

# THE LITTLE WHITE SACK



MISTY MALONE



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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only. Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's advocating any non-consensual sexual activity.

## CHAPTER 1



Kansas, 1891

The sun was beating down on Garrett Knowing something fierce when he finally came upon the creek. It was only the end of April, but it felt more like mid to late August. He'd heard the babbling creek and headed toward the sound, hoping to find water for his canteen, and a place to get washed up. The sun was high in the sky and he'd been traveling since the sun came up enough to allow him and his horse, Thunder, to move safely. It was time to stop and cool off. He'd see if he could catch a fish or find a rabbit or some other tasty meal, get cleaned up and head on west.

As he dismounted and tied Thunder loosely in a thick copse of trees, he started thinking back to how he'd gotten here, on his way to Wyoming with the hopes of staking a claim. He had some money in his saddlebags, along with everything else he owned, which wasn't much. He'd been born on a farm outside of Boston. After his ma and brother died of influenza, his pa couldn't stand to stay in

the Boston area any longer, so he'd sold their house and moved west to Pennsylvania. Farming reminded his pa of the family they'd lost, so he moved them to a small town and got a job working in the bank. Garrett missed the farm, but understood his pa's reluctance to farm again without his wife and second son. Garrett finished school there and got a job working in the mercantile. It wasn't bad work, but he'd rather be on a farm.

When his pa was shot and killed in a bank robbery, Garrett had no desire to stay in the area. He sold the house they'd lived in and was heading west to stake a claim and go back to farming. He knew his timing was bad to start a farm, but he didn't really see that he had much choice. The robbers hadn't consulted with him as to when would be a convenient time to kill his father.

The best time for him to start a farm would have been several months ago. It took time to go to the land office and see what land was available, then go look at it and pick out the one best for farming. Then he'd have to go back to the land office and do the paperwork to stake the claim. Once it was approved, he'd have to build some kind of structure to live in, as well as a barn for the animals he'd need to work the land. Then once he had the animals, he'd have to get the equipment.

Then came the hard part: tilling the land. That was a hard job, clearing the land of trees, moving all the rocks and large stones off, then turning over soil that probably had never been plowed before. Finally he'd be ready to plant his first crop, so he could nurture it along and hopefully it would give him enough to feed his animals over the winter. He'd also need to plant a garden so he could have something to sustain himself, as well. Hunting for game could provide all the meat he'd need, but meat alone was not a healthy diet.

Starting a farm was a lot of work, and it would have been nice to have had a chance to have the land and build the barn at least before it was time to plant. He planned to live in a little portion of the barn until after harvest, when he would have more time to

build a separate house, but building a barn for the animals was a priority. He had money to buy good animals, but finding some for sale could take some time; time he didn't have. Planting the fields would be a real challenge, as seeds should be going in the ground soon.

He had a feeling he'd be lucky to get some ground in his name, a barn built, and some good horses or oxen purchased by this fall, along with a good plow. He'd just have to rely on the money he had saved from his job and selling his dad's house to buy food for himself and the animals over winter. He'd do some trapping this winter, as well, and hopefully have some furs to sell come spring, but not being familiar with this area, he wasn't sure he could count on much from that. Then next spring he would try to get an early start, and get the ground plowed and crops in the ground for next summer. He'd just have to hope to get enough the first year to feed his animals. He wasn't sure he had enough money to buy food for himself and the animals for two winters without any money coming in.

If his first year's crop wasn't enough to sustain them and trapping didn't provide enough to buy the hay and grain he'd need, he'd have to decide what to do. He might have to try to find a job in town for a while. For that reason he was hoping to find land not too far from a town.

His mind was still wandering about what could possibly lay ahead in his future as he lifted his saddlebags from Thunder's back and started rummaging through them for clean clothes. Finding what he needed, he turned toward the creek when he caught some movement in the corner of his eye. He stopped to see what it was. It could be the landowner, and he didn't want any trouble. He would go forward and make himself known. He would ask permission to wash up in the creek, and maybe catch a fish before moving on. Owners usually didn't care, but appreciated him telling them he was there, so they could keep an eye on him and make sure he did in fact move on. He didn't blame them; he would do the same thing.

The movement he saw turned out to be two riders, and they were coming closer to him. He was about to walk out of the group of trees and wave them down to talk to them, when he saw something that made him pause. They slowed down, apparently talking, but kept looking all around, especially behind them, like they were watching for someone. He didn't know why they would be doing that. If they lived close by and farmed this land, why would they be scanning the area like that? He decided to stay where he was and wait a few more minutes before drawing their attention.

