

GOLDEN GATE SECRETS

2

IN

*Dreams
Forgotten*

TRACIE
PETERSON



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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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To Anna.

I am always amazed at how God puts people together,
but our friendship is definitely one of those things
that He carefully orchestrated for His glory.

You have taught me so much about the Hutterite
people and their love of Jesus and others. Your
kindness and love is something I will always
cherish. Thank you for being my friend.

—Tracie

CHAPTER

1

SAN FRANCISCO
FEBRUARY 1906

Judith Gladstone looked at the letter in her hands. It was creased and worn from folding and unfolding. The ink seemed to fade with each reading.

She smoothed the paper in a loving fashion. Her mother's delicate script and pleading words stirred her heart. "This is all I have to go on," Judith whispered to herself.

The letter was the only resource that might shed light on the past, as well as the future. She read it again, hoping it might give her an insight that up till now had eluded her.

Dear Edith,

I know you must be surprised to receive word from me after all these years, but I have learned that I am dying and feel I need to make an appeal for your forgiveness. I know that what I did was unforgiveable, but I hope you might find some way to manage a small bit of understanding and forgiveness for your sister.

My actions were born of desperation. You know the reasons why. I know that I deserve only your reproach and bitter avoidance, but I hope that the years might have eased matters between us.

Before I die, I long only to tell you that I am sorry, and yet those simple words are not enough to convey my deepest regret for what I did. For Judith's sake, I hope you will forgive me and perhaps try to help her. After all, she is blameless in this matter.

I had hoped to repay the money, but we never seemed capable of making enough to do so. I know the money wasn't all that important anyway, but I wanted to make the effort. Looking back now, knowing my death is imminent, I hope only to be at peace and knew I could not do so without at least writing this letter.

Knowing the pain I caused you and the situation itself, I never came home to rectify the matter. Leaving as I did was wrong, but returning seemed even worse. I don't know if you're still in San Francisco, but I pray you are and that this letter will reach you.

*Begging your forgiveness,
Lila*

Judith shook her head, still staring at the words. "Oh, Mother, what did you do that couldn't be forgiven? Why didn't you tell me about your sister? What does it all mean?"

She stretched her legs out on the cushioned window seat and gazed outside. Spring had come, and the sun pushed back the clouds to shine down on the world after days of rain.

"So why can't I put aside my gloom as easily?"

She didn't need to ask the question. Her desperation to under-

stand her mother's secrets was like a cloud hanging over her. Lila and Homer Gladstone—her parents—had always insisted they had no living relatives, yet here was her mother's letter to prove otherwise.

Having been raised on an isolated ranch in southern Colorado, Judith had never really questioned her parents' honesty. There had been no suggestion of lies—no strange comments or objects to raise suspicions. Judith remembered asking about her grandparents and hearing brief explanations of their demise from illnesses or accidents. When asked about other relatives, her parents had always told her there were no other living relatives. When Judith had pressed to know if there ever had been, her mother had been quite clear on the matter.

“No, Judith. There is no one else.”

“But there was,” Judith said, looking again at the letter. “You had a sister named Edith.”

Refolding the letter, Judith got to her feet. She tucked the missive back into its envelope and then slipped it into her pocket. She had spent weeks—months—poring over the well-worn letter, and to no avail. Coming to San Francisco had been her last hope, but so far she'd been unable to find out anything about Edith Whitley.

Of course, she'd only arrived the previous November, just four months ago. She had boarded a train in Denver without knowing what she might find in San Francisco. There had been precious little money after selling off her mother's remaining things and paying the family's debts, but Judith had taken some of it and bought the train ticket. She hoped it was the right thing to do and knew that once she reached her destination, she would have to immediately seek a job. That idea didn't seem so daunting, but navigating a big city had left her more than a little anxious.

But fate had been with her. On the train west, she'd made

the acquaintance of Camrienne Coulter and Kenzie Gifford. Both young women were traveling unaccompanied to the city on searches of their own, and it seemed only natural that the trio combine their resources to help one another.

Judith checked her appearance in the dresser mirror. She'd pinned her hair up in a bun as usual but had taken the time to use a hot iron to make ringlets on the sides and at the nape of her neck. She'd never had a lady's maid, and although there was a sweet young woman in the house named Liling who had recently started helping them with such matters, Judith was more comfortable doing for herself. She also reasoned that she wouldn't be staying here in the Coulter house forever, so it was best not to get too used to having servants.

"Are you ready?" Kenzie called from the hallway.

