

## CHAPTER 1



Lucy Wilson casually strolled down the wooden sidewalk of town toward the blacksmith's shop. Earlier, Mrs. Swan, the proprietor of the shop at which Lucy worked, asked Lucy to pick up a set of crafted candlesticks from Joe, the town smithy. Lucy looked forward to the errand as Joe was a close friend of the Wilson family and much like a grandfather to her.

Lucy was grateful for the break from pinning and hemming a voluminous dress skirt and was letting the warm fingers of sunshine pull all her cares away from her. She wished she could take a longer break to enjoy a little catnap in the warmth, but felt grateful for the reminder that spring was not far away. The new season was waiting to make a grand appearance, and Lucy knew that the beautiful March day was not an official beginning of the season. It was entirely too early to get very hopeful. Still, Lucy knew the worst of winter now lay behind her. She looked forward to the promise of easier days for gardening and picnics and maybe even parties or weddings.

Lucy put her hand to the door lever at the smithy shop, and a happy little bell rang as she entered. She called out as she

entered, "Mr. Joe, it's Lucy Wilson. Mrs. Swan sent me to pick up those pretty burnished candlesticks you made for her wedding anniversary."

Lucy looked around the shop, but the old smithy was nowhere in sight.

"Mr. Joe?" Lucy questioned into the seemingly empty room, walking behind the counter and back to the shop where the old man worked. "Mr. Joe, are you here?"

As she stood to listen for a reply, a quiet whimper reached her ear. She looked toward the sound and saw Joe down on the floor, his hand still on his worktable, a heavy iron wheel settled on top of his fingers.

"Mr. Joe!" Lucy cried as she hastened toward the old man. Joe looked at her, his face awash with pain and relief as Lucy tried to free Joe by lifting the wheel and moving it aside.

"Please, help me!" the old man whimpered.

One end of the wheel was wedged underneath the end of Joe's heavy anvil, and Lucy realized she was going to need help to pull and then lift the heavy metal away from Joe without making his injuries worse.

"Hold on, Joe! I'm going for help and will be right back!" she yelled over her shoulder as she ran through the shop's back entrance.

"Hurry—this hurts!" Joe said.

Lucy knew the traveling doctor who cared for the town was at least a week away with his route. The first person Lucy could think of to help her worked at the local saloon and brothel, which was across the backyard of Joe's shop. Lucy sprinted the distance, flew up the back stairs, and flung the door open wide.

Sadie Roberts was drying freshly washed glasses behind the bar as Lucy made her appearance.

"Miss Wilson, strange seeing you here," Sadie said, one eyebrow raised.

“Joe’s hurt! Please help!” Lucy said as she struggled to catch her breath.

Sadie instantly set into motion as she grabbed a small carpet-bag, a bottle of whiskey, and some clean bar towels.

“Boil water as soon as we get inside,” she directed Lucy. “I will tell you what needs to happen as soon as I get apprised of the situation.” Lucy nodded as they ran.

Lucy stepped into the shop first, and immediately began pumping water from the hand pump, as Sadie brought up the rear and rushed to Joe’s side. Joe looked up and suddenly found the wherewithal to become surly.

“No, ma’am!” he yapped. “No painted lady is a gonna be doctorin’ me!”

“Hush, Joe,” Sadie replied. “You don’t even know what a saloon girl is about.” Sadie regarded him with her large brown eyes. “I just sit with the fellas and talk all nice to them.”

Her voice was reassuring, soothing. Sadie slowly inched forward as she continued, “My job is to make the customers feel at ease, feel cared for, important, you know? I don’t do what they call ‘private performances’, Joe. I set the tone for whatever diversion, comfort, or frolic they need—be it drink, cards, a dance, or an audience with the girls who have other skills.” By the time Sadie finished speaking, she was next to Joe, her hand set lightly on his shoulder.

Joe sighed heavily, and resigned himself to her aid as Sadie evaluated the situation, and Lucy appeared with a heated kettle.

“Lucy,” Sadie commanded, “you’re gonna have to help me get this wheel up and off his hand. It’s heavy, girl, and we need to be careful not to drag it, else we hurt him worse.” Sadie and Lucy situated themselves on opposite sides where they each grabbed two spokes.

“This is gonna hurt,” Sadie said as she looked at Joe; then, both women lifted when Sadie counted three. Joe let out a muffled cry once the wheel was lifted free, and carefully pulled

his hand to the edge of the worktable. It hurt too much to bring it all the way down to his lap.

"It hurts like the Devil!" he cried.

"Buck up, partner. It's about to get both better and worse," Sadie said as she handed him the whiskey bottle. "Drink up, Joe. Drink as much as you think you're gonna need for what's next."

