



EVERY  
WORD  
UNSAID

*a novel*

KIMBERLY DUFFY

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To Ellie.

Everyone should see life through your eyes.  
Beauty abounds. Excitement is only a daydream (or book) away.  
Stories are waiting to be captured and told. And there you are,  
camera and pen in hand, on the precipice of a grand adventure.

And in memory of Pandita Ramabai Sarasvati.  
“A life totally committed to God has nothing to fear,  
nothing to lose, nothing to regret.”

“I once was lost, but now I am found,  
was blind, but now I see.”

—John Newton

# 1



## August 1897 Deadwood, South Dakota

Nothing brought Augusta Constance Travers more joy than slipping away. And nothing frustrated her more than the companion meant to keep her from doing so.

Gussie slid back from the building's corner, drawing Dora Clut-terbuck farther into the alley.

“What are you doing, Miss Travers?” Dora shrugged Gussie's hand from her arm and placed her fists on hips that could use a Scott three-piece bustle pad. Perhaps Gussie would gift her one. There was little she could offer that might soften Dora's expres- sion, but her figure was another matter entirely.

Gussie craned her neck around the building and saw the man pacing the boardwalk outside their hotel's front door. She flattened herself against the wall and pressed a finger to her lips. “We've been caught.”

Dora didn't even try to stanch her smile. “Praise God.” She made for the street, her hand already lifted in a wave.

Gussie grabbed her. “You cannot ruin this for me.” She made

sure the strap of her camera bag lay securely over her chest and then marched toward the back of the hotel. “I’m not ready to be found.”

Dora huffed and scurried to keep up. “Miss Travers, it is time to shake the dust of Deadwood from our shoes and return to civilization. I’m not sure how much more of this I can take.”

Gussie paused when they reached the back of the hotel, searching for an entry. A door stood propped open by a large rock. She was safe. For now. “I hardly think your duties a heavy burden. Indeed, except for this last month, every trip has been made first class.”

“This last month has undone anything Mr. Pullman could offer on his trains,” Dora muttered.

Gussie chuckled. Dora often cast a cloud over their adventures, but she did own an amusing proclivity toward overstatement.

Something shifted near a pile of rubbish, drawing Gussie’s attention. She caught sight of the little scamp, trousers too short and shirt too large, who had taken to following them around. A smattering of freckles spilled across his nose. She’d always been partial to freckles, even though her own skin remained untouched because of Mother’s violent insistence that Gussie carry a parasol everywhere she went.

She reached into her pocket and fished out the coin she’d tucked in there before leaving her room a couple of hours before sunrise. “Don’t spend it on something practical.”

The boy snatched it away, a grin lighting his grubby face.

“You darling boy.”

“Why do you bother with urchins?” Dora stepped away from him, and Gussie herself resisted the urge to wrinkle her nose at his scent. “You’ve given too much of your pay to vile creatures since we left New York, and it’s wasteful, I say.”

Before Dora could launch into her tired lecture, Gussie pinched the boy’s chin and gave him her most brilliant smile. “Every child deserves to be seen. No matter their station. No matter . . .” She glanced toward Dora, whose scowl seemed a much nastier thing than the boy’s filth. “Well, no matter anything.”

A familiar cough echoed from the street, and Gussie glanced over her shoulder. They would soon be discovered.

She skirted a pile of vegetable scraps, stepped through the hotel's back door, and entered the kitchen's chaos. A red-faced woman wearing a calico dress and a stained apron shouted at the collection of young women and children unfortunate enough to be employed by her. Kettles shrieked, pots bubbled, and a dog with one eye and suspect bare patches around his tail gnawed on a bone.

"Come on." Gussie glanced behind her to see that Dora followed, and they took the servant's staircase. "I hired you specifically because you said you had a thirst for adventure. Have I not given you that? Have there not been many adventures?" Their echoing steps punctuated her questions. Gussie mentally ticked off some of the trips Dora had accompanied her on. Nearly a month traveling the Ohio River, ending in a whirlwind tour of New Orleans; a few fun days exploring the delights of Coney Island; a boring week at the Greenbrier Hotel in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia. That had been an apology for dragging Dora through the Midwest after the Ringling Brothers Circus. "Do not flag on me now."

"*You* didn't hire me. Your father did."

They reached the Bullock Hotel's third floor, and Gussie stuck her head out the door and looked both directions down the length of carpeted hall before darting from the stairwell. She'd taken a room here as restitution for the month-long trek she'd arranged through the Badlands, thinking Dora would enjoy the luxury, though Gussie couldn't imagine time in a dull hotel being more interesting than the marvels outside it. What photos she had been able to capture!