Judith opened the door of her room. "Yes, I'm afraid I got a little distracted."

Kenzie was a few inches taller than Judith, with striking red hair and shimmering blue eyes. Judith thought she was one of the most beautiful women she'd ever seen, but more than that, Kenzie had such a regal grace and elegance about her. She carried herself in a polished and confident manner that Judith wished she could emulate.

"If we don't hurry," Kenzie said, "Micah will arrive, and you'll have no time to talk to Caleb."

Judith swallowed the lump that had instantly formed in her throat. At the mere mention of Caleb's name, she felt all aflutter. Caleb was Camri Coulter's brother—the owner of the house Judith was living in and the man she had fallen in love with at first sight. Of course, he had no inkling of her feelings.

"I'm ready." She slipped on an emerald-colored jacket that complemented her plaid walking-out skirt. The outfit was something she'd purchased with her Christmas bonus.

“You aren’t going to wear a hat? We’ll be outside all day.” Kenzie had her own beautiful creation of gold woven straw, white tulle, and flowers strategically pinned atop her auburn hair.

“Oh, bother. I’m rather addlebrained today.” Judith went to a peg behind the door and took down one of the two hats she owned. It was a wide-brimmed green felt trimmed in rosettes of blue and red. All three colors matched the shades in her skirt and jacket. She hurried back to the mirror.

Kenzie gave a soft laugh. “At this rate, Caleb will have already left on his date.”

Judith frowned as she pinned the hat into place. “With Florence Brighton, I suppose.”

“No, he’s taking her to the opera tonight. Today he’s attending an engagement party of one of his friends, as I understand it.”

“Well, she’ll probably be there. It seems she’s always around when he is.”

“Why don’t you just tell Caleb how you feel about him?”

Judith shook her head. Kenzie was the only one she’d ever confided in regarding her feelings for Caleb. “It wouldn’t matter. He clearly doesn’t feel that way about me.”

“He might, if he knew how you felt.” Kenzie shrugged. “But have it your way. Far be it from me to make recommendations about love. My life is proof that I’m not a good judge of such matters.” She had been stood up at the altar the year before and had not recovered from the rejection.

They made their way downstairs as Judith did up the buttons on her jacket. They’d just reached the bottom step when Camri came flying out of the dining room.

“I nearly forgot my gloves,” she said, hurrying past them up the stairs.

Kenzie shook her head. “It would seem I’m the only one in

control this morning, and I'm the one who didn't want to go on this picnic outing in the first place."

"But it'll be fun. You'll see." Judith gave Kenzie's arm a pat. She knew her friend didn't care to go on outings with Dr. Micah Fisher. He was rather sweet on Kenzie, but she had no interest in him.

"Caleb's probably in his study," Kenzie said, motioning down the hall. "Why don't you go speak with him, and I'll listen for Dr. Fisher."

Judith nodded and hurried away before Kenzie could change her mind. The study door was open, and she could see Caleb standing at his desk, reviewing some papers. He was dressed impeccably in a double-breasted beige tweed suit.

As she approached, he looked up with a wide smile. "I wondered if you'd make it before I had to leave."

"I'm sorry. I lost track of the time."

"Well, it seems to have been time well spent. You look lovely."

She looked away, feeling her cheeks grow warm. "Thank you. I might say the same of you. Well, perhaps lovely isn't the right word . . . ah, for a gentleman."

He laughed. "I'm happy with any compliment I can get. Now, what can I do for you?"

Judith thought of several answers she would like to give, but refrained. She drew a deep breath and met his gaze with a confidence she didn't feel. "I wondered if you'd had time to check on my matter."

Caleb looked momentarily blank, then seemed to understand. "I'm sorry, Judith. I'm afraid I've been so busy with this political corruption issue that looking for your aunt completely slipped my thoughts. But I'll make a note to myself."

She felt a stab of pain. He hadn't even thought of her or her desire to find her family. He was all she could ever seem to think

about, but he clearly didn't feel the same way. *And why should he? I'm just a poor, uneducated girl from nowhere. I haven't the money nor the beauty that Florence Brighton has, nor even the refinement and intelligence that Camri and Kenzie have.*

She tried not to let it bother her. "It's all right. Truly. I didn't want to bother you with it anyway, but Camri told me I should, and . . . well, I'm sorry."

She turned to go, but Caleb quickly crossed the distance and put out his hand to stop her.

"Wait—I'm the one who is sorry. Of course I want to help you. Don't apologize—this is my fault. I'm afraid all this city nonsense with Abraham Ruef and his corruption has taken my full attention."

