



MYSTERIES
of SILVER PEAK

A Mountain OF Mystery

SNEAK
PEEK...
CHAPTER
ONE!

From your friends
at Guideposts

CAROLE JEFFERSON

Prologue

Silver Peak, Colorado

June 1897

Dear J,

He is arriving three days hence and I can do nothing to stop the wedding. My terror grows with each passing moment and I would rather face death than the prison that awaits me in marriage to such a man.

I shall leave tomorrow at midnight, just as we planned.

I want nothing from here, save my father's photograph and my dear mother's wedding dress. They are all I have left of my old life. She has locked these treasures away from me as it gives her great pleasure to witness my distress.

But no more.

My fear is that she knows of our plan and waits in secret to stop me. I was so foolish to ever trust her and I have suffered dearly for it. Only you and God know my pain, as I dare not reveal it to another living soul.

You are my only hope.

I shall wait for you by the place where we hide our letters. If you do not come before the dawn, then I shall be lost.

Yours, R



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Chapter One

Sadie Speers told herself not to panic.

Her wedding ring had gone missing. For the past hour, Sadie had looked around the nooks and crannies of the Antique Mine, her antique store in the historic mining town of Silver Peak. She'd taken her ring off to protect it from the paint thinner she'd planned to use to strip the peeling paint off of an old wooden rocking horse she'd been asked to restore.

Now that the job was done, she couldn't find her ring. Sadie examined every inch of her long mahogany desk that doubled as the store's front counter, looking under the cluttered surface for some sign of her ring. She was certain she'd set it there before starting her project. The man who had given her that wedding ring, her late husband, T.R., had also made this counter. He'd refinished the elaborately scrolled mahogany front of the antique desk and varnished it to a high polish. Then he'd added a dark granite top. Silver veins ran through the granite, adding to its richness.

"Where is it?" Sadie said aloud, looking high and low for the silver wedding band that had been on her finger for over four decades. She could only assume that it must have rolled off the desk and was now lost somewhere in the store.

Sadie planted her hands on her hips and looked around the shop. She loved the high pressed-tin ceiling and the way the sunlight streamed in through the plate-glass front window, but there were too many places where the ring could disappear.

She'd already searched behind the vintage quilt rack and in the dark recesses beneath the antique sleigh bed. Her gaze moved to the labyrinth created by the vast array of hand-carved wood chairs and tables that wound its way throughout her beloved shop.

Sixty-two years of living had taught Sadie that, most of the time, there was little sense in worrying. But that ring meant so much to her—the symbol of the love she'd shared with T.R., especially now that he was gone. She couldn't imagine never seeing it again.

The brass bell above the door jingled and Rosalind Putnam walked inside. The two women were almost nothing alike on the outside, but had been kindred spirits since kindergarten. Sadie was petite at 5'4", with short, salt-and-pepper hair and twinkly brown eyes. She embraced her mountain girl heritage and found herself most the most comfortable in the outfit she wore today: hiking shoes, blue jeans, and a sky-blue North Face vest over her pine-green cotton turtleneck.

Her best friend, Roz, was tall, often joking that she stood 5'12", with straight, shoulder-length gray hair that framed her cheerful face. Today, her long legs were hidden by the knee-high leather boots and the patchwork denim skirt she

wore. A bright yellow tunic top was cinched at the waist with a vintage turquoise belt that matched the turquoise blue frames of her stylish glasses. Roz often looked more like a time-traveling flower child from the sixties than a retired schoolteacher, and Sadie loved her all the more for her eccentric, bohemian sense of style.

"Am I glad to see you," Sadie exclaimed, walking over to greet her friend with a big hug. "I lost my wedding ring and I can't find it anywhere."

Roz's groomed gray eyebrows rose in alarm. "Oh no! How did that happen?"

Sadie explained the situation. "I thought I left my ring on the desk. If I did, I suppose it could have fallen off when I was gathering supplies to take into the back room."

Roz looked around the crowded shop. "So it could be anywhere?"

"Yes." Then an idea popped into Sadie's head. "You know, I decided to have a cup of tea on the back patio before I started my project. Maybe I took it off there."

Sadie moved quickly to the back room of the store. She opened the door and glanced around the small fenced yard where she'd set a white wrought-iron patio table and two chairs. Silver Peak was nestled high in the Rocky Mountains, and the wide blue sky provided the perfect backdrop to the snowcapped peaks and the untamed wilds of the Rockies. Sadie could see breathtaking mountain vistas in nearly every direction.

