

# Grading Garnet

*The Red Petticoat Saloon*

By

Carolyn Faulkner

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## Chapter One

She'd finally arrived.

Dropping her valise on the floor just inside the closed door, Gloria Owens drew a deep breath, ignoring the pungent smells of horse manure, sawdust and dirt that wafted through the dingy gray lace curtains surrounding the open window of her second floor room. With what she considered rather exorbitant rates, it was the only one she could afford. Despite the fact that the room was just a tad bit bigger than her closet back home, she threw herself down on the tiny, creaky bed on her back in a rare moment of pure joy.

She'd done it. Not only had she earned her teaching certificate despite the obstacles—mostly male and set on matrimony—that her father constantly saw fit to strew in her path, but she'd made it all the way here to the wilds of Culpepper Cove—*California*—from the civilization of the most well appointed drawing rooms on the Eastern seaboard. And, she was still in one piece, very little the worse for the wear, overall, considering how arduous the journey had been. If she had the money to spare, which she didn't, she would have sent her doubting Thomas father and over-eager, erstwhile gentleman caller, Theodore Giles, each a telegram just to brag that she'd done what they'd said she was too spoiled and pampered to ever accomplish.

Eventually, Gloria sat up, surveying her meager surroundings with a jaundiced eye, realizing with a start as the garish, black and gold striped wallpaper drew her eyes up, that it was further distance up to the ceiling than it was to reach across to the nearest wall. Into this tiny room was packed an old, beat up wash stand, an even more ancient chest of drawers with a single, tallow candle atop it, and one meager straight backed chair serving no earthly purpose she could come up with, as it possessed a supposedly cane seat that was more hole than actual seat.

The entire depressing scene before her eyes brought memories of the expansive bedroom she'd—she could admit now—somewhat blithely left behind, with its big, canopied bed, floor length velvet curtains, and Aubusson carpet. While most females of her age and station would have had an enormous vanity piled high with lotions, potions and perfumes guaranteed to catch them a rich husband, she, instead, had a large writing desk. Much to her father's disgust, she'd spent many

a night when she should have been attending the many balls and fetes to which her invitations had rapidly been declining—reading, writing, and studying.

Despite her present rather spare surroundings, Gloria felt true happiness for the first time in a very long time, perhaps even since her mother had died when she was barely eleven. They had been very close, and unlike her father, her mother had been nothing but encouraging and supportive of the idea of her daughter getting as extensive an education as she could manage. Her mother had taught her herself and even went so far as to hire tutors in subjects at which she wasn't the strongest.

Although she was young at the time, Gloria had a strong feeling that her mother wasn't happy with her marital situation—not that she ever saw or heard anything uncomfortable between her parents. In fact, she thought her father was quite infatuated with her mother. But, she also knew that her mother's parents, who had been fabulously wealthy, were not in such a good financial situation when it came time for their only daughter to marry. As her mother had described it one evening when she had had a bit too much to drink and was kissing Gloria goodnight, she felt as if she had been sold to the highest bidder, who ended up being Gloria's father.

Thus she impressed on her daughter the idea that she should strive to be an independent woman, not necessarily wealthy, even, but happy and not dependent on a man to bring her that happiness. She encouraged her daughter to be able to take care of herself, without having to rely on a man to do so.

Having lost her mother early on, though, and with her father's tendency to compensate for that loss—not with emotional support, as would betray his staunch New England upbringing, but with things instead—Gloria grew up to be not only quite independent and outspoken, but also rather spoiled if she was truthful with herself. Although she hated to be because it confirmed her father's negative opinion of her, which formed rather quickly once she let him know when she came of age that she wasn't going to be corralled into marriage, by him or anyone else.

Despairing for his only child's future, Sterling Owens tried to put his foot down, especially when she stopped being even superficially polite to the eligible bachelors he tried to introduce her to. She'd developed a ball shriveling, withering stare with those deep blue eyes of hers that she must've inherited directly from her mother, that sent many a perfectly good potential suitor running for the door when they came to call.

Those who stayed did so out of pure desperation for the truly enormous amount of money he had set as her dowry, to say nothing of what she was sure to inherit as Sterling's only heir. Even then, few lasted longer than an hour in her company, for if the stare didn't work, she resorted to either blatantly ignoring them in favor of a book or boldly insulting them, using terms that would make a sailor blush—and sometimes both.

