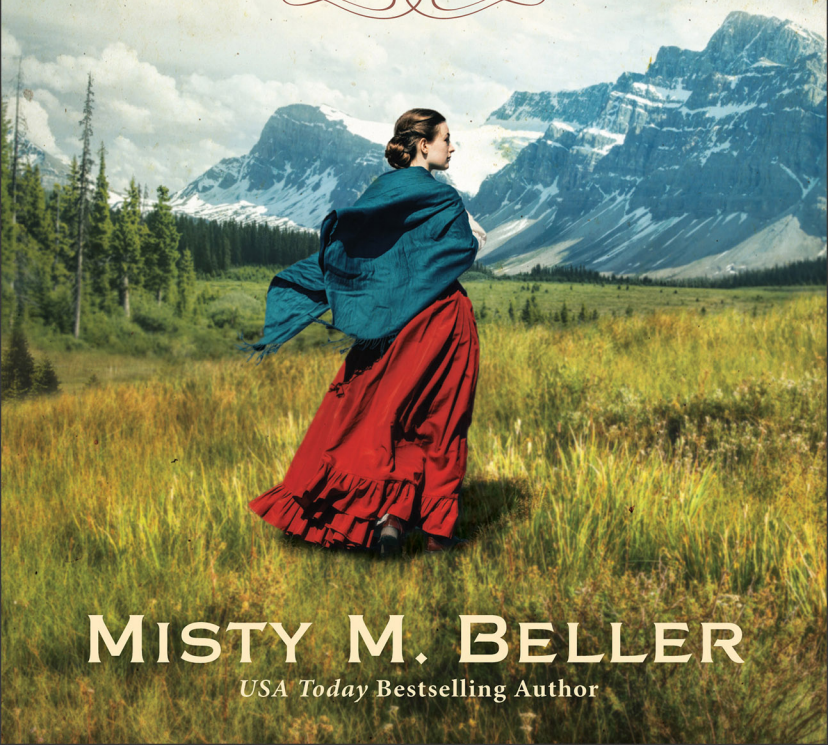


SISTERS OF THE ROCKIES • 1

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**ROCKY**  
**MOUNTAIN**  
**RENDEZVOUS**  
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**MISTY M. BELLER**

*USA Today Bestselling Author*

“Adventure ensues when four sisters set off for the untamed West, risking all to keep a promise. Throw in plenty of danger, a chivalrous mountain man, and a compelling mystery to unravel, and you have the recipe for an engaging historical novel.”

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and bestselling author of the SECRETS  
OF THE CANYON series

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“Fans of the series will love this romantic mountain saga.”

—*Publishers Weekly* on *Faith’s Mountain Home*

## Books by Misty Beller

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### HEARTS OF MONTANA

*Hope's Highest Mountain*

*Love's Mountain Quest*

*Faith's Mountain Home*

### BRIDES OF LAURENT

*A Warrior's Heart*

*A Healer's Promise*

*A Daughter's Courage*

### SISTERS OF THE ROCKIES

*Rocky Mountain Rendezvous*

SISTERS OF THE ROCKIES • 1

# ROCKY MOUNTAIN RENDEZVOUS



MISTY M. BELLER



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To my sweet daughter, Haven, my inspiration for Juniper.  
I'm so proud of what a kind, smart, caring  
young lady you're becoming!

Many are the plans in a person's heart,  
but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails.

Proverbs 19:21 NIV



# ONE



JULY 1837

GREEN RIVER VALLEY (FUTURE WYOMING)

**A**nts. The men looked like an army of ants crawling around in the valley below.

Juniper Collins studied the chaotic sight from atop her horse far above on the mountain pass. Her mount shifted beneath her, the mare's movement uneasy. The action seemed to set off the same agitation in her sisters' horses on either side of her. The four of them had come hundreds of miles and traveled nearly two months on this mission, but they hadn't expected the trapper rendezvous to look like this.

Mayhap *horde* would be the better word for the mass spreading before her. A horde of men and horses and lodges and . . . Air congealed in her lungs. How would they ever find someone in this madness who knew the Peigan Black-foot woman named Steps Right?

"Oh my." Rosemary, the oldest of the four sisters, spoke just as the first shouts echoed across the open land.

"Wagon ho!" a man's gruff voice yelled.

"It's here!" The fellows nearest them waved hats.

"Let's go, boys!"

And just like that, the horde stampeded up the slope toward them. The whoops and yells charged ahead of the men, all racing toward the wagons right beside Juniper and her sisters.

"Run!" As usual, Rosemary took charge. She spun her horse away from the wagons, right into the flank of Juniper's mare. Rosemary waved her hand to shoo them all ahead of her. "Quick! Behind those rocks."

