

# CATCHING CARRIE



PIPPA GREATHOUSE

BLUSHING BOOKS

©2017 by Blushing Books® and Pippa Greathouse  
All rights reserved.

No part of the book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Published by Blushing Books®,  
a subsidiary of  
ABCD Graphics and Design  
977 Seminole Trail #233  
Charlottesville, VA 22901  
The trademark Blushing Books®  
is registered in the US Patent and Trademark Office.

Pippa Greathouse  
Catching Carrie

EBook ISBN: 978-1-61258-437-9  
Print ISBN: 978-1-61258-471-3

Cover Art by ABCD Graphics & Design

This book is intended for adults only. Spanking and other sexual activities represented in this book are fantasies only, intended for adults. Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's advocating any non-consensual spanking activity or the spanking of minors.

## CHAPTER 1



### ARRIVAL

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 1885

Carrie Thompson muttered under her breath as the creaking stagecoach rattled the last few miles approaching the edge of the Methow Valley, nestled at the edge of the Cascade Mountains. She had been glued to this unyielding leather seat for weeks. It had long ago lost any cushioning it might have once had, and the mail sacks they had picked up in Spokane had made it almost impossible to find a place for her feet. The last passenger had gotten off there, as well, leaving Carrie alone with her thoughts. Her fears about what lay ahead for her were dark, her courage faltering.

Her frown deepened. She almost wished the mail sacks could carry on a conversation. Listening to them would be far preferable to being left alone with her own apprehension.

Orphaned at age fifteen, the Spencers on the adjoining property

had eagerly taken her in. They'd allowed her to come with only her clothes and her sewing machine. She'd also brought one other thing but had hidden it in her trunks, away from view— the gold mantle clock with the curved glass face that had belonged to her parents.

The Spencers brought her into their home but never into their hearts. They'd given her the dormer room in the attic, with two small windows, hot in summer, and cold in winter. It had one redeeming feature, however. It was private.

Her brow knit as she thought of the family she had lived with for the past few years. They had suggested, more than once, that she deed her family's land over to them during her three years there, stressing that, as a single young woman, she would never be able to run a farm herself. They had also added, for emphasis, "Since we were kind enough to take you in." But her parents had made her promise to never give up the land, and she had ultimately refused to part with it. That strained the relationship even more. It was almost no surprise when, as her nineteenth birthday had neared, they had strongly suggested that she either sign over the land or find herself a husband. She still remembered her shocked and betrayed feelings that day, as she'd gone back up to her attic room to sit on her bed. The feeling of security she'd had for the past few years had been no more than an illusion.

Still, it had completely surprised her when Mr. Spencer returned from town one day with a letter for her. Mr. Hank Joseph Barrow, a rancher from Washington territory was searching for a bride. Her trip west had begun there. Her nineteenth birthday had come and gone during her journey, and she tried to ignore the fact that she spent it alone, without anyone even knowing.

She reached into her bag and pulled out the last letter, in which she'd tucked the cabinet card Mr. Barrow sent with his likeness on it. It looked well made. She turned it over. The name *Crabtree and Sons* was printed across the length of the back in large, ornate gold text. She squinted at the address. Dodge City? Her home?

Carrie frowned and stared again at the front. He was a hand-

some man, with a disarming smile. His hair looked light and was pulled back. She squinted at it, once again examining him. It was his eyes that troubled her. They seemed cold.

The coach hit an uneven spot in its travel, and she gasped, as the likeness fell from her hand and slid down between the bags of mail. She leaned down to retrieve it, and another bump nearly caused her to fall over onto the mail bags. When, at last, she righted herself and was able to bring the cabinet card back up, she took one last glance and tucked it again into her bag.

No, perhaps, she was just being judgmental. Mr. Barrow wrote in a fine hand, even if his words were curt. The first letter had been very persuasive, but the successive ones were hard to characterize. She knew she had a tendency to read between the lines, possibly too much. Life with the Spencers had taught her that. But as she prepared for her trip, her fears grew. She had already bought the ticket with the money he had sent. But when his last letter got there, it had been so abrupt, it was chilling. She began to feel an ominous sensation about coming.

A shout from the driver alerted her that they were nearing the destination of Lesterville, and she took a deep breath. Leaning toward the window, she pulled the straps on the leather coverings open and looked out, idly wondering where her sewing machine was. It had been in the family since she was a young girl. But it was too large to carry in the boot, so it had gone separately, on the train to Pendleton. Mr. Barrow would need to go pick it up in a wagon, she supposed, when it arrived at the rail station fifteen miles away.