But she didn't see her wedding ring on the patio table.

Roz appeared in the open doorway. "Did you find it?"

"No." Sadie walked back inside and started looking around the vintage pie safe that stood next to the back door while Roz began searching behind the front desk.

Sadie smoothed one hand over the polished oak wood of the pie safe and carefully wiped a small smudge off the one of the punched tin door panels. Her ring wasn't on the floor, so she checked the inside of the pie safe just to be certain it hadn't found its way there.

The telephone rang on the desk.

"I'll get it," Roz said, reaching over to grab the phone.

Sadie rounded the pie safe and picked up the copper washtub setting beside it.

"Sadie," Roz said, her brown eyes wide as she held the telephone receiver against her chest. "It's for you."

Sadie set the washtub back on the wooden floor. "Just give me a minute to catch my breath," she said, chuckling. "I haven't exercised like this in quite a while."

Roz leaned toward her and whispered, "It's Edwin."

Sadie stared at Roz, trying to figure out what she was talking about. "Edwin who?"

"Marshall," Roz whispered, a slow smile spreading across her face. "He wants to talk to you."

Sadie's heart skipped a beat. She hadn't talked to Edwin Marshall for decades. They'd gone steady together as teenagers until Edwin left Silver Peak to attend college and went on to a successful career as a circuit judge in Chicago. Why would he be calling her now?

Sadie took a deep breath and then reached for the phone. "Hello?"

"Hello, Sadie," he said, his deep, resonant voice carrying over the line. "Edwin Marshall here. How are you?"

"I'm fine, Edwin," she said, aware that Roz was watching her. "Long time, no speak. How are you?"

"I'm good. Happy to be back in Silver Peak."

"You're in town?"

"Yes—I actually moved back two days ago and I'm still settling in."

"Well..." she said, struggling for words. "That's a surprise."

"Someone told me they call you the Antique Lady now," Edwin said.

Sadie laughed. "That's true. I just hope it's not a reference to my advanced years."

It was Edwin's turn to laugh. "You always did have a great sense of humor. I'm sorry to bother you on such short notice, but I need your help."

"Oh?" Sadie couldn't imagine what help Edwin might need from her. She rested one hand against the desktop to steady herself. "What can I do for you?"

"Well, you might remember the old family home on Monroe Avenue. I've just moved into it and I was wondering if you might be able to stop by today. There's something I want to show you."

"Sure." She wanted to ask him more questions, but something in his tone made her hesitate. "Is now a good time?"

"It's perfect," he said.

"Okay, then, I'll see you soon." Sadie ended the call, then looked over at Roz. "Do you mind watching the store until Julie gets back from lunch? It shouldn't be long." Julie Pearson worked part-time at the Antique Mine while her twin boys were in school.

"I'd love to." Roz moved closer to her. "But you can't leave until you tell me what Edwin said."

"He didn't say much." Sadie was still shocked that Edwin had contacted her after all these years. "But it sounds like he's back in Silver Peak to stay. And he

wants to show me something.”

“Well, that’s intriguing,” Roz said, amusement dancing in her brown eyes. “So what are you waiting for? Scoot!”

Sadie laughed as she headed for the door. “I’ll be back soon.”

“Take your time,” Roz called after her.

A few minutes later, Sadie drove up the steep incline that led to Jefferson Avenue, one of the nicest streets in town. In the late 1800s, Silver Peak had been a boomtown with a population of more than 50,000 people. That was when most of the town’s huge Victorian houses had been built, along with many of the brick storefronts that still lined Main Street.

The Marshall family home was a three-story white Victorian with a large turret in the front and the original gingerbread trim all around. The porch wrapped around one side of the house and was bordered by large purple lilac bushes that Edwin’s grandmother had planted herself.

Sadie parked in the driveway, then took a glance in the visor mirror. She took a moment to fluff her short hair before climbing out of her red Chevy Tahoe.

Edwin might not even recognize her, Sadie thought to herself as she walked to the wide front porch of the Marshall house. But then again, she might not recognize him either. When she thought of Edwin, she still pictured a tall young man with broad shoulders and laughing blue eyes.

“I wonder what he wants,” she murmured, lifting the brass knocker and rapping it twice against the heavy oak door.

The door opened almost immediately and Edwin Marshall stood on the other side. His solid, powerful frame filled the doorway. His hair was an attractive steel gray now, but the twinkling steel-blue eyes and patrician nose both belonged to the boy she remembered.

She would have known him anywhere. “Hello, Edwin.”

