



A Novel

Annette Lyon

SPIRES *of* STONE

PROLOGUE

NEW YORK CITY, AUGUST 1867

Phillip carefully settled the last of his new photography supplies in the trunks, closed the lids, then secured the latches. He had spent a lot of money—and considerable credit—on the items inside them, plus a few days learning how to use the supplies. It wouldn't be long before he would have his own photography business in downtown Salt Lake City. He already had the newspaper advertisement planned in his mind.

Smoothing his hand along the edge of one trunk, he stood and looked around the empty room that he and his brothers had rented at the inn. They had packed for home and would soon be leaving their mission after twenty-nine months. It didn't feel as if they'd been there that long. Yet in some ways, it seemed a lifetime ago that they'd first arrived. Phillip really didn't want to return to the pre-mission world. Here was purpose and peace. Here he was an elder, nothing more—and even better, nothing less.

He figured his brothers were downstairs getting a bite of supper before they left, so he grabbed his coat and hat to join them. Halfway down the hall another door stood open, and Phillip slowed his step, waiting for it to close so he could continue along the narrow passageway.

A young couple stood close together, and even though the door partially blocked his view of them, Phillip flushed slightly at their intimacy and looked to the floor briefly as he waited for them.

“You will come back soon, won’t you?” the woman said, and Phillip suddenly looked up at the voice.

The man kissed her, then answered in a quiet voice, “Of course, Cybil. How could you think otherwise?”

Cybil? Phillip’s jaw dropped. *The man isn’t . . . no, it couldn’t be . . .* He had answered so quietly that Phillip couldn’t be certain by his voice, and yet . . .

He leaned to get a better look. Could it be his brother Claude, kissing the girl they had just baptized?

“You know I love you,” she said. “And after what we’ve done, you *will* come back? You promise?”

“Shhh . . .” the man said. “Everything will be all right. You can trust me.”

At the side of the door, Cybil’s blond curls bobbed as she nodded. Phillip’s heart hammered in his chest. Between the woman’s hair and the man’s voice, Phillip no longer had any doubts about the couple’s identity. What had they “done”? Phillip’s stomach sank as he suspected the answer.

“You don’t need to worry about anything,” Claude said. He leaned in and kissed her again.

She threw her arms around him and held him tight. “Oh, Claude. Don’t go! I can’t bear it. I just can’t.”

He held her for a moment, then gently peeled her arms off him. “I must go. For a while.” He kissed the tips of her fingers and smiled at her, then gently eased her back into the room, reaching in and withdrawing his hat from inside as he did so. He blew her a final kiss and closed the door.

Claude set his hat on his head, sighed, and, to Phillip’s chagrin, said under his breath, “Glad that’s taken care of.” He strode purposefully down the hall, whistling as he went, not seeing his brother behind him.

Phillip stood there, stunned, watching him retreat. “Claude?” His brother’s heel hit the floor and froze in place.

Claude turned around. Their eyes locked for a moment, Phillip’s in confusion and disgust, Claude’s in panic. “That’s not what it looked like,” he said, his hands moving nervously about. “I swear.”

Suddenly two men came barreling up the stairs behind Claude—Cybil's brothers. Now, it was Claude's turn to appear shocked. "Hello, Thomas, George," he said, nodding to each of them in turn. "I was just about to come find you to say good-bye."

By the look on Claude's face, he'd had no plans to do any such thing. Thomas, a blond man whose arm was the size of Claude's leg, looked down at him and declared, "I thought you were sticking around to marry my little sister."

"Yes, well, I can't quite do that right now, you see," Claude said, his face so hot he looked as if he might melt into the floor like a crock of butter.

George took a step closer, inching Claude closer to the wall. "You are going to make a lady out of my sister."

Everything the two brothers said to Claude only confirmed Phillip's suspicions. Of course, it was likely no one besides Claude and Cybil knew for sure what had happened between them, but . . . Cybil must have said something her brothers had latched onto.

Squirming under the men's gaze, Claude glanced at their thick hands. Phillip wondered what damage they could do if Thomas and George decided to beat Claude. Two Mormon farm boys would be no match. And Phillip wasn't sure he wanted to defend his brother anyway, though he knew he'd be pulled into the fray.

"You see, gentlemen," Claude stammered, "I have to report to the Church authorities. After that I might be able to return. We could discuss wedding plans, then." He tried to smile broadly, but his charms only affected ladies, not harbor workers who'd seen their share of conniving rats over the years.

George pulled his arm back, ready to strike. Claude ducked low, quickly crawling under Thomas's outstretched arm and scrambling down the inn stairs. Phillip swung over the banister and jumped halfway down the stairs in a single leap. Thomas and George let out a bellow and hurled their collective bulk down the stairs after them.

The chase continued to the main floor, where Phillip spied their brother Ben eating at a table. Claude raced across the room, shoving people out of the way and crying, "Ben, Ben!" His brother looked up at the ruckus, confused and startled.

“What’s going on?”

Before anyone could explain, Thomas picked up Claude by the scruff of his shirt and turned him around. He punched his face, sending him flying across the room and onto a table—right in Ben’s dinner.

Ben jumped to his feet and returned the punch, landing his fist on Thomas’s nose. In spite of the man’s impressive size, his eyes rolled back and he collapsed to the ground. The room fell silent for just a moment before George cried out, “You don’t hit my brother like that, and my sister’s going to get what she’s entitled to!”

Ben tilted his head in confusion. He leaned toward Phillip, who now stood a few feet away, breathing heavily. “Could you explain what’s happening?”