The valley was beautiful, with the mountains in the distance.

She had insisted on bringing it. Mr. Barrow had balked, at first. But he'd begrudgingly sent some funds for transporting the Singer, though they were far from enough. Had he deliberately short-changed her? The Spencers had chipped in a small amount, and Carrie had used the rest of what she'd earned from sewing to finish the shipping costs. But it left her woefully short.

"Oh, be quiet," she grouched, as her stomach rumbled its hunger

at her. Stage fare had not included meals and, at one dollar a meal, she had known she wouldn't have enough to get all the way there. Mr. Barrow had not sent anything for that. She had skipped a meal, sometimes two, almost daily, since the beginning of her journey. And then, yesterday, she had used the last of it to pay for a light breakfast of biscuits with butter and jam.

She was arriving at her destination completely without funds and slightly lightheaded from hunger. She hoped desperately that Mr. Barrow would meet her at the station. He'd promised to take care of her. She prayed he was a man of his word.

The coach began to slow, and Carrie leaned her head out the window to see what the town looked like. Two-story buildings lined the main street of the town, where pedestrians moved among the horses and wagons. Mothers and children walked along board-walk sidewalks and a stray golden dog slept behind a water trough. A new sign "Stagecoach Depot" hung below an older one that read "Telegraph Office" and one block down from that was the hotel. A moment later, the coach swung left in a wide arc and shuddered to a stop.

Carrie leaned forward and shook out her long curly hair, trying to remove some of the dust that had gathered. The door swung open, and the reins man put his head inside.

"We're here, Miss Thompson. Just a moment." Burley and strong, he began to pull the sacks of mail out, two at a time, so she would have room to stand. Five of them had to be moved out before she could rise to her feet and grab hold of his hand to step toward the door.

"Your trunks will go into the office, miss. Unless your party is here to meet you?"

She stepped down and scanned the street. No one there fit the description of Mr. Barrow. "Not yet. But he will be, surely."

"Anyone I know?"

She smiled. "Mr. Hank Barrow. Do you know him?"

Was it her imagination or had he just looked at her with pity in his eyes?

Her eyes stopped to rest on the window in the sheriff's office across the dusty street. A man was standing inside the window, the lowering western sun shining in on his face and light eyes. He was watching her. She averted her gaze suddenly.

She stood there until the driver dragged her trunk inside and moved back against the outside wall to wait, watching as he tipped his hat and climbed back up. She supposed he was taking the horses toward the hostlers to have them changed out.

Her expression uncertain, she once again turned to scan the street. Where was Mr. Barrow? The next time she glanced across the street, the man in the sheriff's office was still standing there, observing her. A spark of anger overtook her humiliation for a second. It was rude to stare and, now, more than ever before, she hated the sense of someone examining her, as if he was reading her embarrassment even from that distance.

Scowling, she stuck her tongue out at him and turned abruptly on her heel. She moved over toward the bench in front of the station and sat down, clutching her small bag in her lap. She sighed and prepared to wait.

And wait.



SHERIFF SAMUEL PETTIGREW stared down at the paper in his hand.

A man named Joseph Cannon had been in early that morning to ask about a young girl who had disappeared during a stop from his coach, south of the Methow Valley. He reported her name as Penelope Cannon, age eighteen, small, about five-foot-five-inches and weighing about one hundred pounds, with dark hair and last seen wearing a blue dress. There had been no sign of her since, and they suspected she had run away. The gentleman claiming to be her

father said she had been nothing but trouble since the day they left Salt Lake City.

Sam had studied him and the fine coach he had descended from. Mr. Cannon was well dressed. There were several young ladies sitting inside it with their heads turned away. He frowned.

Something about Cannon seemed familiar, but Sam was unable to put a name to it. He took the information down, and Mr. Cannon said he would return in a few days to see if anything had come up. Sam had watched him pull away with a driver who hadn't been there a minute before.

He'd spent the morning making inquiries, but the search had come up empty. No one had reported any signs of her. He set the paper down and was about to sit down in his chair, when he looked up. The regular stage had come in to the depot, and it looked as if the reins man had gone to the door to help someone out of it.

He shook his head. Probably just a sack of mail. But the bottom of a blue dress caught his eye under the coach, as the passenger stepped down onto the walk.

"Hurry up with that coffee," the prisoner demanded, from the back. He heard Drew Abbott, his deputy, reply, "It'll be ready in a minute, Tince. Patience."

"Lost that long ago. Need coffee. Need a cigarette. Need a woman. Like *that* one."