He smiled. “Sadie, you haven’t changed a bit. Please come in.”

As Sadie walked inside the house, she felt as if she were stepping back in time. The Marshall house had been built by Edwin’s grandparents and had stayed in the Marshall family all these years. She’d often visited here as a young girl whenever her grandfather, Jacob Wright, had come to play a game of chess with Edwin’s grandfather, James Marshall. The two men had been good friends for more than sixty years.

“This brings back memories,” she said, looking around the front hall. Nothing had changed, not even the furniture or the artwork on the walls. If she closed her eyes, she could almost hear her grandfather cheerfully calling out “checkmate” in the next room.

“It’s wonderful, isn’t it?” Edwin said. “I spent so many happy times in this

house. I couldn't think of a better place to enjoy my retirement."

Sadie met his gaze. "So you really are back for good?"

"I am," he replied. "My wife passed away two years ago, so there was nothing to keep me in Chicago. I was ready for small-town life again."

"Small-town life is all I've ever known," Sadie said with a wistful smile. "I'm sorry about your wife. I lost my husband, T.R., a few years back."

"I know," he said softly. "I've had a subscription to the Silver Peak Sentinel ever since I left here, so I've kept up with the joys and sorrows of all my old friends. You have a daughter, don't you?"

"Yes," she said, touched that he'd kept track of her. "Alice recently moved here from Denver with my two teenage grandchildren, Theo and Sara. It's nice to have them so close by."

"That's wonderful. My daughter, Noelle, lives in Atlanta, Georgia, with her husband, Carl, and my five-year-old grandson, Sam. I visit as often as I can."

"Grandchildren are a blessing, aren't they?"

His eyes shone with pride. "They sure are."

Sadie couldn't take the suspense any longer. "So what did you want to show me?"

He chuckled. "You always did like to get right to the point." Then he motioned her toward the stairs. "It's in the attic. I hope you don't mind a bit of a climb."

"Not at all," she said cheerfully, following him up the stairs. "If I did mind, I wouldn't be living in Silver Peak."

When they reached the attic, Sarah saw several old trunks and assorted boxes scattered across the crowded space.

"I've been sorting through some of my grandparents' and parents' things," Edwin said, leading her toward an open trunk, "but it occurred to me that I might want to bring in an antiques expert before I start handling a few of these items." Then he pointed inside the trunk. "Especially something like that."

Sadie moved closer and saw an old dress box with the lid partially dislodged. Curious, she lifted the box out of the trunk and removed the lid.

"Oh, Edwin," she breathed, "this is lovely."

Inside the box was a gorgeous Victorian wedding gown with the delicate lace sleeves neatly folded across the silk-and-lace bodice.

"The fabric looks pretty fragile," Edwin said, "so I didn't want to do anything that might damage it."

"It's in excellent condition for its age," Sadie told him, admiring the detailed hand-stitching along the neckline. She lifted one sleeve for a closer look at the lacework, then she noticed something else on the dress.

There was a small hole in the center of the bodice. Ash-gray smudges surrounded the hole, along with some small, rust-like streaks. "Well, this is interesting."

"What is it?" he asked.

"I think it might be—" Sadie leaned closer to the hole. "It looks like a bullet hole." She sniffed the gray smudges and recognized the unique odor right away. "This gray stuff is gunpowder."

"You're sure?" His wiry brows lifted.

"Pretty sure." She saw him glance at the trunk before turning back to her. "Where did this dress come from?"

"I don't know," he said slowly. "It was in the trunk and, as far as I know, this trunk has been in the attic since before my father was born."

"What else was in the trunk?"

He hesitated. "There were some old photographs of people I don't know. And a packet of old letters with only initials used instead of names."

"How strange," she said, staring at the wedding dress.

Then he pointed to the rust stains around the bullet hole. "Is that blood?"

Sadie shrugged. "I'm not sure. You'd have to get it tested to know for sure. Rust stains are common on vintage fabrics and they're almost impossible to differentiate from old bloodstains just by the naked eye."

When he didn't say anything in response, Sadie looked up at him. "Is anything wrong, Edwin?"

"To be honest with you, Sadie, there is another reason I asked you to come here."

Something in his tone made her skin prickle. "What reason is that?"

"There was something else inside the trunk with the wedding gown," he said, his deep voice almost gentle now. "Something I removed before I brought you up here."

Sadie stared at him, not sure what to expect. "What was it?"

"A gun," he said, then he looked at her for a long moment. "And your grandfather's name is engraved on the handle."

