia bit her lip and leaned forward. Her heart pounded. Several painful seconds passed.

“Your request to transfer to the El Tovar has been granted, and I give my hearty approval.” The woman’s smile was a bit teary, and that touched Julia’s heart in a way she hadn’t experienced. Would this be how a proud mother would look at her? Or a big sister?

She couldn’t help it, she jumped out of her seat. “Oh, thank you, Miss Blaine. I know it’s because of your glowing recommendation.”

But now the woman who had trained her, mentored her, taken her under the proverbial wing didn’t look all that happy. “Please sit.”

The tone was one Julia knew all too well. Not scolding, but not pleased. There was something else on the woman’s mind. So she sat. “All right.”

“Julia . . .” The sigh that escaped Miss Blaine was long. She rubbed her forehead and removed her spectacles. “I’ve known you for many years. We’ve worked together here longer than anyone else. And while most of the girls come and go every year or so, you have stayed.”

Why did her stomach feel like it was being turned upside down?

“We’ve been through a lot together, you and I.” The head waitress tapped her spectacles on the desk for a moment. Then she placed them back on her face, stood, and turned toward the window.

Julia managed a nod, even though Miss Blaine couldn’t see it. She was still trying to figure out whether she was supposed to be excited for the news or preparing for something else.

“And while I give you my blessing, I must admit that I am concerned for you.”

“Concerned?” Her voice squeaked a bit. What she wouldn’t give for a glass of water right now.

“As head waitress, I consider you girls my family. You know that. I teach you, guide you, protect you, and hope that when you leave this place, you have a solid foundation under you. That you will be prepared to take on the world.”

“You’ve done a wonderful job of that.”

“Have I?” The older woman turned. While not unattractive, her features were hard. Plain. In her mid-thirties, she was wiry and tall. But underneath her tough exterior, Sue Blaine had a sweet disposition and a heart of gold. “I feel like I have failed you.”

Julia felt her brow crease. “Failed me? How? You just helped me get the position I’ve dreamed about for three years!”

Sue stepped toward her. “You deserve that position. The El Tovar is Harvey’s crown jewel, and you will do fabulously, I’m sure. But it’s your personal life I’m concerned about. Julia . . .” Another sigh. This one almost sad, as if filled with disappointment. “You don’t have any friends.”

As the words tumbled out of her mentor’s mouth, it felt like a stab to Julia’s heart. She *had* friends. Lifting her shoulders, she narrowed her gaze. All the other girls were her friends, right? So what if she wasn’t *close* to any of them?

“Don’t look at me with such defiance, Julia. It’s time to be honest.”

Honest. That word was like a splinter underneath her fingernail. All her life, there had been two groups of people. Those who couldn’t wait to hear her spin her next tale, and those who rolled their eyes and told her to be honest.

Neither group had been her friends.

Because while the fascination with her stories might get her attention from one group, those people never stuck around. They wanted to be entertained. The other group didn't have time for her. If Julia entered a conversation with any of them, they'd soon tire of her and leave.

Julia felt deflated, and her shoulders slumped. No matter how much it hurt, it was true. She didn't really have any friends. Hadn't for a long time. Maybe not ever.

"That sounded awfully harsh. Forgive me. *I'm* your friend, Julia. I hope you know that, and I'm truly not trying to hurt you—"

"I know that." Julia lifted her chin. Couldn't let the woman continue. "It's my own fault and I know it." She might be a meticulous worker and respected as a Harvey Girl, but that was where all the accolades ended. Ever since she lost her parents, and then her adoptive parents, she'd sought attention and affirmation from others. To do that, she'd told a lot of stories.

Stories to impress. Stories to make people laugh. Stories to make her sound more interesting.

Stories to hide that awful orphan title. Stories to cover up what *really* happened to her parents.

"The girls trust you at work, but they don't trust you to be a friend. And while you have been entertaining time and again, it doesn't help you make deep, abiding relationships." Sue pursed her lips and reached for Julia's hand, taking it between her own. "Everyone loves you, don't hear me wrong. But they won't allow themselves to get close to you because they never know if what you are saying is the truth. More than one girl has come to me about it. I haven't spoken to you before now because . . . well, they don't know you like I do. I thought things would improve over time. But with the

busyness of everyone's schedules, most of the girls don't have time to figure out when you're weaving a tale or when you're in earnest."

Even though the words stung, they were true. Julia couldn't blame her mentor for saying them.

"Which leaves me with the fact that this is my fault."

With a shake of her head, she huffed. "No, Miss Blaine, it's *my* fault."