Sam turned, frowning. Tince Willis was staring from his cell, through the doorway, out through the window and across the street.

Sam reached out and immediately closed the door between the rooms. When he turned back to look out the window, he paused. He couldn't help himself. He was staring at the petite blonde young woman as she wandered out from behind the stage on the far side of the street. She looked lost and forlorn. Not many people travelled to the small town of Lesterville, and he couldn't remember the last time a beautiful young woman had stepped onto the sidewalks of his small town.



And she was indeed beautiful.

She looked, worried, up and down the street and paused, staring back at him. A frown creased her brow and she then turned away, walking back behind the coach once more.

The stage had come from the east. Many times, it carried mail for the Pony Express, and occasionally, a passenger or two.

He shook himself back to reality and reached for the paper he'd just had in his hand. No. This young lady didn't fit the description of the missing girl.

The stage moved on, and Sam looked at the girl again. Who was she? He stood, unable to take his eyes off her. Long golden hair curled down her back. The delicacy of her features was apparent, even at that distance, as was her tiny waist and hourglass figure. He cleared his throat as he continued to watch her, wondering where she came from. A moment later, she turned and looked straight at him. And glared. Then she stuck out her tongue.

He laughed. So beautiful and so defiant at the same time. Opening the door, he nodded to his deputy. "Drew? Take over for me?"

"Sure."

Sam took a step toward the door. "Thanks. We've a visitor. It looks like no one is there to meet her, and the hotel is full."



ALONE ON THE SIDEWALK, she sat on the small bench in front of the depot office with her back straight, her chin high, and hands sweating nervously inside her gloves. She clung to the small bag in her lap, closing her eyes and praying that she wouldn't have to be on public display for too long. Her stomach was still grousing at her, and she frowned.

"Hello, young lady. Waiting on someone?"

She jumped, opening her eyes wide. Hank? In the noise of the voices and carriages around her, she hadn't heard him approach.

But the tall, dark haired, hazel-eyed man who towered over her was not Hank.

He touched the brim of his Stetson briefly.

"Sheriff Sam Pettigrew." His deep melodious voice stirred something within her.

She studied him. She could see long locks that curled around his ears and showed under his hat. From where she sat, he looked about ten-feet-tall but the thing that caught her attention was the five-point badge in a circle, on his jacket. It said *Sheriff*.

But his smile was genuine, and his hazel eyes, with their bright gold rim just around the inside, were mesmerizing.

Carrie gulped and opened her mouth to speak. No sound came. His height and manner were disconcerting, to say the least. She swallowed and tried again. "I'm waiting for my intended, Mr. Hank Barrow."

His smile disappeared. He stared at her, almost severely, for a few seconds before speaking and looked up and down the street.

"He knew you were coming in today?"

She jutted out her chin. "Of course."

"Then he is dreadfully late. And so, young lady, are you."

Carrie blinked. "What do you mean?" She was suddenly aware of her rumpled blue dress and the untidiness of her hair.

"I mean, that the justice of the peace just left town, this morning, and is not expected back for well over two weeks. You don't appear the kind of young woman who would take up residence unchaperoned with a man while waiting for a wedding."

Carrie had no idea whether to laugh or cry. Her gaze lowered to the walkway in front of her. "But—" She sputtered, dismayed. Two more weeks? *Dear God*, what would she do?

Her deep indigo eyes rose to meet his. His head was tilted as he waited for her to continue. Finally, he sat down beside her, but his gaze still rested on her face.

"Nor do you look the kind of young lady who has any business being on her own."

Her eyes blazed suddenly. "And just what kind of lady do you think I am?"

"A child. You cannot be more than fifteen."

Her mouth flattened into a straight line. "You are quite wrong, Sheriff Pettigrew. I am nineteen, thank you very much."

"I'm at a distinct disadvantage. Your name is?"

Her stomach answered him with a growl, and she looked away, dismayed, before answering. A blush crept up her neck and into her cheeks. "Miss Thompson. Though it is no business of yours." Her gaze fell suddenly on his badge, and she paused. There was no point in angering the sheriff of Lesterville. "Miss Carrie Thompson."

His brow had softened a bit. "Well, Miss Thompson. This is a fact. You can't stay at the hotel. It's full."

She found herself staring at the building with the word "Hotel" displayed on the front and feeling helpless. She had no money, without Hank there to see to the arrangements. Her hands twisted nervously into fists, her gloves tight across the backs of her knuckles.

"Then, where in Heaven's name shall I stay?"

One of his strong, tanned hands reached out and rested on her shoulder, turning her to face him. With the other, he pointed toward the hill behind him.