With that thought, he slowly moved further back into the trees and ducked down lower, watching. They stopped their horses, talked a little more, and got off their animals, looking all around. One man pointed to the creek, then a large tree growing close to the creek with some big limbs hanging out over the water. The other man nodded, and they led their horses over toward the rather odd-looking tree. He continued to watch as they untied a couple of small shovels from their horses and began to dig a hole over near the tree. One of the men went to his horse and came back with a sack. They each took something out of the sack and put in their pocket, then put the sack in the hole and covered it up.

Garrett wondered who the men were, what they were apparently trying to hide, and why. After they replaced all the dirt and packed it down, one of the men went to the tree, turned and walked to whatever it was they'd just buried. The other man did the same before they got back on their horses and rode off, fast. Garrett stayed where he was, not moving an inch and hoping Thunder stayed still and quiet, still hidden in the trees, until he saw them ride off over a hill. They kept looking around the entire time.

Garrett sat there a few minutes, trying to make sense of what he'd just seen. The two men had obviously buried something, and it looked to him as though they counted off the steps from the tree to where they'd buried it, so they could find it at a later date. That could be why they pointed to the creek and the odd-looking tree. It would be easy to find again at a later time. The way they kept

watching around them made him believe whoever they were, they were up to no good.

He thought maybe he'd better see what they'd buried, but he didn't want to be digging it up when they returned. With that in mind, he got back on Thunder and went to the area to do a little looking. He easily found their tracks and followed them over the hill. The tracks went on, and he could tell by the spacing of the tracks they were running the horses, so he doubted they would be back soon. It looked to him as though they were running from someone.

Knowing that, he felt safe to return and dig up the sack. He gasped when he opened it, and he stared at it a few moments. The sack was full of money, both paper money and coins. There was also some jewelry in it. Garrett didn't know a lot about jewelry, but this looked like it was nice. He kept the bag, but put the dirt back and tamped it down so it looked like it had when the men left.

Now he had to decide what to do with the bag. First things first, so he went back to his original plan. He needed to cool off a little, and to wash up. Getting his clean clothes, soap and a towel he'd retrieved from his saddlebags already, he went to the creek and took a bath. By the time he was dressed he'd come up with a plan.

There was a house over to the west, and he assumed it was more than likely the landowner. He would talk to him. If he seemed like a decent man he would tell him what he'd found and ask about the local sheriff. If he felt the sheriff was trustworthy, they could take the sack to him. He suspected the men had robbed a bank or stage-coach or something, and were hiding the evidence. The sheriff would probably know if there had been a recent robbery in the area, and the things could be returned. The landowner needed to be aware of it, though, in case the men came back to claim their prize and it was missing.

He watched the house as he dressed, but didn't see any activity. All he'd eaten today was a little hardtack, so he went back to the creek where he'd seen several fish, and it didn't take long to catch

one. He made a fire and cleaned his dinner. After he ate and washed up his skillet, he checked again to be sure the fire was out, and headed over to the house, hoping the man was close by so he could talk to him and do something about the sack of items now in his saddlebag.

Not wanting to scare anyone in the house, he approached slowly and as soon as he felt he was close enough for them to hear him he yelled, "Hail the house." He stayed back, not wanting to appear threatening, and waited for someone. He watched both the house and the barn, for someone to approach. He yelled it again, and after waiting and watching both the house and the barn, he saw some movement inside the house.

Thinking maybe the man had gone to town for supplies, or was possibly out in a field and not able to see or hear him, he turned toward the house and put his arms out to his sides. "I mean no harm, but I'd really like to talk to you. There's something I think you need to know for your safety. I just need to talk to one of you."

He waited patiently and finally the front door opened a crack and the barrel of a rifle was pointed toward him. "Stay on your horse and keep your hands where I can see them," a female voice demanded. "What do we need to know?"

"Ma'am, is your husband around?"

"Whatever you have to say you can say to me."

"Yes, ma'am, I will, but if he's around I'd like to explain it to both of you at the same time."

"He's not here right now. Say what you have to say and be moving on."

This lady was acting strange, and Garrett wasn't quite sure what to do. Sure, ladies out on the frontier needed to be careful, but she seemed to be overly cautious, and he wondered why. Was she ill, or did she need some kind of help? For now, he needed to try to earn her trust and find out. "Yes, ma'am, I will, but I hate to yell it. It's not something anyone else needs to hear. Would you mind if I move a little closer so we can talk easier?"