"I should have said something to you years ago, but I figured your stories were harmless. At least to other people. We've all enjoyed them. But . . . they're harmful to *you*, Julia." Sue's face softened, her eyes glistening with tears. "You are gifted in so many ways, and yet you strive to gain standing with your fellow peers. Like you're seeking approval from everyone around you."

Because she was. The question that had plagued her most of her life repeated itself. Why? Why did she have to lose everything? *Why?*

Why didn't anyone want her?

"You don't need to tell stories for people to like you. You're plenty interesting all on your own." Sue squeezed her hand and then let it drop. Her words sounded as if she'd read Julia's mind, and it was unsettling.

Julia swallowed against the tears threatening to build.

Her mentor took her seat again. "A very dear friend of mine is the head waitress at the El Tovar. I will miss you more than you can imagine, but I'm praying that the good Lord has given you this chance for a fresh start."

A fresh start. How many times had she said that to herself? That a fresh start would fix everything. That it was all she needed. To start over. Well, maybe this time she needed to take it to heart.

"I know I can change." Tears stung Julia's eyes, but she blinked and refused to give them their moment. "I've been wanting to for so long, I just haven't known how. My reflex is to tell a story whenever I get into a jam." Why didn't she just come out and say it . . . wasn't it all just a big lie? But her whole life was a big lie, wasn't it?

"I understand that, I do. But what people want to see is the real you. The truth. Living so remotely at the Grand Canyon is going to require that you gain the trust of the Harvey family there."

The question was, *who was the real Julia*? Hidden underneath the layers of stories she'd created to protect her own heart, she wasn't sure if the real Julia even *existed* anymore. If she did, it'd been far too long since she'd come to the surface. Could she start over? Even if she didn't know who she was?

The weight of the new and wonderful opportunity in front of her all of a sudden felt like she was trying to pull a steam locomotive . . . up a mountain . . . all by herself . . . with one hand tied behind her back.

"Can you do that? Commit to telling the truth?" The love and compassion in Sue's eyes brought the tears back to her own.

"Yes. I promise." With a lift of her chin, she took a deep breath and put a hand to her heart.

A smile stretched across her friend's face. "I'm so glad to hear it."

"You're right. It's time I let people see the real Julia." More of a comment to herself than to her supervisor, the words whirled around in her head. How would she keep herself from telling stories?

Sue leaned forward. "Before you go, will you tell me something? Be honest about it?"

Why did that make her stomach churn? She swallowed hard. “What would you like to know?”

“What happened to your parents, Julia?”

The question made her snap her chin up. No one here knew—no one could *ever* know. “Ex—excuse me?” Maybe she could stall. But the lump in her throat grew.

Sue tipped her head, her face still relaxed and caring, but the dip of her brows showed her deep interest. “You’ve never told me what really happened to your parents. I’ve heard probably twenty different accounts.”

The blunt statement forced her to blink several times as she studied her mentor. Her heart raced. No. She couldn’t tell anyone the truth about that. Not now. Not ever. “I’d rather not say.”



WILLIAMS, ARIZONA

“Headed to see the family in Albuquerque?”

Christopher Miller smiled at the ticket agent. “Not this time, Ed. I’m headed to the El Tovar.” A train whistled a long tone behind them. It had been a few months since he’d gone back home to see his parents in New Mexico. Guess a visit was due . . . but when? Maybe he could convince them to come out to see him sometime soon.

“One of these days, I want to get up to the El Tovar and see it for myself. I hear it’s quite the place.” Ed stamped the ticket and handed it to him.

“This will be my first time. You know, I’ve been here two years and have never even ventured up to see the Grand Canyon. Gramps kept prodding me to go, but I found myself

always making excuses and staying behind at my jeweler's bench." Then his grandfather got sick and, well . . . he swallowed back the lump that accompanied his grief. Best to get back on track. "Before the hotel was built, did you ever go up to see the canyon?" If he had to guess, he'd bet Ed hadn't seen much outside of this ticket booth all the years he'd worked for the AT&SF Railroad.

"Nope. Been meaning to take the wife there. She keeps bugging me to go. Says, 'We can't live this close and not see it with our own eyes.'" The man's voice as he imitated his wife was funny, yet sweet. "You better tell me all about it so I can go home and tell Gertrude." The man's chuckle couldn't diminish the love written all over his face. He might tease about his wife, but they clearly had a special relationship.