"See that house up on the hill?"

Her breath hitched at his touch. "Yes."

"It's my house—no—" He paused as she bolted away from him, shaking off his hand. "Hear me out, young lady. And pull in your claws. I have a very nice couple—the Clancys—who keep it for me and live there. They would be happy to chaperone you. The upper floor has several bedrooms and a bath, which are all empty at present. You are welcome to use one of them." He stared down at her and, with two fingers, lifted her chin. "Miss Thompson, are you listening to me? I'm not accustomed to talking to myself. Pay attention."

Her gaze moved to his face, and she slid backward along the bench, away from him.

"And I'm not accustomed to people being condescending to me. I make my own decisions."

His eyes narrowed. "Not in my town. And not when you are so young and have no one to look out for you."

Carrie's head came up, her temper flashing. "*Your town?*"

"You heard me."

Her eyes lowered to the scarf at his throat, then dropped to her gloved hands, and she blinked as he continued.

"Look, Miss Thompson. You can poke out your tongue at me in defiance to your heart's content. But the fact is, you're hungry—I can hear your stomach growling. You have no place to stay, and Mr. Barrow is not here to meet you." He stared down at her. But his voice was firm, as he went on, "I am not giving you a choice, Miss Thompson. I'll send Drew out to your *intended's* place to see if he is there and, if he is, he will bring him. But you won't be allowed to leave with him. I'll give you a few minutes to speak, but that's all. Then I'll escort you up to the house and introduce you to the Clancys."

"Who is Drew?"

"My chief deputy. You'll meet him." His eyes narrowed. "Meanwhile, when did you last eat? Your stomach seems to be telling you it's quite hungry."

His question took her by surprise. Should she tell him? No, she wouldn't. "This morning—I suppose," she lied.

"You suppose?" He held out his arm and waited for her to take it. She didn't. "You don't sound very convincing. Come with me. I'll see that you get a good meal, at least."

"But—what if Mr. Barrow comes?"

"Then my deputy will watch for him and call him over. You really are a bit recalcitrant, aren't you?"

Carrie scowled. "I am not."

"Prove it." Once again, he held out his arm. She stared at it

before glancing up uncertainly and finally taking it. As she stood beside him, she became aware for the first time of the difference in their heights. She barely reached his shoulder.

He led her down the steps from the raised sidewalk to the dusty road, where he dropped her hand and urged her forward, with his hand at the small of her back. At his stronger touch, Carrie balked and halted abruptly, in the middle of the street.

"A wagon pulled by two mules pushed past them, forcing Sam to move her backward. His expression changed as he leaned down into her ear. "Stopping in the middle of a busy Lesterville street will get you trampled by horses, young lady. You have two seconds. You can walk on your own two feet or I can carry you over my shoulder. Or perhaps I should arrest you for loitering?"

The breath whooshed out of her. She flattened her mouth into a straight line that turned down at the corners but let him guide her the rest of the way across the street.

"Pout all you want," he said, his frown deepening. "But we are going to get some food into you. You can't wait outside the stage office all night with your stomach growling."

Carrie glared at the walkway as they approached it. She could be just as determined as he was, but at the moment, her stubbornness was overwhelmed by the need to eat.

He helped her up the step and led her to the front door of the sheriff's office. He opened it, sending her inside, where a tall man with brown eyes sat at the desk. He was looking back over his shoulder into the room behind him, where the prisoners were staring at her. Sheriff Pettigrew moved her past the doorway and closed the door.

"Miss Thompson, may I introduce Drew Abbott, one of the deputies here. Drew, keep watch for Hank Barrow. I'm taking Miss Thompson over to Rosie's for something to eat. If he shows, keep him here until we get back. All right?"

"Will do, Sam. Want me to put him in a cell if he refuses?"

The sheriff glanced down at Carrie, whose expression was

incredulous. "No. Just tell him I have her with me. We'll be back in a few moments." He opened the door, and Carrie exited in front of him. Had the deputy been serious? Drew's sarcastic offer to put Mr. Barrow in a cell sounded like it. She pondered it for a moment before asking, "Would I be correct in guessing that neither you nor Mr. Abbot have a very high opinion of Mr. Barrow?"

He paused, studying her. "You are quite astute, to be such a brat."

She scowled. "I assume you think that's funny."

Sheriff Pettigrew didn't respond. He took her down a block and around the corner, to a small wooden building sporting a sign confirming that it was Rosie's. White organdy curtains framed the inside of the window, and the window box below it outside was still filled with late summer flowers. Opening the door, he sent her inside.