He didn't get a response, but several seconds later he heard another female voice. There must be two of them, and they were obviously discussing his request. He kept his arms out where the ladies could see them and waited. Eventually he heard, "Lucy, we need to hear him out." The front door opened a bit further and a rather small lady stepped out. She was holding a rifle aimed at him, and another lady about the same size was close behind her. The front lady did the speaking. "Go ahead and come to the house. You can get down and tie your horse up, but keep your hands where we can see them."

"Yes, ma'am. I really do mean no harm." He rode Thunder closer to the house and slowly slid down. He tied him to the hitching post and slowly turned toward the ladies. "First off, my name is Garrett Knowling. I'm heading further west to stake a claim, but I stopped back a ways by the creek to get some water, and while I was there I saw two men that I believe were up to no good, and I wanted to warn you and your husband, or husbands so they can watch out for them."

"Why do you think they were up to no good?" the lead lady asked.

Garrett paused a few moments, not sure how much to say. If these ladies needed any kind of help he wanted to provide it, but he wasn't sure what they would do if he showed them the bag with a good amount of money and jewelry. He had to proceed cautiously. "Is your husband around the barn or in a field? I'll be happy to get him so we can all discuss it together. We have to decide what to do. I'll do anything I can to help."

The two ladies looked at each other, murmured something softly, and then seemed to reach a decision. The lady standing a step behind the other stepped forward. "Mr. Knowling, you seem to be sincere, so we're going to trust you."

"Thank you. You can trust me, I want to help you, not hurt you. Do you need help?"

The two ladies looked at each other again and the one still

holding her rifle nodded her head. The other one agreed. "Yes, actually, we do."

"I'm sorry to hear that, but I'll do whatever I can. What do you need help with?"

"My name is Lucinda Fletcher, or Lucy, and this is my sister, Eloise McLaren, or Lois," the lady holding the gun said. "We're from Philadelphia. My husband and I decided to come out here to stake a claim. We were ready to leave when our Pa died. Mama and Lois didn't have any way to support themselves, so we brought them out here with us."

Lucy had tears in her eyes, and when she paused, her sister came to her, put her hand on her arm, and finished telling their story. "Mama got sick, and she's been in bed the last three weeks. Lucy's husband, Clyde, died three days ago. Mama's getting worse, and we don't know what to do. Clyde told us never to go into town alone, but I think I have to go into Cedar Ridge and see if Dr. Wiley will come look at Mama. We don't have any money to pay him, though, so we're hoping he'll take a little food in trade, though we don't have a lot extra to offer."

"Clyde's right, you shouldn't go into town yourself. It's not safe for a lady to be traveling alone out here."

"But Mama needs a doctor," Lucy insisted.

"I'll go get the doctor," Garrett said.

"You'll have to tell him I don't have money, but I can make him some food. Maybe he would accept that," Lucy said.

"I'll pay him," Garrett said, which brought surprised looks to both ladies. "I meant it when I said I want to help you," he said simply. "Now, before I go, let me ask a couple of quick questions. Do you ladies know how to use that rifle and have ammunition for it?"

"We do." Lois looked a little uneasy, but Lucy looked confident, so he accepted her answer.

"Good. I'll explain it when I get back, but if two men you don't

know come to the house, one with dark hair, one with light and both wearing dark colored vests, don't let them in."

"Okay," both ladies said, looking at each other and looking concerned.

"Miss Lucy, does your husband need to be buried?"

"No, we did that. It took all day, but we wanted him to have a proper burial."

"Good. I wanted that, too, and was going to take care of it for you. Now, one last question. Cedar Ridge is the town I just passed through not long ago. That's where Dr. Wiley is?"

"Yes," Lucy said.

"Do you know anything about the sheriff in Cedar Ridge? Can he be trusted, is he honest?"

"As far as I know he's a good man," Lucy said. "Clyde said he always heard good things about him in town."

"Good. Remember what I said, and I'll be back as soon as I can." Without another word he jumped on Thunder, turned him around and headed off toward Cedar Ridge, urging his horse on. Once on the road his mind turned momentarily to the two ladies. Both of them were small ladies, just a couple of inches over five feet tall, at the most. They were obviously sisters. Both had light brown hair that was twisted into some type of knot on top of their head. They both had brown eyes, but that was where their similarities ended. Lucy was definitely the one in charge. She looked to be a few years older than Lois, but it was more than that. She had a certain confidence and strength about her that got his attention. Lois, on the other hand, seemed more laid back, willing to follow her sister's lead.