A throat cleared behind Chris. And it wasn't subtle. Impatient was more like it. Must be someone else in line. Someone *not* from around here, who didn't understand their small town where everyone chatted with one another. At the post office. The grocers. And yes, even at the ticket counter. As quiet as Chris was, Gramps had drilled into him the importance of conversation in small towns. Getting to know their neighbors. He winked at Ed. "I will be sure to give you all the details. As soon as I get back this afternoon. Thanks."

Turning on his heel, he gave a bright smile to the throat-clearer. "Have a good day." With his hat in place and ticket in hand, he picked up his leather case and headed to the train platform. Now that he was actually on his way, his insides decided to take that moment to jolt. Like a diamond hit with a chisel. Again and again and again.

He blew his breath out and rolled his shoulders. The invitation from Mr. Owens, the manager of the El Tovar, to meet with him and discuss potential business at the Grand

Canyon was intimidating, yes, but he didn't need to tie himself into knots over it.

While he'd always been proud of the family business and of learning how to be a master jeweler at his grandfather's knee, he wasn't a born businessman. He'd much rather stay in the back of the shop and just create the pieces and work on repairs than come up with any kind of long-term business plan. It was hard enough for him to come out of his workshop and deal with customers. But Gramps had drilled into him how important it was to take *care* of those customers. So, he'd put his best foot forward and banished his shy self to the overwhelming task of greeting the people who entered his shop. Making small talk. Listening to their likes and dislikes. It *had* made him a better jeweler and designer.

His grandfather had given him this business, and he wanted to be the very best steward of that gift he could be. Naturally, when Mr. Owens called from the El Tovar, he couldn't decline, no matter how much he would prefer to lock himself in the store and work with the hand tools. His mandrel, rawhide mallet, bending pliers, and chasing hammer were his normal companions. They understood him.

"All aboard!" Hissing and steaming accompanied the conductor's words.

Chris stepped up into the railcar and glanced at the other passengers. Taking a seat as far away from the others as he could, he settled in for the three-hour ride and flipped through his notebook of design ideas. That was his real passion. Creating original pieces. *Little works of art*, Gramps called them.

With pencil in hand, he sketched out several new ideas as the train chugged north on the tracks toward one of the greatest natural wonders of the world. Ever since the tracks

were completed in 1901, the amount of people flooding through his little town of Williams had grown exponentially. Access to the remote canyon was now faster, easier, and definitely more comfortable than the twelve-hour bumpy stage ride from Flagstaff to the rim. Gramps had been brilliant to start a shop in Williams, catering to the visitors on their way to the canyon. While it had been good for his business, it had meant leaving all the family in Albuquerque, which hadn't been easy.

Chris looked up and out the window, letting his mind wander back to home and family. It had been one thing to be here away from most of his family while Gramps was alive. Now that his grandfather was gone, loneliness settled on his shoulders. But he couldn't abandon what Gramps had left him. The legacy was something he wanted to pass on. Still, he missed family. Mom and Dad let him know on a regular basis how much they wished he'd move back home.

Was he just being stubborn in thinking that God still had something in store for him in Williams? He should pray about that. He wouldn't want to get ahead of the Lord and miss what He had for him.

The swaying of the train and the terrain scrolling past his window relaxed him to the point that he couldn't focus anymore on what he had been drawing. Maybe he could close his eyes for a few minutes. Might help him to calm his nerves before the meeting.

Two hours later, Chris couldn't quite believe the sight before him. Oh, he'd seen plenty of pictures of the Grand Canyon and had heard how magnificent it was. But there was something about *seeing* it for the first time with his own eyes. The expanse of it took his breath away. He'd gone from

looking out the window of the train at trees and desert brush to walking up a set of stone steps and seeing the hard-carved lines of the canyon. Layer upon layer of rock changed in color from copper-red to dirt-brown. The top of the canyon seemed like a flat line on the horizon. But below that was another world, with mountainous rock formations as far as the eye could see. And far below—so far down it made him dizzy—a shiny silver river.

When he'd exited the train a half hour ago, the view hadn't been that great. Not much different from Williams, if he were honest. But he'd followed the mass of people up the path and past the immense hotel to the rim. As soon as he'd gotten his first glimpse, his jaw had dropped. Where had all this splendor come from? In the middle of dry and dusty Arizona, no one would ever think to find such wonder.

The canyon seemed to have a magnetic pull on anyone who caught sight of it. And just like that, the crowd had moved in rhythm closer and closer to the edge. Gasps and exclamations of awe accompanied their footsteps. It seemed most people weren't concerned about their luggage or accommodations when a sight like this awaited.