A chorus of shouts went up as men throughout the inn began hitting one another. A few men started for Ben and Phillip. “Tell you later,” Phillip said. He nodded toward Claude. “Let’s get him—and us—out of here.”

In a single motion, Ben hefted Claude’s limp form over his shoulder, then shoved one man and punched another in defense so they could get out of the room. They managed to sneak out of the inn, leaving a brawl behind them. They raced down the street as fast as they could while carrying Claude, constantly checking to see if George or Thomas had come after them. Fortunately, Thomas must have remained unconscious, and George must have gotten stuck in the row at the inn, because no one followed.

Ben found a quiet bar a few blocks away. “Let’s catch our breath here,” he said, slipping inside. “No one will think to find Mormon elders here.”

Phillip found a long table in a dark corner. The innkeeper gave them a funny look when he noticed Claude, but gave them permission to lay him out on the table flanked with two long benches.

“Maybe we can pay someone to fetch our luggage so we can still make the seven o’clock train tonight,” Ben said, taking a watch out of his pocket.

“I hope so, but it better be someone careful,” Phillip answered, thinking of his photography supplies—the glass panes, bottles of fluid, lenses, his tripod. “Definitely no one who’s been drinking.”

“Agreed.”

A few minutes later Claude moaned as Ben washed off a slight cut in his eyebrow. Ben pulled back toward Claude’s feet and motioned for Phillip to join him at that end of the table. “What on earth happened in there?” he whispered.

Phillip swallowed hard. He glanced over at Claude, then back at Ben, remembering Claude’s words: *It wasn’t what it looked like. I swear.*

Technically, Phillip didn’t know what had happened. But he could wager a decent guess. He knew what Thomas and George thought had happened. He knew what Cybil wanted from Claude. And he knew that Claude had no intention of coming back to New York.

“Cybil wants to marry Claude.” Phillip didn’t feel as if he could say more than that, at least not until he sorted things out with Claude. His brother needed to come clean about some things, but it wasn’t Phillip’s job to tell his secrets—or his sins.

“Should have guessed as much,” Ben said.

“Oh?”

“Haven’t I taught you well enough?” Ben said with a shake of his head.

“Oh, of course.” Phillip laughed. He sat up straight and recited as if he were a pupil, “Most problems in the world boil down to womankind.”

With his feet propped on the benches across from him, Ben leaned against the wall, folded his arms, and pulled his hat over his eyes. “Very good, Phillip. You *have* been listening.”

Phillip gave his brother’s feet a kick, knocking them off the bench. For their entire mission, Ben had been “preaching” such nonsense to his brothers, and it had all started with getting his heart broken by a girl shortly before they left. “You don’t really believe that, do you?”

“With all my body, mind, and soul,” Ben said, putting his heels back up and giving Phillip a bit of a shove with one boot. “If it weren’t for Cybil, we’d be headed west right now. Instead, we’re stuck here. Claude’s got a black eye, and who knows what kind of damages

we'll have to pay the inn. Nope, you can't convince me that women are anything but trouble." Ben closed his eyes again and appeared to be dozing off.

But it wasn't Cybil who caused the trouble, Phillip wanted to say. It was our ornery brother.

CHAPTER 1

SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

“They’re back!”

Bethany looked up to see her sister Hannah yelling, boots kicking up dust as she ran toward the road. Bethany’s hat flopped into her eyes as she reached for another onion. She pushed the brim out of the way, yanked the onion from the ground, and tossed it into the basket just as Hannah skidded to a stop halfway between the house and the street.

“*Who* is back?” Bethany asked, standing and beating at her canvas work apron, which had layers of garden dirt on it. Soil also covered her work gloves and arms. Chances were good that it was smeared across her nose, cheeks, and chin, too.

Breathless, Hannah put a hand on her older sister’s shoulder to steady herself. For a second Bethany’s stomach flipped over itself with worry, but then Hannah broke into a grin. “They’re back.”

“Yes, you said that already,” Bethany said, pulling away from her sister and hefting the full bushel of onions they would be storing in the cellar. She started walking toward the house. “So *who* is back? And from where?”

Still breathing heavily, Hannah stepped backward to keep her face to Bethany’s. She jabbed a thumb over her shoulder in the direction of the street. “Look for yourself. They were right behind me.”

A glance over Hannah’s shoulder revealed three men striding toward the house, side by side. One was nearly a head taller than the

others, and even at this distance—a good fifty feet or so—Bethany recognized him.

Benjamin Adams. For over two years she had managed to keep him out of her thoughts. She hadn't counted on his mission back East ending quite yet—if ever. But she supposed it was about time he came back. At the sight of him, a knot formed in her stomach, and she clutched the bushel of onions to her chest. Her lips pressed into a tight line, and her heart pounded with—what?

Anxiety? Yes.

Anticipation? Hardly.

Anger? Absolutely.

Would his mission have softened him, or would the two of them still exchange verbal barbs each time they met? She had never known Ben to be mean or rude to anyone—except her. And she wasn't all that proud to admit that she could rise to his level of sarcasm just as quickly as he could when provoked.

Hannah twirled away and raced to meet the men. Even though Ben was flanked by two others, Bethany could focus only on him. She knew without looking who the others were—Ben's brothers, Phillip on one side and Claude on the other. But her eyes refused to look at either of them, instead seeing only Ben's even gait and broad shoulders, his hat worn slightly askew—and, as he drew closer, the strawberry blond cowlick he had always tried to tame. The cowlick that, in years past, *she* had tried to tame . . .

Her stomach tightened as she waited. What would she say to him and how would she say it?