Abraham Ruef was the power behind the mayor and the city's Board of Supervisors. It was well known that he ran San Francisco in a scheme of graft that rivaled New York City. Caleb and his former employer Henry Ambrewster had both fallen victim to his corruption. It had, in fact, cost Henry his life and seen Caleb shanghaied.

"It's quite all right, Caleb. The problems you're dealing with are much more important than my finding out if I still have a living relative. It will keep." At least she'd managed to get her letter back from him after he borrowed it, intending to investigate for her. She feared that, with all he had going on, he might misplace or lose it, and Judith couldn't bear to imagine that loss.

He smiled and patted her arm. "Thank you for understanding. I promise I'll get to it as soon as possible. Hopefully Monday I can give it more attention."

"Thank you, I—" The sound of the door knocker echoed down the hall. "I have to go. That will be Micah, and I don't want to keep him and the others waiting."

“Have a wonderful time. I wish I could join you. I think a picnic at the beach is just the thing for this beautiful day.”

She nodded. “I’m sure it will be . . . very nice.”

Judith set her mind on enjoying the day. Ten young people from church had come on the outing. They’d all squeezed into two cars, one owned by Micah and the other by a man named Thomas, who was particularly sweet on a woman in their group named Suzanna. He hadn’t minded at all that she was snugly pressed between him and her girlfriend Maribelle. Their car was rounded out by another couple, Roman and Esther, who were newly engaged. Everyone but Thomas held a basket packed with goodies.

In Micah’s car, Judith sat with Camri and Patrick in the back. Given Patrick’s broad shoulders, it was a tight fit, but Camri didn’t seem to mind cozying up to her fiancé. Kenzie was the unhappy one. With Judith wedged in the back, she was forced to take the front seat beside Micah.

Judith watched as Kenzie hugged a large picnic hamper to avoid any contact with the young doctor. It would have been nice if Kenzie could just allow for their friendship—if not something more. It was obvious her former fiancé had been a cad. Judith knew the wound ran deep, but Micah was highly regarded by one and all. All but Kenzie.

After a short drive, they arrived at a place on the beach. Blankets were spread, and the food was unpacked from the hampers. The men immediately began gathering dry driftwood for a fire while the women set up the meal.

“Oh, what delightful-looking pies,” Maribelle declared.

“Judith made them,” Camri announced. “She’s quite gifted.”

“What kind are they?” Maribelle turned one of the pies in her hand. “I can’t tell, what with all the meringue.”

“They’re both chocolate cream,” Camri replied. “You could hardly expect anything else from Judith. I’ve never met someone who enjoys chocolate more than she does.”

Judith’s cheeks warmed, but she focused on arranging the food. Once all the tasks were complete, grace was offered, and everyone began to eat as if they’d been without food for weeks. There was something about the sun and fresh salt air that stimulated their appetites.

For the most part, Judith found the day pleasant enough, although it was a little colder than she liked. They shared thoughts on current events and told stories of their youth. Judith even shared how she’d learned to rope a calf when she was only eight years old. The others thought this very impressive. While they continued to nibble on dessert, Thomas and Roman brought out their guitars. It wasn’t long until they were caught up in a sing-along of hymns and folk songs. Judith enjoyed this the most. She loved music. She was accomplished on the piano, and at least while everyone was singing, no one was questioning her about her plans for the future.

As the sun slipped beyond the horizon, Micah lit the bonfire. The dry wood quickly caught, and soon they had a welcoming blaze. Judith was grateful for the warmth and scooted just a bit closer. The sea breeze was even chillier in the absence of the sun.

Kenzie leaned over to Camri. “We really should be getting back.”

“Just another song or two,” Camri encouraged, leaning against her fiancé. “This has been such a nice time.”

“I wouldn’t be mindin’ if we sang through an entire hymnal,” Patrick said, wrapping his arms around Camri.

Thomas began to strum the chords to a new song, and as everyone joined in to sing, Judith felt a sense of belonging that she’d never really known before.

“The day Thou gavest, Lord, is ended, the darkness falls at Thy behest; to Thee our morning hymns ascended, thy praise shall sanctify our rest,” Thomas’s rich baritone voice sang out above the rest.