The horses scrambled to obey as all four of them aimed toward a cluster of boulders that would be large enough to hide them.

Juniper reined in behind her sisters to make sure no one dropped back, and the first men reached the wagons just as she tucked her mare behind the rocks. Some of these swarming trappers must have seen them dodge this direction, but the wagons looked to be the biggest draw. The crazed men probably hadn't even realized women had arrived with the supplies they'd been waiting all year to trade for.

"Ho up! Ho there, I say!" Mr. Provost waved his hat and spun his horse, his shout barely rising above the clamor.

A gunshot ripped through the air, its boom finally lowering the volume of the trappers a small bit.

"Quiet!" Again Mr. Provost bellowed above the commotion.

The trappers ignored him as they surged around the wagons.

Two more rifles fired, puffs of gunsmoke clouding around the drivers of two of the middle wagons.

At last, the mountain men stopped pressing forward, and an unsteady quiet settled over the group.

Mr. Provost's voice sounded once more, this time not as frantic. "Settle down, the lot of ya. No trading until morning, an hour after sunup. Any man who touches these wagons before then will be shot."

A grumble spread through the crowd, but the mass of men eased away from the rigs. Mr. Provost turned his mount toward the first wagon and moved in front of the lead mules. "Make a road, men. Make a road."

The sea parted before him as the grumble turned to the rising tone of conversation. A few trappers yelled out as the group passed.

"You came just in the nick o' time, Provost."

"Hope at least two of those wagons are full o' whiskey."

"Got a white beaver skin yur gonna love. Save me a barrel of the good stuff."

Mr. Provost tipped his hat at a few of the voices as he rode past them. The men in the crowd seemed remarkably restrained now compared to their stampede moments before.

How would Juniper and her sisters ever find someone among all these people who could direct them to the Blackfoot woman their father had known twenty years ago? Should they start by asking among the white men or the natives?

For that matter, telling the difference may not be as easy as they'd expected. Though she'd not looked hard at faces, more than one fellow possessed skin dark enough that she couldn't be sure if they were half-Indian or simply spent too much time in the sun.

A tiny squeal sounded from behind her, and she spun

to see Lorelei, the next sister down from herself in age, struggling to hold onto the newest pet she'd picked up on the trail—a coyote pup. A tiny thing, only a few weeks old, with barely enough teeth to gnaw the scraps of meat Lorelei shredded into tiny pieces for him.

At the moment, the little fellow was no longer content to ride on her lap, instead clawing and howling to escape her arms. Lorelei scrambled for a better grip of the animal as she cried out, “No!”

But the tiny creature slipped from her arms, leaping from the saddle to the ground. In a flash of fur, it darted toward the two tallest boulders.

“Boots, come back!” Lorelei leapt from her horse and scrambled toward the rocks. The fluff of a coyote tail slipped behind them.

Juniper's belly clenched. That pup had already caused enough trouble. Running loose among all this chaos was dangerous, though, especially if Lorelei chased after him.

She slipped from her own mount and grabbed the reins her sister had left hanging. Maybe Lorelei would finally let the animal go if she didn't find it right away. That didn't seem likely, for the girl possessed a heart too sensitive toward animals, and the pup was too young to survive on its own. She'd discovered the animal curled in its den, orphaned by the shot of one of the supply train hunters. She'd managed to keep it alive for a week now and was determined to nurture the pup until it was old enough to hunt on its own.

But if she truly couldn't find the animal this time, perhaps she would have no choice but to let it go.

As Lorelei disappeared around the same boulder the coyote had, Juniper glanced at her other sisters. Rosemary's

expression had turned worried, her body tensed like she might leap from her saddle any minute. “Lor, come back.”

“I’ll help her.” Faith, the baby in the family at sixteen, released a sigh as she dismounted and handed her reins to Rosemary.

“Here, boy. Come, Boots.” Lorelei’s gentle murmur drifted from the rocks, though they still couldn’t see her.

Faith slipped out of sight the way Lorelei had gone, and moments later, a strange sound made Juniper tense. Something like a squeal and shout combined. What had her sisters stumbled upon back there?

“Lor? What’s happening?” Rosemary leaned forward to slide from her mount but paused when Lorelei and Faith stepped from behind the boulders.

Both possessed empty hands, and Lorelei’s face held a bit of thunder. Had she lost the pup?

A third person followed them—a man. Apprehension pressed in Juniper’s chest, and from the corner of her eye, Rosemary straightened and reached for her rifle.

The stranger held Boots in the crook of his arm. She couldn’t decipher the man’s expression. Almost amused, yet his brows lowered in something like a scowl.

When all three had stepped from the rocks, Lorelei spun and reached for the pup. “I’ll take him now.”