Hannah's voice broke into her thoughts. "It's *so* good to see you all!" Hannah exclaimed, her face flushed with excitement. But Claude was the only one she was looking at. "I was telling Bethany just the other day that it must be nearly time for you three to come home, wasn't I, Bethany?"

Hannah had said no such thing, but Bethany managed to swallow hard and nod stiffly from where she stood a few feet behind. Her eyes met Ben's. *What is he thinking right now?* He wore that familiar smirk on his face, the one she couldn't get out of her head, the one that could drive a woman mad. She tried to imagine what snide remark

was about to come out of his mouth. If only she could get her feet to move, she could escape into the house. The fact that they remained planted on the ground infuriated her.

"I'm so glad you came to visit," Hannah went on, leading them toward Bethany and the house.

"We did promise your father a report," Claude answered with a smile as he followed.

"Yes, you did," Hannah said. Bethany thought she detected a hint of disappointment in Hannah's eyes that Claude had mentioned only their father. Hannah stopped by Bethany so that the men and her sister could exchange greetings.

Ben, still staring at Bethany, cocked his head to one side and opened his mouth to speak. Some foolish put-down, no doubt. She wasn't about to let him score at her expense.

After what he did to her, Bethany had convinced herself that regardless of how valiantly he had served his mission, regardless of how well respected he was in the city, Ben was still the devil incarnate. She would never allow him to weasel himself back into her heart only to break it again.

Refusing to let his presence paralyze her any longer, she thought of a witty greeting and stepped forward to close the gap between them.

But before she managed to utter a word, her foot caught on her dirt-covered hem. For one horrified moment, all she could do was see the inevitable outcome. In a rush, she tripped, the bushel of onions spilling onto the ground with her landing in a heap on top of them. Humiliation burned her face, and she closed her eyes as she got to her hands and knees, dreading having to stand and face Ben's jeers. She didn't have long to wait.

"Still as graceful as a pig, I see."

So the rules of their little game hadn't changed after these two years. What would the people he had preached to have thought of his greeting? She shoved a strand of hair behind her ear and stood, nearly toppling again when her foot landed on a couple of onions, which rolled away. Swiping at her apron and trying hard to keep her chin aloft, she said, "At least I don't have the manners of a pig." She

cleared her throat and adjusted her skirt, painfully aware of what a horrid sight she was at the moment.

If only their reunion had been at a dance. Then she would have worn her new organdy dress, with her hair in tight curls. She could have watched Ben squirm by the wall as she glided across the floor on the arm of one dance partner after another. She could toss insults over her shoulder as she walked past him to the refreshment table, and refuse him when he asked her to dance—surely he wouldn't be able to resist asking her.

The corner of Ben's mouth lifted, as if he knew she had won a point in whatever game it was they were playing. With added confidence, Bethany went on before he could answer.

Gesturing at the spilled onions, she said, "A gentleman would not make jokes around a lady, and he certainly wouldn't stand idly by when she was in need of aid."

Ben innocently looked side to side, peered behind Hannah, and finally turned in a circle before saying, "I don't see any lady here. Except dear Hannah, of course." He wrinkled his nose. "I suppose I could be wrong. The stench of your work might be clouding my judgment."

"*Judgment?*" Bethany spat back. "You've never *had* good judgment since the day you were born."

Ben took a step closer and looked down his nose. Bethany stood defiantly several inches below. "That would explain certain elements of the past." He stepped to the side, leaving her paralyzed, eyes stinging. She couldn't quite convince herself that it was because of the onions.

He held out his hand to Hannah. "My, how you've grown while we were away. You were just a girl when we left."

Hannah's eyes darted uneasily from Bethany to Ben, uncomfortable with the exchange and unsure how to respond. She finally smiled and took Ben's hand—and Ben's compliment. "I'm eighteen now."

"Just as I said. A *lady*." He shot a look at Bethany.

Insides roiling, Bethany turned to Claude and Phillip. "So, *gentlemen*,"—this with a pointed glare at Ben—"come inside and tell us about your mission. Father's in the parlor. I'm sure he'll be pleased as punch to see you again."

She gave a curtsy, avoiding Ben's eyes so she wouldn't scream or try yanking out that cowlick, and turned on her heel. She banged the door shut behind her, leaving the bushel and the mess behind. The family could go without onions this winter for all she cared; she wouldn't give Ben the satisfaction of seeing her crawl in the dirt to gather them.

* * *

An hour and a half later, when the men left the Hansen home, Claude had a lopsided smile on his face and seemed to be walking several inches above the ground. Ben caught the faraway look in his brother's eyes.

"What's the matter? Did Bethany's bread pudding not agree with your stomach?"

"I thought everything was delicious," Phillip answered. "Sure beats our sad attempts. Hannah's pie crust was almost celestial."

The truth was, all of the food the Hansen sisters served—especially Bethany's bread pudding—had been excellent, but Ben wasn't about to admit it. After being away from the falderal of womankind for over two years—and making sure he taught Claude everything he knew about so-called "love"—he hoped his brother had learned a few things. Unfortunately, Claude's starry eyes said just the opposite. Ben had hoped they had left such nonsense behind them when they left Cybil in New York. Apparently not.

"So what's wrong, then?" Ben asked with an elbow jab to Claude's ribs.

They turned onto the street, and Claude slowly shook his head as if in a dream. "Have you ever seen *anything* so beautiful?"

Ben looked around them, at the sky, and even inside his jacket. "Nope. Sorry. Don't see anything beautiful at all. Do you, Phillip? I know Claude thinks *he's* beautiful, but that's old news."