It wasn't too far to Cedar Ridge, and when he saw the sign for it he focused his mind back on his goal. He asked where the doctor's office was and found it quickly. He hurried in and explained his situation to the doctor, who fortunately had no patients at the time.

"I know where Clyde and Lucy live," he assured him. "I'll grab my buggy and get there as quickly as I can."

"Thanks, Doc. I've got to go talk to the sheriff, then I'll be out, too, and I'll pay you. Thanks." Without another word he hurried back outside, found the sheriff's office and took off toward it. He went in and saw who he assumed were the sheriff and a deputy.

The two men stood, instantly on alert, eyes on Garrett, who addressed the one wearing the badge identifying him as the sheriff. "Sheriff, I'm Garrett Knowling. I just came from Clyde and Lucy Fletcher's house, and they need some help out there."

"What kind of help? What's going on?"

"It's rather involved. I'll be happy to explain it to you, but three ladies are alone out there, one of them's sick, and there may be trouble heading their way. I'm going back out to do what I can to help, but I'd sure appreciate your assistance."

"How long will I be gone, and do you need more men, or just me?"

"I think just you, for now at least, but it might take a while."

"George, I'll go out there and see what's going on. You stay here. If you need me, come get me."

"Yes, sir, sheriff. If you need me, send someone in."

"Will do."

"I'm Sheriff Jake Harper," he told Garrett as they hurried outside and mounted their horses. "What's going on out at Clyde and Lucy's?"

Garrett explained that Clyde had died, leaving the three ladies there alone, one sick. Then he quickly explained what he'd witnessed the two men doing earlier. "I have a feeling the items are stolen, and I'm afraid they'll come back to collect them. I don't like having three ladies there alone if they return."

"No, I don't, either," Sheriff Harper said as he spurred his horse on a little faster. Garrett did likewise and they wasted no time getting back. They passed Doc Wiley on their way, which Garrett was glad to see. At least they would have a doctor to help their mother.

They reached the cabin and both men rode up to the house,

dismounted and tied their horses. Lucy came to the door to meet them. "I'm glad you're back," she said. "Hello, Sheriff. Mr. Knowl- ing, did you find the doctor?"

"I did and he's on his way," he assured her. "We passed him not too far back."

"Oh, thank you. Come on in, both of you. No one came while you were gone, thank goodness. Can you tell us what we need to be aware of?"

"Yes, I'll explain it all to you and the sheriff, but first, how is your mother? Do you know what's wrong with her?"

"We don't," Lucy answered. "I don't believe it's the influenza, but she's been sick for going on three weeks now. She keeps getting weaker and weaker."

"Has Doc seen her?"

"No. Clyde wanted to get him, but Mama knew we didn't have any money to pay him and didn't want him to come out. We told her we could ask if he would take something in trade, but she said no. She and Papa have always been very proud, and they would never call for a doctor if they didn't have the money."

"It's okay to have pride, but sometimes you have to let others help you. Here comes the doctor. Do you want to see what he says about your mother, then we can talk?"

Lucy looked to the bedroom where her mother apparently was, and back to him, obviously torn. "Yes, maybe I better see what he has to say. But then I want to hear what you have to say." She went to the door to greet the doctor, and took him into her mother's bedroom. Lois followed them in, leaving Garrett and Sheriff Harper in the kitchen.

Once in the bedroom Lois helped the doctor, since she'd been sharing a room with her mother and knew more about how she'd been feeling. Lucy stayed back by the door, listening to what they were saying, but she couldn't keep her mind from going back over what was happening. When her father died, she'd felt abandoned and afraid. Mama was sick, and they had no money. She knew she

had to figure out something because her mama and sister were depending on her.

Then in rides this stranger. It was hard for her to trust people when she first met them, but for some reason she felt she could trust Mr. Garrett Knowling. Maybe it was because she felt almost desperate, but she didn't think so. He was tall, probably close to a foot taller than her, with dark hair. His eyes, though also dark, seemed open and inviting to her. The way he held himself, and held his hands out to show he meant no harm made her feel safe, like he was truly willing to help. The fact he went to get the doctor and said he would pay him seemed to bolster her feeling that she could trust him, but a part of her was still leery. She was very vulnerable, so she had to be careful.