In their room, Gussie set her bag on the narrow brass bed she'd claimed and pulled out the smaller satchel protecting her Folding Pocket Kodak. She'd been given a model before it was available to the rest of the country and had been traveling and taking photos with it to send back to New York. Everyone now wanted the machine Miss Adventuress carried around the world. She patted

the satchel, then removed the journal she'd kept this trip. She always kept one during her travels, scribbling snippets of thoughts and descriptions of America's natural beauty. They were a handy reference when she wrote her regular column for *Lady's Weekly*.

Gussie skimmed the notes she'd taken that morning. They were unlikely to make their way into a column—too serious, too introspective—but they would still serve a purpose when she was back in New York, trussed up like a Christmas turkey and suffocating beneath expectations. They would remind her of wild freedom.

Waking early that morning had been worth the inconvenience. They had walked down a deserted Main Street, through Chinatown and Elizabethtown, and then, after only a mile more, Gussie had been met with incredible vistas. The Black Hills rose above them, pine trees and jagged rocks framing a sunrise so vibrant it brought tears to her eyes. A photo couldn't do the scene justice, of course, but her words would spin pictures. And Miss Adventuress's description would take her readers away. Away from household duties and crowded cities and dull routines. To South Dakota and a rough frontier town and experiences one could only dream about.

And read of in *Lady's Weekly*.

Gussie set the book aside and rested her chin in her hand. "Where should we go next?"

"Chicago."

Gussie sighed.

"You've been gone long enough, and if your parents have sent *him* after you, it means you must return to your aunt in Chicago." Dora poked one priggish finger into the air. "It is *time*."

Gussie rolled her eyes and slapped her hand against her knee. "Very well. Back to Chicago you shall go."

Dora gasped. "Truly? And then home to New York? Is this interminable madness over?"

Gussie ignored her and pulled a carpetbag from the bottom of the wardrobe across the room. She set it on the bed and began unbuttoning her jacket.

Dora eyed her with suspicion. "What are you doing?"

“The train leaves in sixty minutes. You must be on it.” Gussie removed her jacket and set it aside, then let her skirt puddle around her feet. “Thank heavens I had the foresight to hire a woman my size.”

“Your father hired me.” Dora’s voice was as acerbic as an unripe persimmon.

Gussie grinned and waved her hand toward Dora’s serviceable rust-colored bodice. “It’s an awful color for me, but it will suit. And you *think* Father hired you.”

Gussie had experienced two wonderful years of freedom, traveling as *Lady’s Weekly* photographer and columnist Miss Adventuress, before she was asked to write weekly. It meant more travel. More exciting destinations too. But also, according to her parents, more opportunity for a ruined reputation. Dora was a compromise, but that didn’t stop them from sending a Pinkerton after her when she left unexpectedly. Of course, it also didn’t stop her from continuing to leave without informing them.

She couldn’t bear their negativity and pronouncements of certain social doom. She’d had enough of it from Dora too.

“Well—” she huffed when Dora just stood in front of her, still as a statue—“undress. We haven’t much time.”

Dora’s face fell. “You aren’t planning to be on that train with me, are you?”

“You must know me better than that by now.” A year together, and Dora still seemed surprised when Gussie acted like the independent woman she was.

Dora’s brow wrinkled. “I can’t leave you here by yourself. It will ruin you. Your parents will, at the very least, release me without a reference.”

“I won’t allow them to.” Gussie patted Dora’s shoulder. “Don’t fuss. I’ll leave Deadwood on the morning train. And I’m only making one stop—there’s a waterfall outside Sleepy Eye I wish to capture. The train pulls through there twice daily, so I’ll be on my way to you and Chicago only a day later.”

“But you will be alone. On the train. For two days.”

“So will you. Women travel alone now, Dora. It isn’t unheard

of. Nellie Bly traveled the world on her own almost a decade ago.” Gussie lifted her skirt from the floor and draped it over the edge of the footboard.

“Your sister’s wedding is in less than two weeks.”

“And we will be there in plenty of time. Just Sleepy Eye, Dora. Two days in Chicago, and home we shall go.”

Dora still stood unmoving, her thin lips twisting.

“I can contact Mr. Smart if you think I need someone to accompany me.”

“Don’t you dare,” Dora squeaked. She began to disrobe.