But as the train's whistle blew for its return trip to Williams, Chris looked down at his watch. The manager would be expecting him, and he didn't wish to make Mr. Owens wait. Hopefully he'd get a chance to come back and view more of the canyon before he headed home. Why had he never come out here before? To think he'd been this close to such a place for all this time.

Turning away from the rim, he moved back toward the hotel and took it in. The large adobe structure to his left must be the Hopi House. And to his right sat the famous El Tovar. The circle drive held a couple of horse-drawn carriages—

horseless carriages would probably have a difficult time getting out to a place this remote.

He climbed the stairs up to the wide porch and then opened the door. As he stepped into the foyer of the luxurious hotel, he stared. The massive beams in the ceiling, the colorful carpets, and the stone fireplace were all warm and welcoming. Never had he been anywhere so nice. But that wasn't saying a whole lot. Albuquerque had been his home before Williams, and that didn't exactly make him a world traveler.

Two couples walked by. Their light conversation about the wild and untamed West intrigued him. Did people from the East really not understand what was out here? The necklace around one lady's neck was worth more than everything he owned. Probably including his shop.

He was definitely out of his element here.

But he wasn't about to pass up this opportunity.

"Mr. Miller, I presume?" A gray-haired man in a fine tailored suit approached and held out a hand. "I'm Gregory Owens, hotel manager."

Another man—younger and about the same height, with brown hair parted down the middle—also stepped toward him. "Ray Watkins."

"Nice to meet you both. Christopher Miller." He nodded, shook their hands, and tried to steady his breathing.

"Thank you for coming out." Mr. Owens put one hand on the watch in his pocket.

"Thank you for the invitation. This is spectacular."

Mr. Watkins broadened his smile. "The first time I saw the canyon, it was dead of winter, and I almost froze to death because I couldn't tear myself away from the view."

"I admit the only way I could force myself to come inside

was because I knew you were expecting me.” Chris returned the smile. *Relax*. The gentlemen seemed friendly enough.

Mr. Owens motioned with his hand. “This is the Rendezvous Room. If you’ll follow me through to the rotunda, my office is just beyond.”

With a dip of his head, he acknowledged and followed. The dark beams everywhere kept drawing his gaze upward. Whoever built this place was a genius. Numerous fireplaces not only kept the place warm but enticed people to sit in the cozy areas and converse. The atmosphere was elegant and yet intimate.

Welcoming. Warm. Inviting.

He followed the other two men into the rotunda and glanced up several stories. The hexagon shape of the area showed off the stairs and a generous overlook from the floor above.

“It has quite the architecture, doesn’t it?” Ray Watkins’ voice. “If you’ll follow me.” The man extended his hand toward the open door.

Chris snapped his attention back to the men he was supposed to be following. “My apologies.” He walked into the office beyond the greeting desk, where several posh-looking guests were checking into the hotel, and took the seat offered to him. He set his case down on the floor and waited, unsure of how these types of meetings normally went.

“Mr. Miller, I’m sorry for the loss of your grandfather,” Mr. Watkins began. “I had the privilege of meeting him last year when I commissioned a piece to be made for my wife. He boasted of your incredible talent as a jeweler. You two must have been very close.” The younger man’s tone was friendly and kind.

“We were. Thank you. I couldn’t have asked for a better

mentor, friend, or grandparent. He was the finest man I've ever known."

"It was a privilege to know him," the manager affirmed. As Mr. Owens sat behind his desk and straightened his waistcoat, he leaned forward and brushed a piece of lint off the blotter.

Chris doubted the manager allowed for much to be out of place. Not in a hotel with a reputation like this. Everything around him seemed to be perfect, including the appearance of the man. "Thank you, sir."

"Your grandfather is the inspiration behind our proposal today." Mr. Owens tipped his chin toward the other man. "I'll let Mr. Watkins explain."

"Please feel free to call me Ray." The warm and genuine smile from the gentleman made Chris feel at ease. "As you probably know, Harvey has become synonymous with high quality lodging, food, and hospitality as well as celebrating the native artifacts here in the Southwest. Since moving here in 1905, I've been helping Mr. Owens develop new ideas for the hotel and Hopi House. We believe that your jewelry would be a wonderful addition to the handcrafted goods that Harvey sells at the Hopi House."

Wow. Chris's eyebrows felt like they touched his hairline. While he had dared to hope that something like this was the reason behind the invitation, he couldn't quite believe it. "That is quite a compliment."

"What do you say? Would you like to become part of the Harvey Empire?"