"What the hell is next, girl?" Joe asked as he gave her a level look, took the bottle, and belted back several large swigs. Sadie wrapped his bleeding hand into a clean bar towel, and she and Lucy helped him up and moved him over to his little cot in his humble living quarters.

Bringing a kitchen chair to the bedside, Lucy watched as Sadie used the space to create a little table for her work. Sadie opened her small carpetbag and Lucy fetched another chair for Sadie's supplies when she saw the instruments, herbs, and tinctures in the bag. As Sadie emptied out the supplies and selected what she needed, she handed metal instruments to Lucy, instructing her to pour the hot water over them. Lucy noticed she carefully hid a kitchen cleaver from Joe's sight as she handed it to Lucy.

"Now, Joe, the middle finger of your hand is crushed, not broken," said Sadie. "It won't heal right and is gonna have to come off else gangrene will set in. Are you with me?"

Joe swooned and reached his good hand over for the whiskey, taking a large chug. Sadie gazed reassuringly as the old man took several deep swallows. Once the whiskey had burned its way down to his belly and he felt warm and calm, Joe lay back onto his cot and closed his eyes, now happily drunk.

"Do your worst to make it better," he sighed.

A moment later, the cleaver made a clean cut. Joe howled and then sobbed quietly while Sadie poured whiskey over the wound and mixed up a paste of whole wheat flour with the water left from Lucy's kettle.

"It'll stop the bleeding," Sadie said in answer to Lucy's

imploing look. "Go ahead and get a cup. I'll make some tea to help ease his pain for now. You need to ride herd on his discomfort. Are you feeling all right about it, Lucy?"

"Of course," said Lucy as she moved over to the little shelf that held Joe's crockery.

Sadie made a tea and told Lucy it had Saint John's Wort and Gypsy Root in it. She also made a poultice of Yarrow and bound it inside the bandage she made from strips of unbleached muslin. Then, she pulled out a buckskin bag the size of Lucy's hand, dug out a piece of white bark and handed it to Lucy.

"It's Willow bark. Have him chew pieces of it when the pain is getting to him, and he can have more whiskey. I'll bring another bottle over tomorrow."

Both women turned to regard Joe as he slept, breathing a little shallowly at first, but then drifting off into deeper breathing and a healing rest. Lucy and Sadie looked at each other, sighed, and moved away. Lucy followed Sadie to the back-door of Joe's shop. Sadie stepped outside and assessed Lucy as she stood before her.

"You are so calm," Sadie observed. "You handled yourself well. I'm amazed."

"Yes," said Lucy, a little surprised now that Sadie had pointed it out.

"You're a natural. You have a sense of things. With a little bit of training, I think you just might be the one to keep such emergencies from becoming tragic, know what I mean?"

"You mean I could do what you just did? Really, I'm not that brave or clever. I know I couldn't possibly." Lucy blushed and stammered.

"You'd do better," Sadie replied. "You should have seen me after the first time I helped with an accident like this one. I collapsed into a blubbering heap once the injured man was asleep. I'm telling you that you have a gift. Use your talents,

Lucy; I beg you.” Sadie looked at Lucy in earnest. “Just think on it,” Sadie said.

And with that, Sadie headed to the saloon. Lucy watched the curvy, sable-haired woman as she crossed the yard. Sadie’s observation both intrigued and terrified Lucy. “*Is it possible I could help others like she does?*” Lucy wondered for a time, but then she remembered Joe was resting. She went back inside to ensure her “patient” rested and healed well.

Lucy recalled the afternoon’s events and was contemplating what Sadie had observed when she heard the bell at the front door of Joe’s shop jingle.

“Miss Wilson, are you still here? Mrs. Swan sent me to see if you are okay.”

Lucy recognized the voice as the town barber’s 11-year-old son, Raymond Evans. Lucy got up from the chair at Joe’s bedside and walked into the front area of the smithy’s shop. She saw the lines in the wide-eyed child’s face fade away when he saw her.

“I’m okay, Raymond. I found Mr. Joe injured when I came here to pick up Mrs. Swan’s candlesticks. If you would be so kind, please go tell Mrs. Swan what happened and that I am sorry for not returning to work. I promise to buy you a peppermint stick for your trouble.”

Raymond’s face lit up at the prospect of getting candy. “You bet, Miss Lucy. I’ll let her know right away!” He turned immediately and ran to the front of the shop.

Lucy smiled as she watched him struggle as he pulled the door open to leave and then dart past the front window. She marveled at the interesting developments of what started out as a mundane day.