Phillip laughed and shook his head, but he didn't answer. Over the years the three of them had gone through the same dance enough times that they could all predict with relative accuracy what was about to happen. Ben wished Phillip wouldn't keep staying out of

the ring. The anti-female side of the fence could use a few more members.

Phillip looked more uneasy at the joke than Ben would have thought he would, and he made a mental note to ask what was troubling him. But Claude's cheeks were bright red, and Ben knew he had hit a target; Claude did think he was handsomer than most. "I didn't mean me," Claude insisted.

"Maybe not this time," Ben murmured, a smile twitching his mouth. Phillip couldn't hold back a chuckle. Throughout their mission, Claude had spent more time grooming in front of the mirror than he would like to admit.

Turning around, Claude pointed to where they could just make out the fence of the Hansens' property. "Back there." He sighed. "Hannah used to be just a sweet girl. I know we were all good pals before, and I liked her well enough, but now—" He shook his head, turned back to the road, and plunged his hands into his jacket pockets. "Now, she's a beautiful woman."

"Oh, please." Ben yanked Claude's arm to keep him moving. "I saw no such thing back there, and I'm years away from needing spectacles."

"Little brother," Claude said to Phillip, stopping in the road and ignoring Ben. "*You* think Hannah's pretty, don't you?"

Phillip looked from one older brother to the other. "In a word, yes." He raised his hands in defense. "But this isn't a firestorm I want to get myself into. I'm going to talk to Mrs. Brecken about letting her attic for my shop. Either of you want to come along?"

"I'll be right there," Claude said. "*After* I try to knock some sense into our older brother."

Phillip seemed about to say something else, but instead he closed his mouth, shook his head, then walked around a corner toward East Temple Street, leaving Ben and Claude to fight it out.

Ben watched his brother, curious. Something seemed to be eating at Phillip. Shaking off the thought, he turned to Claude. "First of all," Ben said, pointing a finger at Claude, "as far as I'm concerned, women-folk are a distracting and, unfortunately, necessary vice."

"Yes, yes," Claude said, looking at the sky dramatically. "We all know that it's your greatest aspiration to convert as many men to

gray-haired bachelorhood as possible—in spite of the fact that it’s contrary to every gospel principle.”

“Precisely.” Ben refused to acknowledge the sardonic edge to his brother’s voice. But quietly, he sighed. It wasn’t easy trying to run from marriage, especially since he was twenty-five. Ben hated to admit that it wasn’t so much the idea of marriage he was running from as much as marrying someone he didn’t really love, and that was now his only option. There was only one person who had ever held his heart—then broken it—and there would never be another. If he ever succumbed to the pressure to get married, it would be for practical reasons only. Having a woman around to do the cooking and laundry would be a pleasant convenience. “Let’s pretend for a moment that I paid the *slightest* attention to Hannah.”

“I’m pretending,” Claude said dryly, eyeing his brother sideways as they walked. “So?”

“So it’s obvious to any bystander that Hannah doesn’t hold a candle to Bethany.”

Claude’s brow furrowed and, after a moment, his lips curved. “I don’t believe it! You still have feelings for—”

Stomach suddenly knotting, Ben’s step came up short. Claude of all people should know better than to bring that up. He pushed his face inches away from Claude’s. “Say one more word and I’ll yank out your tongue.”

Claude backed down. “Whoa. Sorry,” he said, raising his hands in surrender.

Ben shook off the anger, suddenly feeling a twinge of guilt for snarling at his brother like that. Not exactly the behavior of someone who had just returned from proselyting. *Neither was your behavior back at the Hansens’*, he reminded himself. But that was different. With Bethany, it was a game of one-upmanship. That didn’t count.

Claude turned to keep walking, and when he spoke again, it was in a softer tone, one free of debate. “I felt something when I saw Hannah today.”

“Like I said, it was probably indigestion.” Ben tried to act casual again, as if nothing had happened. All this woman talk made him

uncomfortable. Things were much simpler when being with his brothers consisted of little besides preaching and baptizing.

Claude stopped in the road again. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. “Ben, I respect your desire to remain a bachelor, whatever your reasons. But nothing you say is going to change the fact that I really like Hannah.” He looked up at his brother, who was a few inches taller. “Please don’t make light of that,” he finished, then pulled the brim of his hat down and strode away.

Ben watched him go, feeling guilt worming its way into his mind. He glanced over his shoulder, but the Hansen property was no longer visible. Thinking back to the moment they had walked up the lane, he was painfully aware that his pulse had picked up its pace at seeing Bethany—covered in dirt and tripping on onions. A soft smile crept onto his face that he couldn’t stop. She was still so beautiful.

At the memory, he coughed and walked faster, deliberately changing the direction of his thoughts from how she looked to what she had been doing. It was pretty funny to see her stumble like that—and a tiny bit satisfying.

Nothing more, he assured himself.

As he turned to go home, he muttered to himself, “Gotta be more careful, buddy, or one of them females might sneak her way through your defenses, and you’ll end up a poor sap like Claude.”

CHAPTER 2

When Phillip reached Mrs. Brecken's general store, he went inside and retrieved a sign from the window which read, "Space to Let." Looking around the room, he searched for Mrs. Brecken, who had owned this store for as long as he could remember, and found her stacking feed bags in the back corner. As he approached her, she paused to catch her breath and count the bags. She shook her head as if she'd lost track, then added them up again, pointing to each bag as she went.

"Twenty-nine," she muttered, then—turning around to jot the number down—nearly bumped into Phillip. "Oh, heavens. You startled me. Can I help you with something?"