It didn't take long for interest in her to die on the vine, as she apparently intended, except in the case of Theodore, but then, not only did he not need her father's money, but they'd known each other since they were children. He was immune from anything she could throw at him, and was quite happy to pull his own book from his pocket when she did hers.

Still, she showed no interest in him and turned his embarrassingly frequent proposals down flat, even when he finally, boldly promised that, once she gave him a son, he'd leave her alone to do as she pleased, as his more prurient interests lay elsewhere.

Thus they formed a friendship that allowed her father to think was perhaps going to end in matrimony, so he never objected to them spending time together. In fact, he was quite happy at the idea, believing that eventually he would achieve his goal and have grandchildren from the two.

But even Theodore was against her plans to become a truly independent woman and use her teaching certificate as a way to get away from what she considered to be the stifling environment in which she'd been raised and was now living, like a caged bird.

"But you have no idea of the perils that await you!" Theodore argued. "Why do you have to go all the way to California? Couldn't you teach somewhere closer to home?"

Gloria had snorted indelicately at that idea. "And how do you think Father would react to the idea of his daughter taking a lowly position as a teacher right under his nose?" She flounced over to the sofa and dropped down next to where Theodore was sitting. "I don't really like my father, but I don't hate him, either. I don't want to hurt him, and that would definitely embarrass him. If I go far away, he can make something up that would be socially acceptable about me—that I eloped with an English lord and moved abroad or something—I don't really care. Besides, the idea of California appeals to me for some reason I can't explain."

Theodore looked down at her, his head resting on his hand. "Perhaps you'll meet your match out there. A cowboy or a gunslinger or a rich miner..."

"I don't want to meet my match, Teddy," she answered primly, but firmly. "I don't intend to get married. I just want to be left alone to teach."

Teddy reached out absently and adjusted the collar of her dress. He'd never met a woman who cared so little for appearances. "Why are you so against getting married? You're too young to resign yourself to spending your life alone."

"Why not? You have!"

He looked indignant. "I have not!"

"No, you're going to marry a woman and do what you told me you'd do with me—get an heir and then leave her alone to pursue your own... interests. That doesn't sound very loving to me."

His pout rivaled her own. "It's the best I can come up with, considering my unconventional tastes. But you—you could get married and be happy and have children if you'd just stop deliberately driving men away."

As the subject matter had gotten a bit too close for Gloria's comfort, she avoided Teddy's eyes, remarking self-deprecatingly, "Yes, I'm so gorgeous that European princes flock to the door, having heard of my devastating beauty. I'm well aware that my only point of attractiveness to the male of the species is in the healthiness of my father's bank accounts."

"Well, you might realize that it could be more—much more—than that, if you'd just make an attempt at looking nice instead of wearing those same three frocks over and over again and cramming your hair into that horrid bun at the back of your head. With a little rouge on your cheeks, color on your lips, a different hairstyle and a dress that was new before the thirties, I bet you'd be a knockout. They'd be falling at your feet."

Instead of being insulted by what he'd said, Gloria laughed heartily at that idea. She knew what she looked like. She was a plain Jane, and nothing was going to fix that, and it was fine with her. Her looks didn't matter. It was what was in her mind that counted towards being a good teacher, and that's what she'd concentrated on. She'd ignored Teddy's and her father's dire predictions of her fate and forged on to California on her own after reading an advertisement in the paper about the small, enticing sounding town of Culpepper Cove needing a new schoolmarm.

To her great surprise and delight, she'd applied for and been accepted as a teacher for the new school year, to be paid the generous amount of twelve dollars a month, with a small raise possible if she had performed up to standards, not all of which had anything to do with teaching. She would be expected to attend church services, to light and tend the fire in the stove when necessary, and, if she ever got married, she would be expected to quit.

Of all of the morality clauses listed, she knew that she would find that last one to be the easiest to conform to.

And now that she was here, she was realizing that she was as tired as if she'd pulled the wagon herself!

Donning a plain cotton nightgown, she crossed the room to douse the candle when something caught her attention out the window.