The others sang on, but Judith sat back and thought about her parents. They had never spoken much about God. It wasn’t until she’d met Camri that Judith had really heard someone other than a preacher talk about God and heaven. Once she’d started attending church with Camri and Kenzie, Judith had been surprised to realize that the emptiness in her life that she’d accredited to having no extended family had been filled by accepting that God loved her. It had been hard at first, because who could imagine that the God of the universe would care one whit about a lonely girl from Colorado?

“So be it, Lord! Thy throne shall never, like earth’s proud empires, pass away; Thy kingdom stands and grows forever, till all Thy creatures own Thy sway.”

When the last chords faded on the air, everyone seemed content to just sit in silence around the fire. It was the perfect ending to the day.

Later, when Micah dropped them off at the house, the sun had long since gone, and the skies had given over their swirls of orange and scarlet to the night. While Camri and Patrick disappeared up the lighted stairs into the house, Kenzie was waylaid by Micah, who apparently wanted to talk to her privately. Judith felt torn between going into the house and waiting so that Kenzie wouldn’t be alone. She climbed the stairs to the first landing outside the small but beautiful house. She glanced at the windows lit in welcome. No doubt a fire was already crackling in the front room, and given the chill, Judith longed for its warmth. She glanced down at the car, where Kenzie was shaking her head and doing her best to sidestep

Micah. Judith didn't want Kenzie to be uncomfortable, but at the same time, she knew Kenzie could take care of herself. She also knew Micah was a gentleman. He wouldn't do anything untoward.

"You'll catch a chill out here," Caleb said, descending the stairs. "And it looks like rain."

The sight of him took Judith's breath away. In the light from the streetlamp, she could see he was dressed in his finest formal wear from head to toe. Black tails, white tie, and top hat. Florence Brighton had better appreciate him.

"I . . . uh, I was just waiting for Kenzie." Her mouth felt suddenly dry. Why couldn't he see the effect he had on her? "You look quite dashing." She cringed. She hadn't meant to say it out loud.

"Why, thank you." Caleb shrugged. "It's expected, where I'm going."

"The opera," Judith murmured.

"Yes, but first to a very formal dinner at the home of a very influential and very aloof family, who believe their presence to be a gift of the very finest order." He grinned.

Judith couldn't help but smile. "Sounds *very* delightful."

Caleb laughed heartily. "Just between you and me, I tend to side with Kipling. He said, 'San Francisco is a mad city—inhabited for the most part by perfectly insane people, whose women are of a remarkable beauty.'"

"Are you speaking of Rudyard Kipling?"

This question came from Kenzie, who had joined them on the steps.

Caleb nodded. "I am. He wrote it some years ago. I suspect he hoped Americans, or at least San Franciscans, would never read it, but a good friend of mine managed to write it down word for word and sent it to me as a welcome when I moved

to this fair city. And, I must say, it seems to prove itself true to me on a daily basis.”

Kenzie shrugged. “So why do you stay?”

Caleb gave a slight bow. “A very good question, my dear lady, and one which would take far too long to answer and cause me to be late to my *very*”—he winked at Judith—“important social event.” He then bowed quite formally. “I must bid you both, good evening.” With that, he sprinted down the stairs.

“Well, I must say that was rather entertaining,” Judith watched him start his Winton and climb into the driver’s seat. “Sometimes he is a real puzzle to me.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Well, right after he returned from being shanghaied, he talked about going into ministry work full-time.”

“He does hold a Bible study for those sailors he helped,” Kenzie offered.

“Yes, but he talked about leaving the law, since he inherited Mr. Ambrewster’s money, and going into some sort of ministry. Instead he’s just going to one party or meeting after another.”

“Well, it hasn’t been that long since his ordeal.” Kenzie shrugged. “Maybe he needs some time to put it behind him.”

Caleb had been shanghaied from the dance hall of Malcolm Daniels the previous August, after trying to rescue his Chinese housekeepers’ daughter Liling. Until then, he had practiced law with Mr. Henry Ambrewster and earned the older man’s undying respect and gratitude. In fact, Ambrewster had so favored Caleb that when Patrick Murdock had been accused of murder, Ambrewster had allowed Caleb to stray from their focus on corporate law to defend him.

“But he seemed so excited to go into ministry work,” Judith said.

“Maybe God hasn’t revealed to him what he should do,”

Kenzie countered as they climbed the steps to the house. “Or maybe He has revealed it, and cleaning up the corruption in this town is the direction He wants Caleb to go.”

“Maybe, but he doesn’t seem all that happy.”

Kenzie paused at the door. “Maybe you’re the unhappy one, so you believe he’s just as miserable.”

Judith nodded. “I suppose you might be right.”