Gussie went to the wardrobe and removed Dora’s few items. She hid her triumphant grin before returning to the bed, arms full. Dora had detested the man Lillian Clare, Gussie’s editor and friend, had hired to guide them through the South Dakota wilderness. Gussie had no qualms about Mr. Smart—he’d kept them fed and safe as she took photos of buttes and candy-cane-striped rock formations. He’d led them through the Black Hills for an additional two weeks and deposited them safely in Deadwood, pocketing the money Gussie handed over in a velvet pouch and leaving without a backward glance.

Which suited Gussie just fine. She didn’t feel as strongly about his propensity for spitting fat wads of chewing tobacco at their feet as Dora did either. Gussie could put up with a lot, as long as she was afforded the opportunity to breathe. There was a lot of air and space around Deadwood. Just her, her Kodak . . . and her uptight companion.

Gussie dropped the clothing atop the bed and made a show of folding a few pieces before scooping the rest up and dumping the whole pile into the bag. She whirled and lifted her hands, as supplicant a posture as Dora would ever witness. “These are our only options—either I travel back to Chicago and Aunt Rhoda alone, or I travel in the company of an uncouth man who couldn’t care a whit about my reputation.”

“Or you can come home with me.” Dora went to the window and peeked past the curtain. “And him.”

Gussie snorted and held out her hand for Dora's skirt.

Dora clutched it to her chest. "I could stay here with you, I suppose." She said it so mournfully that Gussie considered agreeing, if only to reward her companion's acting ability.

"No. You must go. I need to evade him for another couple of days, and you are the perfect diversion." Gussie plucked the skirt from Dora's grip.

"Your aunt." Dora buried her head in her hands. "She's going to be so unhappy."

"Aunt Rhoda is routinely unhappy. Let's at least give her a reason."

Gussie stepped into the skirt and draped the fabric so it fell neatly over her bustle pad. "Hurry. Retrieve my traveling gown. We don't have much time. The train leaves soon, and I need to be sure our ruse works." She wouldn't be caught this soon.

Dora went to the wardrobe and donned the navy wool skirt and jacket. Gussie sighed, her fingers itching for the velvet trim and large buttons. What a shame. She would have to give the traveling suit to Dora, of course, as restitution for this latest escapade. And Gussie did so love it.

"What a lovely figure you have, Dora. That outfit suits you." It did too. Gussie didn't know why Dora sought the most unflattering colors and fabrics for her gowns.

Dora's fingers paused their fumbling, and her shoulders stiffened. "Do not flatter me, Miss Travers. Everyone is sure to be angry with me. And if you meet some unfortunate end, as you seem so driven to do, they will hold me responsible for your death."

"Oh, don't be so cross. We've had a great adventure."

"One I'm glad is nearly at its end."

"Not entirely. Don't forget that my readers wish for waterfalls."

Dora whirled, her eyes protruding in such a fashion that Gussie considered suggesting she see a doctor. "I will leave you for good, Miss Travers! And then where will you be?"

"Stop fussing. It will all come out in the end. It always does." Gussie pulled the pins from her hat and transferred it from her head to Dora's, tugging down one of the large white feathers so

that it hid her profile. “Perfect. Once you’re settled in your berth and he’s boarded the train, I’ll escape through another car.” Gussie grinned. How she loved this game. She went back to the bed and snapped the carpetbag closed. “Now, we must go. I will carry your bag to make a show of it.”

“Miss Travers, your aunt isn’t—”

Gussie shoved her own bag into Dora’s arms. “If you’re that worried, just get a room when you arrive in Chicago.” She snagged her lip between her teeth and went to the bureau where she’d hidden her reticule. Dora appreciated nice things. Gussie handed her enough money to cover a week at the Palmer House. “A fashionable one.”

Dora counted the bills, and her mouth went slack.

“Aunt Rhoda need never know you left me in Deadwood. I’ll be on the Saturday morning train. Meet me at the station, and we’ll return to her house together, gather my things, and go straight to New York.”

Dora wrestled a sigh too heavy for someone only two years older than Gussie’s twenty-five. But it signified victory. “Very well.”

Gussie pressed her hand against Dora’s back and ushered her from the room. “Once the train departs, he’ll likely only show his face at stops to make sure you don’t disembark. Have a steward bring you meals and try to stay in your berth until you reach Pierre, where you switch trains. It won’t matter then if he discovers our duplicity. Now, let’s dupe the detective.”

And if Gussie’s luck held, he wouldn’t catch up with her until Chicago was within sight.