“Who is *that*, Lor?” Rosemary had her rifle aimed now, her tone one of a protective elder sister.

The man glanced at the animal lying quietly against his chest, then to Lorelei, his expression shifting in a way that showed his hesitation. “Ma’am, this is a coyote pup, not a pet. Wherever his mama is, she’ll not take kindly to human scent on him.”

Lorelei straightened. “I’ve become his mama, ever since the real one was shot by a wagon driver. I’ve been feeding him, and he’s happy to ride on the saddle with me. I’m in no danger, sir, except maybe from the likes of you. Hand over my coyote, if you please.”

The man’s brows shot up, and his gaze shifted from Lorelei to sweep over all four of them. Then he shrugged and held out the pup. “Be careful. The Almighty made his kind to bite the hand that feeds it.”

Perhaps so. But this man hadn’t met Lorelei Collins yet. No animal would think of biting her sister. In addition to her tender heart, she also possessed an uncanny way of winning the affections of wild creatures with merely a word and an outstretched hand.

Juniper should probably hold her tongue, but something in the man’s demeanor, the way he acted like Lorelei hadn’t the sense of a schoolgirl, pushed the words out. “My sister knows how to handle him, sir, far better than you, I’d say. That pup would have died a week ago without her.”

As Lorelei removed the coyote from his arms, the man’s focus lifted to Juniper. Something too much like a grin played at the corners of his mouth. “That’s good to hear.” Then he moved back to take in all four of them again. “Welcome to the rendezvous, ladies. I’m Riley Turner. A pleasure to make your acquaintance.”

Then, without giving them a chance to respond, he turned and walked back through the boulders, disappearing as mysteriously as he’d arrived.



Riley Turner paused partway down the slope and glanced back, but he could only see the cluster of rocks now.

*Women.*

He'd met so few females these past years, and none from back East. The sight of them had nearly addled his brain. Why would white women come to this place, where rivers of whiskey flowed and a host of otherwise smart men took leave of their senses?

The supply wagons often brought an extra visitor or two, men who wanted to experience the happenings of the trapper rendezvous—an event that had become infamous among Easterners. He'd even heard an artist might have come along this year to capture the scenes for others.

But no word of women coming had reached his ears.

He'd not planned to be part of the welcoming party—too many others would swarm the rigs—but when he spotted the four riders split off toward the rocks, he'd not been able to help himself.

And a coyote pup? Only Easterners would think it a good idea to try to tame a wild animal. If the mother truly had died, there might not be danger right away. But going against the natural order of things almost always ended badly. He'd learned that fact while growing up in the Illinois wilderness and during those two years in the cavalry, but now he understood it far better after living in this unsettled country.

Every man who lasted in this territory discovered quickly enough how to find his place in the rhythm of the land and animals. Those who didn't learn but managed to stay alive headed back East, back to civilization.

A place Riley would be happy never to see again.

He turned and continued his trek to the lodge he shared

with three others. Dragoon and Jeremiah had both trotted off to meet the wagons, and a glance ahead showed Ol' Henry still sat by the fire, stirring the pot of stew hanging from the tripod. A lifetime in this wilderness had taught him better than to jump up just because a few supplies rolled into camp. The man had seen more rendezvous than any other fellow Riley knew. He'd trapped all the way down into the Mexican territories and even up north into British-owned lands. Ol' Henry never ran short of tales that could shock even the most experienced trapper.

As Riley approached their campfire, the man nodded a greeting. "What bit of excitement did the wagons bring this time?" His leathery skin was dark from years in the sun, but it also had an almost-bluish tint. Like he'd sat in a haze of gunpowder too long.

Riley eased down to sit in his usual spot. "Women. Four of them, definitely from back East. Sisters, I think."

Even Ol' Henry's eyes grew wide. "You tellin' a tale?"

Riley bit back a chuckle. Though Henry knew how to keep a straight face, he also possessed a flair for the dramatic that brought his storytelling to life.

He shook his head. "It's true. Don't know why they're here, but I can't think this is a safe place for them."

Ol' Henry looked toward the pass the wagons had come through, but his eyes seemed to see much farther. A low whistle slipped through his lips. "Don't doubt it. They must not know what they've bit into, coming into this rendezvous with so many men soon to be full o' the drink those wagons brought." Then the man shifted his focus to Riley, his gaze sharpening in a way that pierced. "Reckon they need someone who knows how to look out for them."



Riley raised his brows. “Maybe.” Perhaps Ol’ Henry hadn’t meant *him* exactly, but the words matched the niggle that had pulsed through him the moment he first laid eyes on the ladies.

The last thing he needed was to take on the task of watching over a group of Easterners. And women were the very worst sort.