Since her face bore no recognition, Phillip realized he needed to reintroduce himself. "Sister—Mrs. Brecken, I'm Phillip Adams. Remember me?"

He held out his hand in greeting, but the plump woman just eyed it and wiped a strand of damp, gray hair from her face. "Back from your mission then?" He nodded. "Your brothers back too, or are you home early?"

Phillip's brow creased; she seemed to be implying something, and he had a feeling he knew what it was but prayed he was wrong. Mrs. Brecken was one of the handful of people who knew his family's history back to Nauvoo. Phillip couldn't understand how such people could blame him for something that happened before he was born. "No, it's all three of us—Ben and Claude, too. I noticed this sign in your window." He held it out.

“Yes . . .” She looked down her nose at it.

“I’d like to let the space,” Phillip said, bracing himself. Mrs. Brecken was one of the few old-timers who still held his questionable birth against him.

“For what?” she asked warily.

“For a photography studio. I bought all the supplies back East and took lessons before we returned. It’ll take a few weeks to get set up, but I believe I’ll be able to have a successful business, and my customers will bring you more business, too.”

She didn’t answer right away, instead narrowing her eyes as if scrutinizing him. Just as he had the urge to blurt out that he really was a good person, she continued. “Hmm. I don’t know. I’ve had a few other offers from people who—well, who I know better.”

Phillip was tempted to remind her that she knew his family well—which was certainly true as far as it went. But since the circumstances that led to the shop owner’s prejudice lay in the difference between Phillip’s birth and that of his older brothers, that wouldn’t do much in convincing her to give him the space.

The side door opened, jingling a handful of bells attached to the top. Claude entered and looked around. Spying Phillip in the back, he raised a hand and came to join them. “Do you already have everything arranged, then?”

“I . . .” Phillip hesitated, looking askance at Mrs. Brecken. “We haven’t come to an agreement.”

“Mrs. Brecken, it’s so good to see you,” Claude said, putting out his hand.

The elderly lady shook it and smiled. “Good to see you, too, Claude. You’re a bit taller than I saw you last, I think. Unless I’m shrinking in my old age.”

“Well, you’re as pretty as ever,” Claude said, flashing a broad smile.

Phillip pressed his eyes closed. That was the same smile Claude had used on a hundred other women—including Cybil. Until recently, Phillip hadn’t thought anything of it. Now, it made his hackles rise; it was a sign of manipulation, and he wasn’t sure he wanted that smile connected to his business.

Mrs. Brecken swatted his arm and blushed. “Oh, you young men.”

Claude stepped a little closer to Mrs. Brecken. “So is Phillip going to rent your attic then?”

She glanced uncomfortably at Phillip. “Well, I haven’t quite decided yet . . .”

Leaning in even closer, Claude almost whispered, “He’s got great ideas for his photography, plus all the latest methods and equipment. He’ll easily be able to pay you rent—and everyone who clamors to get one of his photographs will have to come through your door to do that. You’ll get more customers, more sales. It’s the best thing you can do for your store. What do you say?”

He touched her arm gently. She glanced at it, back up at Claude, then smiled. “More sales and customers, eh?” Mrs. Brecken chewed the inside of one cheek and eyed Phillip again. “You think you can do what your brother here says you can?”

“I’m sure of it.” Phillip wanted to say more—or at least point out that he had just made all the same arguments—but he had a feeling that it would be best to keep quiet. Claude had a way with women *and* didn’t have the supposedly dirty past Phillip did. His half brother was untainted, or so everyone thought. Phillip realized he’d expected this reaction from Mrs. Brecken—she’d never treated him as well as she had his brothers, even when they were boys. It was something he just had to accept.

With a curt nod, Mrs. Brecken snatched the sign away from Phillip and said, “Very well. I expect the rent paid by the first of the month. No exceptions.”

“Agreed.”

“You can start moving your things in right away. We’ll count this month as partial rent, since we’re already halfway through. I’ll draw up the papers in the morning.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Brecken,” Phillip said, getting excited now. “You won’t regret this.”

She nodded without another word and went back to work. He hadn’t even seen the attic except from the outside. He knew it had three windows along one side—critical for the light he’d need. But at that moment, it didn’t really matter what condition the attic was in; he had a space to call his own, even if he owed it to his brother and his charms.

He and Claude left the shop and headed for home. “Thanks,” he said after a minute. “I don’t think she would have let me have it if you hadn’t arrived and convinced her.”

“My pleasure, little brother,” Claude said, tugging at his jacket. He sauntered down the road and winked. “Let’s just say you owe me a favor.”

A favor. The idea bothered Phillip. He had already carried a burden for Claude all the way from New York. If anything, they were even now. They walked for several blocks in silence before Phillip couldn’t keep quiet any longer. They had reached some sheds on the temple block, and Phillip motioned to Claude to sit in the shade behind one. “Come here.”

Instead of joining him, Claude stared at his brother. Phillip sat in the shade and took off his hat. “Come here and sit down. We need to talk.”

“About what?” Claude asked, squinting at the afternoon sun.

“I think you know what.”

A palpable silence hung between them for a moment. Claude licked his lips, then hung his head and nodded. “All right. I suppose there has to be a time.” He walked into the shade and sat against the shed. The air was silent behind them. Phillip wondered if the workers had taken a midday break or if this shed had been abandoned like several of the Public Works buildings throughout the block. The only thing that mattered was that the two of them were alone, with no prying eyes or ears.

Claude rested his forearms on his knees and held his hat by the brim, slowly rotating it around and around. When he didn’t say anything, Phillip ventured, “I heard you and Cybil saying good-bye.”

“I know.” Claude continued to circle his hat as he stared at it.