When booking a room at the recently built Grand Central Hotel—as she had arrived earlier than was expected because she'd been so eager to begin her new life, but also because she had wanted to take a day or so to get to know the town a bit before she was expected to teach in it—she hadn't realized its proximity to something called The Red Petticoat Saloon. The saloon did not look like a proper establishment from which a schoolmarm should live across. Nor had she noticed upon entering her hotel room that the window, although small, was more than close enough to a corresponding, larger one on an upper level of the saloon, such that she could see directly into it, as well as hear with distressing clarity, exactly what was transpiring between its two occupants.

Gloria squatted down immediately, not wanting to be seen peeping, but as she literally crawled towards her bed on her hands and knees, she couldn't keep her fingers in her ears to block out the voices that were saying things she very much wished she didn't want to hear.

“What do naughty little girls deserve when they forget an appointment I made with them three months ago?” she heard a deep, stern voice ask.

And it stopped her in her tracks—despite how much she didn't want it to, despite how hard she tried to ignore it, how virulently she tried to convince herself that she should not eavesdrop on a conversation that was so excruciatingly intimate—however intriguing she found the subject matter.

“No, please, sir! I'll be good. I won't forget next time. I'm so sorry you had to wait!”

“You may *think* that you're sorry now, lovely, but I can promise you you'll be much more so by the time I'm through roasting those beautiful cheeks of yours. Now come out of the corner. You know where I want you to be.”

Knowing she shouldn't, and cursing her weak will under her breath the entire time, she reluctantly changed the direction she was heading from the safety of her bed to the corner of the window. She just couldn't help it, so she peeped over the windowsill, just barely, her heart pounding, her body actually quivering at the uncontrollable feelings that were surging through her.



It was just enough to get a real eyeful of the situation she refused to admit to herself that she was secretly picturing herself in.

Across the alley from her was a very large, powerfully built man who was helping a very small, delicate, shockingly naked, and distinctly reluctant, woman to lie over his lap. Gloria shivered. She'd be reluctant, too, considering the sheer size of the man, and the fact that he appeared to have muscles on his muscles. She could see them straining at his shirt every time they flexed.

Still, he didn't yank her over or even really force her at all. When she did finally surrender and settle herself there, he actually patted her bottom familiarly.

"Good girl," he praised softly, as the very naughty area between Gloria's legs clenched and ached, which emboldened her to raise her head a bit above the sill so that she could get a better view of the proceedings as well as allowing her to hear what was being said between the two just that much better.

Using one of those big hands, she watched him arrange the young woman in what looked like a very gentle manner, tipping her a bit further forward than how she had landed over his lap originally. He was careful to hold her safe so that she didn't end up on her head, although she could also see that he still made sure that the tips of her toes were still in contact with the floor, while insuring that the pretty miscreant's ample, rounded bottom was lifted and presented as quite an enticing target.

"You know what to do," he scolded just a bit. "Give me your wrists, darlin' Peridot."

Gloria was surprised when the woman hesitated, holding her hands away from him instead. "Please, Se—sir, no! Please don't spank me. You know how much I hate it!"

Still, he didn't fly into a rage or even sound in the least angry at her vehement protests. Instead, he said almost regretfully, "Little girl, you know that the longer you delay obeying me, the worse it's going to be for you."

Gloria found herself mimicking the girl's deep inhale and then giving a rather exaggerated, resigned sigh as she exhaled. What sort of name was Peridot anyway? Tossing that inconsequential question aside, Gloria watched as Peridot did finally lay her own wrists across the small of her back, watching as the man's hand easily engulfed both of them at once to hold them there, saying encouragingly, "That's it. But I'm afraid I'm going to have to give you extra hard swats at the end, on top of what you were already due, honey."

That pronouncement prompted a loud, heartfelt wail of pure remorse from the young woman.

“Ten for taking so long to obey me about your hands, and twenty for fibbing.”

“What? When did I fib to you?” Gloria heard her ask, much more forcefully than Gloria would have in that vulnerable position, laid across the giant’s lap like that.

“You most certainly did, just a few seconds ago, when you said you hated being spanked. We both know how far from the truth that is.” His tone lowered considerably, although Gloria was still able to hear him threaten huskily, “And I shall make you lick the undeniable evidence of how your own body concurs with me from two of my fingers once I’ve finished thrashing your bottom, my naughty Dottie.”