“She begged you to return after what you ‘did together.’”

Claude’s jaw worked a bit, and he nodded. His eyes seemed to get teary. “I know,” he said again, his voice low. His eyes finally left the hat, darting for just a second to the dusty ground and leaving a wet spot—a single tear.

“Yet as soon as the door closed, it was clear you had no intentions of returning to New York.”

“That’s right.”

Silence. This time Phillip refused to fill it. Claude needed to explain himself. His face screwed up with emotion and, after a moment, one of his hands covered his eyes. “I don’t know what came over me, Phillip. I’m not that kind of man. I’m really not. I didn’t mean to promise things like that when I knew I didn’t mean them. I shouldn’t have acted like that as a missionary. I should never have kissed her. What was I thinking?” He brought up his other hand to hide his tears.

Phillip was taken aback as he stared at his brother. Claude seemed genuinely distressed.

“Kisses and false promises?” As much as he hoped that was the whole story, Phillip remembered what he had suspected in the hallway and what the look on Cybil’s face had implied. So he had to press further. “That’s . . . that’s *it*?”

Claude’s hands fell, and his mouth hung open at Phillip’s question. “What are you saying? You think that I . . . that we . . .” He stood, grabbed his hat, and shook his head in disgust. “I can’t believe you. Of all the low-down, dirty things to say to a brother. I’m bearing my innermost soul to you, and you have the gall to . . .” His voice trailed off as if he couldn’t even come up with the words. “Here I am, moments after helping my brother get a lease for his dream business, and you push me down. Well, thank you very much.”

“Claude, I know what I heard, and it sounded a lot like—” Phillip tried, but Claude shook his head.

“Stop, Phillip. Just stop.” Claude put his hat on deliberately. “Yes, I did something wrong, and yes, I need to make things right with Cybil. I’ll send her a letter apologizing for leading her on, and from here on out, I’ll never, ever let myself get caught up in the moment with a woman. I’m doing what I must to put this behind me. But no, I didn’t do anything like . . . like *that*.” His face tightened, and he shook his head in horror, wiping a hand across his face. “I can’t believe you’d say such a thing.”

“Claude, I—”

But he wouldn’t let Phillip get a word in edgewise. “And I would hope that *you* of all people wouldn’t rush to judgment regarding a man’s character, especially one of your own flesh and blood.”

Stunned, Phillip stood in silence in the shadow of the shed as Claude turned and stalked away. Phillip rubbed his hand down his face, suddenly glad he hadn't told Ben any of this. If the matter with Cybil was all a gross misjudgment on his part, and if Claude had already begun turning around from whatever *had* happened, then there was no use in dwelling on what Phillip had seen and heard in the inn.

Even so, poor, poor Cybil.

* * *

A couple of days after the miserable onion incident, Hannah and Bethany hung fresh linens on the clothesline in preparation for their cousin Marie's arrival. She'd visited from Spanish Fork every summer for as many weeks as the girls could convince her parents to spare her. Marie's visits were the only time Bethany moved in with Hannah. Then all three slept in the same room and giggled late into the night like schoolgirls.

"We should take Marie to the theater," Bethany said, snapping a sheet open. "I don't think Spanish Fork has one, and certainly not one as big and grand as ours."

"Good idea," Hannah said through two clothespins between her teeth. She plucked them from her mouth, pushed them onto the line to hold a sheet in place, then turned to her sister. "Bethany . . ."

"Yes?" Bethany glanced up. She drew a pillowcase from the basket, shook it out, and reached up to pin it to the rope. When Hannah didn't speak, Bethany looked over. Her sister stood there, biting her lower lip and studying the grass at her feet. "Is something wrong?"

"I was wondering . . ." Hannah said quietly.

"About the theater? I hear they're doing a Shakespeare play right now, a comedy. I can't remember the name, but I think it had the word *comedy* in the title."

Hannah took a few steps closer to her sister. She leaned down, pulled out one of their father's shirts, and smoothed some creases across the front. "What do you think of Claude Adams?"

Bethany couldn't help noticing the pink flush in her sister's cheeks—and her obvious attempt at looking casual about the question, which included avoiding Bethany's gaze.

"Claude?" Bethany shrugged casually as if she hadn't noticed her sister's embarrassment. "He's the same tall, fair-skinned boy he's always been. I don't care for the way he's styling his hair now with all that fancy pomade—probably some New York fashion he picked up." She raised an eyebrow and looked quizzically at her sister, already having a good idea why she wanted an opinion. Even so, Bethany couldn't help asking why.

With a shrug, Hannah raised the shirt to the line and only then realized she didn't have any clothespins in hand. Bending down to fetch some from the smaller basket on the ground, she asked innocently, "And what of the other Adams brothers?"

Bethany tried not to show how the question ruffled her. She answered, starting with the safest brother to discuss. "Phillip's a fine man. Better looking now than he was when they left, I dare say. He's always been nice, never mean or defensive—even when certain people whispered behind his back about . . . well, you know. I've always respected that."

"No, I don't know," Hannah said, puzzled.

If Hannah hadn't been privy to town gossip, Bethany wasn't about to spread any about Phillip, so she didn't clarify.

But she didn't need to, because Hannah just shook her head and pressed on. "What about . . . Ben?" She seemed to push the name out.

"You know very well what I think of Ben Adams." Bethany put her hands on her hips. "And if you insist on discussing *him*, you'll be doing it by yourself, because I'll be inside." She made a move to leave, but Hannah grabbed her arm. Bethany sighed with frustration, then slowly turned around. "Yes?"

"Would you agree that you and I are as close as any sisters?"

"I would," Bethany said, softening her voice.

"That we confide in one another about almost everything?"

"Yes . . ." Suddenly Bethany didn't like where this was going—back to Ben, she was sure of it.

“And yet . . . after all the time that has passed, you’ve never told me what happened between you two.”

Hannah’s words landed on target, making Bethany’s chest suddenly feel tight. “I’d rather not talk about it.” *Even after more than two years.*

“But it’s important to me,” Hannah insisted. “I—I really like Claude.” She said it as a confession, as if Bethany would condemn her for it. “But if my feelings get in the way of my relationship with you, I’ll force them to look elsewhere. I couldn’t bear it if a man came between us.”

Smiling, Bethany moved to her sister and put a hand on her arm. “You needn’t worry about me. I can manage the likes of Ben all by myself. If you have eyes for Claude and he returns the sentiment, you can proceed knowing that I’m happy for you.”

Hannah tilted her head as if surprised. “You wouldn’t mind? Honest?”

“I wouldn’t mind,” Bethany repeated, then smiled to confirm her words.

“I’ve never been courted before,” Hannah said. “And I don’t even know if Claude has so much as noticed me, so I know it’s ridiculous to be thinking of such things, but I do wonder—if he ever wanted to become my beau . . .” She shook her head, looking distressed. “What if something similar to what happened between you and Ben happens to Claude and me? How will I know what to do?”

“You worry too much,” Bethany said, trying to laugh. It came out sounding forced. She hadn’t ever talked about Ben with Hannah and hadn’t mentioned his name to anyone in years. Discussing it even in vague terms was like ripping a scab off a wound and making it bleed all over again. “Hannah, don’t fret. The chances of something like that are ridiculously small. Claude isn’t his brother’s twin. If he has a particle of sense more than Ben does—which I don’t doubt—you’ll be fine.”

Hannah nodded uncomfortably as she twisted her father’s shirt between her fingers, making more wrinkles than it had to begin with. “Yes, but—but if I knew what happened with you and Ben, I might be able to prevent—”

“I will—not—discuss it.” Bethany’s voice was no longer sweet and sympathetic. Pushed to this point, she couldn’t afford to be misunderstood, and she would *not* talk about Ben. Not even with Hannah, whose eyes grew wide at Bethany’s tone. She looked as if she’d been slapped.

Guilt settled in Bethany’s middle. “Hannah, I’m—sorry,” she managed, but then put up a hand. “I really am sorry. But I *cannot* talk about it.” She turned to go. When she reached the door, she opened it and paused. “I’ll find a tick to fill with straw for Marie to sleep on,” she said, offering to compensate for leaving the laundry unfinished.

Inside, she pressed her hands against her temples and sighed, then headed upstairs toward the linen closet to fetch the guest tick. Getting everything finished in preparation for Marie’s arrival would help her shove away thoughts of Ben and their disastrous relationship—or what had masqueraded as a relationship.

But she didn’t get any farther than opening the closet door before the unwanted memories of that time washed over her and sent tears spilling down her cheeks. The things Ben had written to her and said in her ear. Dancing with him as his girl. The night he’d kissed her . . .

She punched a stack of linens and cried out. “Ben Adams, you fool. If only you weren’t . . . you.”

Her arms rested against a shelf, and she leaned her head against them. She cried, hoping that Hannah would stay outside and wouldn’t find her this way. No one could know—even after two years—that her heart hadn’t come close to healing.

* * *

“So what *is* all this stuff?” Ben asked, looking through the crates in the attic above Mrs. Brecken’s store. The three brothers were unpacking Phillip’s photography supplies in the attic that would soon serve as Phillip’s studio. That is, once he managed to get everything unpacked and set up. And after he had sample photos to display in the front window of the store. And after he’d put an advertisement in the paper for his services. The sooner the better, because he needed to start making some money to pay it all off.

Once he was comfortably settled in a successful business, he would be able to take a step forward in courting a wife. If he didn't hurry, there was a good chance Claude might act first with Hannah. So far his brother hadn't shown any interest in finding a professional trade or obtaining a form of income, so Phillip wasn't overly concerned. Surely if Claude had his sights set on Hannah, he would first need to make himself appear to be a viable suitor. Eventually, Claude's portion from the farm sale would run out and then what? Phillip's feelings for Hannah went back years and years, well before their mission, while Claude's seemed sparked only upon seeing her at their return.

Picking up a bottle of clear liquid, Claude held it to the dim light coming through the window and tilted it back and forth. Ever since their talk by the shed the other day, an unspoken tension hung between the two of them, but neither acknowledged it openly, and both hid it well in front of Ben.

"Hey, be careful with that." Phillip reached for the bottle and placed it in a straw-filled crate. "That's flammable—expensive, too."

They looked around the dusty room that, until today, had been nothing more than empty space above the general store. "Isn't the room perfect?" Phillip said. "Three windows on both ends. More in the gables. Easy access to the well through the store's back door. And low rent to boot."

"Not much light gets in the windows," Claude said, walking up to one and squinting.

"Not *now*," Phillip said, "but there'll be plenty of light when they're clean."

"Looks promising," Ben said, nodding approvingly as he finished unpacking a box and stacked panes of glass on a shelf. He stood and wiped his hand on his pants, then pulled out his watch from his vest pocket. "But if you'll excuse me, the foreman asked me to drop by right about now so he could explain some of the more intricate stone work I'll be doing on the temple stones. By the sounds of it, the work is going to be downright miserable."

The two younger brothers laughed and waved him off as Ben headed down the stairs.