Then he raised his huge hand and brought it down onto the poor girl’s bare behind in a move so lightning quick and forceful that the contact of a hard, male palm to a soft female cheek sounded horribly loud and painful. So much so that it startled Gloria into yelping just slightly after the girl did.

Just enough to call the big man’s attention, although not the girl’s, to the fact that someone was watching what they were doing.

And Gloria was so startled by what she’d done that, before she could duck down, she was mortified to find his eyes lock onto hers.

Then she watched a truly evil, terribly intimate smile spread over the handsome man’s face, as if he knew exactly what she was doing and why she was doing it.

He even had the audacity to reach up the very hand he’d just delivered the first swat with and make the motion of tipping a hat he wasn’t wearing to her, then, with an audacious wink, he returned to his task.

Gloria collapsed onto the floor, her muscles entirely unable to support her any longer through what she’d seen and then, humiliatingly, been discovered watching. And she’d been so shocked to have been caught that, at first, she couldn’t even get herself to move away from the window! She’d just sat there and watched him mock her!

What was worse was that, even now, in the midst of the purest mortification she’d ever experienced in her life, she could hear that the spanking was still in progress, only now it didn’t seem quite as titillating as it had before. So she forced herself to sit up, making sure that no part of her was showing above the window sill as she did so, and reach for the sash.

Unfortunately for her, whoever had built this hotel, didn't manage to get the windows quite square. It took an inordinate amount of time, as well as all her strength, such that she ended up having to hang her whole weight off the sash, exposing herself to him again with her efforts to get it closed.

And she could hear his deep, rich laugh throughout the entire process as she stood next to the window, again avoiding any possible exposure beyond just her arm, and pulled the curtains closed. Not that they were going to be much help, being made of lace. Still, she dropped to crawl beneath the window so as not to be seen to get to the other side to do the same, all while his low chortling rang in her ears.

When she finally got back to bed, sleep eluded her entirely. Having closed the window did nothing to abate the sounds, not that she tried very hard to do so, of what proved to be an eye opening spanking. That incessant *crack! crack! crack!* never let up or paused in any way. It seemed to go on forever, as well as the noisy, but nowhere near as unpleasant as she would have preferred them to be, sounds of what she surmised to be their lovemaking afterwards.

At least she couldn't hear him proving to her the reality of just how she felt about him spanking her—which was apparently very close to how Gloria felt about the mere idea of him doing that to her!

But even when they were finally quiet, Gloria was still flaming with such embarrassment that she could find no solace in Morpheus' arms.

Almost without thinking, her hands went to the hem of her nightgown with at least as much reluctance as that painted lady had displayed when she'd placed herself over that enormous man's lap. But her body knew what she wanted, what she needed, better than she did, and with much less guilt. Her delicate fingers continued to gather material until the split crotch of her bloomers was exposed—but going no further.

Slowly, as her mind warred with her lustful needs and lost, as usual, they made their way to the opening of the split that was positioned just above the thatch of soft yellow hair, pulling them and her legs apart with them, so that the two halves lay well open before they sought the space between the plump, throbbing lips she'd just exposed.

Cheeks now flaming for another reason other than having been caught looking, Gloria's eyes drifted shut as she used the fingers of one hand to spread herself open even further, while she found the source of her own slickness with the others, dipping them delicately into that shamefully

flowing liquid to move them back up to slip easily over the barest tip of that hidden, throbbing button of flesh with a barely stifled moan of forbidden pleasure.

It was a sin. She was quite sure of that, not that she'd ever admitted to anyone that she'd done it. It had to be. It felt too unbelievably good *not* to be!

But the feelings were too new to her. She didn't have the experience, or even the will, to be able to extend the experience. Her flesh was too eager to find the fulfillment she sought, and soon she was writhing and moaning to the tune that her own fingers called until that torturously building ecstasy finally burst within her, and she had to turn her head to scream into her own pillow, lest she give the man across the street an earful of her own secret bliss.

Seconds later, almost before she pulled her gown down and rolled onto her side, she had slipped into the deep, dreamless sleep that had previously eluded her.