“So,” Claude said after Ben was gone, hands on his hips as he surveyed the boxes and crates, “if I’m not allowed to touch anything, what exactly am I helping you with?”

“Start with washing the windows.” Phillip pointed to a pile of rags lying on the floor. He hoped that even with Ben gone, the two of them could keep the conversation away from uncomfortable topics—like Cybil and anything remotely connected to what they had discussed by the shed. “Take a rag and a bucket of water. Mrs. Brecken brought up soap she said I could use—it’s over by the banister. Like you said, I can’t take photographs unless I have light.”

Claude picked up the bucket. “You might have told me I would be your maid,” he called over his shoulder as he headed down the stairs.

Phillip went back to work unpacking his precious cargo. So far he had found nothing broken from the long trip, and with each crate he unpacked, he got more excited to put his new skills to work. It wouldn’t be too long before he’d be making enough money to pay off the equipment and make a good living. He wondered how soon he could buy some land and build a house. He rethought what his advertisement would say—*The newest photography techniques, images more realistic than any you’ve seen . . .* The venture would take some work, of course. He knew the basics, but he needed to practice and hone his skills.

A moment later, Claude returned with the pail of soapy water. He settled in to washing one of the big windows while Phillip unpacked cases of glass squares and inspected them for damage.

“So what do I get for helping you?” Claude asked as he reached high to scrub the grime from a top corner. “Are you going to teach me how to take photographs?”

After a grunt, Phillip responded, “Hardly. I didn’t pay five dollars learning this stuff just to give away the secrets.”

“Well, I’d better get *something*.” Claude rubbed a particularly stubborn pane. “How about I sit for you while you make a special portrait of me for Hannah?”

Phillip paused in his work and looked over his shoulder at his brother. “That’s an idea,” he said vaguely, hoping his cheeks didn’t

look as pink at they felt. Perhaps he could put off the favor for Claude or agree to something else in trade. Although he imagined giving Hannah a photograph, the face in it ought to be *his*.

Even so, Phillip had a sinking feeling in his stomach. Not only because Claude had eyes for Hannah but because of what had happened with Cybil. What if Claude tried something with Hannah as he had with Cybil? What if Cybil *wasn't* just a kiss? As soon as the thought crossed his mind, Phillip chastised himself. Now, he was calling his brother a liar. Who was he to judge Claude? He didn't know whether his brother was repentant or what his brother had done.

Yet there was more to the sinking sensation in his middle. As long as Phillip could remember, Claude had treated him with mild disdain, putting him down and not believing in him. And Phillip, as a loyal little brother, looked up to Claude as someone to emulate, someone he desperately wanted to please. As an adult, Phillip now knew that courting his brother's favor was a lost cause and that Claude's contempt for him stemmed from something ludicrous, something beyond Phillip's control—his paternity. Having his brother's approval now wouldn't mean much. Even so, agreeing to help Claude was almost a reflex for Phillip, as if that little boy looking for praise still existed somewhere deep inside him.

He took a deep breath, determined to lighten the mood. "You know," Phillip said with a grin, "I'm pretty good with a camera. I might even be able to make *you* look less ugly."

Claude hurled the wet rag across the room, where it landed with a squishing sound on Phillip's chest. They laughed as he took the cloth from the floor and brushed at his wet shirt. When Claude held out his hand, Phillip didn't toss the cloth back right away. Thoughts of Hannah returned, which led to his wondering about Bethany and what she might have told Hannah about the three brothers.

What prejudices would Hannah already have toward him? He was related to Ben *and* he had a muddy heritage since he was technically their half brother.

"Claude, do you—do you know what happened between Ben and Bethany?"

With a shrug, Claude grabbed another washrag from a pile and dunked it into the bucket. “Haven’t got the foggiest idea—Ben’s as tight-lipped as ever. I assumed you knew something.” He turned to the window and kept scrubbing. The dirt was slowly coming off, and it was satisfying to see light seeping into the room.

“I don’t have an inkling about it,” Phillip said with a shake of his head. He threw the rag into the bucket at Claude’s feet, splashing water onto the planks of the wooden floor. “All I know is what I saw that night—Bethany running out of the house in tears, Ben breaking things inside. Your guess is as good as mine.”

Claude pulled up a crate and sat down. “You want to know what I think?”

“Can’t wait to hear it.” Phillip went back to work, moving from inspecting glass to fighting with a tripod that refused to stand.

“I think that the two of them are still in love.” Claude folded his arms with an air of satisfaction.

A burst of laughter escaped Phillip, and he nearly dropped the tripod. “They absolutely hate each other. Weren’t you there the afternoon we returned? I don’t think I’ve ever seen *cats* fight like that.” Phillip kept wrestling with the tripod until its leg finally slipped into place. “You do realize that you’re making no sense whatsoever.”

“I’m serious. I think it’s all an act.”

Phillip moved to the next leg. “In that case, it’s an effective one.”

“Hear me out,” Claude said, coming over to Phillip. “I agree they’re both still angry about whatever happened before. But if they didn’t still care, why would they bother sniping at one another? They’d just ignore each other.”

Phillip had never thought of it in those terms. No emotion toward one another *would* mean no barbs thrown. He had once heard someone say that hate was simply the flip side of love, that one couldn’t truly hate someone he didn’t once deeply care for. Phillip couldn’t vouch for that, but Claude did have a point about Ben and Bethany.

Phillip straightened and toed a piece of packing straw out of the way. “You’re almost making sense, Claude. *Almost*. But if I were you, I wouldn’t say anything about *feelings* or *Bethany* around Ben. Not if you value your life.”