

Mail Order Mystery

By

Misty Malone

2017© Blushing Books® and Misty Malone

©2017 by Blushing Books® and Misty Malone
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.

Misty Malone
Mail Order Mystery

EBook ISBN: 978-1-61258-212-2
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.

Table of Contents:

Chapter One	5
Chapter Two.....	12
Chapter Three.....	20
Chapter Four	28
Chapter Five.....	35
Chapter Six.....	42
Chapter Seven	48
Chapter Eight	56
Chapter Nine	64
Chapter Ten.....	72
Chapter Eleven.....	79
Chapter Twelve	86
Chapter Thirteen	92
Chapter Fourteen.....	100
Chapter Fifteen.....	108
Chapter Sixteen.....	117
Chapter Seventeen	125
Chapter Eighteen.....	132
Misty Malone	144
EBook Offer.....	146
Blushing Books Newsletter.....	147
Blushing Books	148

Chapter One

Pilot Knob, Missouri, 1875

The air was hot and stuffy inside the train car, which added to Elizabeth Caldwell's uneasiness. The train conductor, who had been wonderful to her since she'd left home in New York, advised her they were about fifteen minutes out from Pilot Knob, Missouri.

She thanked him with a big smile, and reached up to attempt to tuck the stray strands of hair back into the bun she had neatly pinned up that morning. Knowing it must look a mess, she put her hat back on, fastening it securely with the silk ribbon under her chin. She tried to smooth down her traveling dress, but frowned at the wrinkles and dust. When she packed her valise for the trip, she'd had no idea how dusty and dirty you got riding that far on a train.

But her appearance wasn't her biggest concern at the moment. She was about to meet her future husband, and they would be married before today was over. She knew him only through three letters, which followed her answer to his ad for a mail order bride. It seemed like such a good idea at the time, but the closer she got to her stop, the more the butterflies in her stomach were causing her to question that decision.

She wondered, once again, about her future husband and what he'd be like. She hoped he was nice, and an understanding, honest man. She secretly hoped he was also handsome, though she knew his physical looks shouldn't be as important to her. The description he gave in his letter sounded wonderful, but she knew people weren't always totally honest in such letters. He said he was about six feet, maybe a little over, with dark brown hair, no facial hair, and brown eyes. He owned a small ranch, so she assumed he would be muscular.

Before her mind had a chance to wander much more, the train whistle sounded and the slowing train ground to a stop. She took a deep breath, picked up her valise, and followed the rest of the passengers off the train. She could feel herself trembling as she allowed the porter to help her down the steps. She stood on the platform, looking around.

All around her the passengers she'd shared the train with were hugging people who were there to greet them. She looked around, then walked to the other end of the platform, but still didn't see anyone who matched the description he'd given her. She turned clear around in a circle, searching, but there wasn't a soul who looked close to how she pictured her husband-to-be. Her shoulders slumped a little as she realized either he was less than honest about his appearance, or he wasn't there to meet her.

Given her options, she found herself hoping he was delayed for some reason and would be there shortly. She hated to think her intended was less than honest, or unreliable. Those were two characteristics in a man that were very important to her. She turned to walk inside and see if perhaps he'd left word as to why he may be delayed, when she heard a man's voice. "Elizabeth Caldwell?"

She turned in the direction of the voice and saw a man looking at her. He wasn't a bad looking man at all, but nothing like the description. She waved at him and smiled, wondering why he would want to deceive her about his looks. He was close to six feet tall, maybe an inch under, and had blond hair and blue eyes, but why hide that? Looking at him now, he was actually quite a handsome man.

He excused himself and made his way through the crowd to stand in front of her. "Ma'am,

may I assume you are Miss Caldwell?"

"I am. And you are Ben Tuttle?"

"No, ma'am, I'm not. My name is Clint Haywood, and I'm the sheriff. Could we move off to the side here so we can talk a few minutes?"

He took her arm and led her down the steps, off the platform and over to a bench under a tree. They had some privacy, and the shade felt nice. Once they sat down, she looked at him hopefully. "Do you have a message for me from Ben?"

The sheriff was obviously uneasy, as he shifted so he was looking directly at her. "Ma'am, there is no good or easy way to tell you this, so I'm just going to come right out with it. Ben Tuttle passed away last week. I sent a telegram to you, but I was afraid it was too late, and you'd already left. I'm sorry to have to tell you this."

She could feel the color draining from her face, and she suddenly felt dizzy. The sheriff reached over and put his hands on her shoulders, as if to support her. "Are you okay, ma'am? I'm real sorry to have to tell you like this. Ben was a good friend of mine. He was a good man." He waited a minute or two to give her time to adjust. "Are you okay, Miss Caldwell? Can I get you something? Maybe some water?"

Her throat was dry, but she felt numb all over. It took several moments for her to find her voice. "What happened?"

"He was shoeing a horse for a neighbor, when one of the mines not too far from here set off some explosives. It scared the horse and she kicked just as Ben reached for her foot. It hit him in the head and killed him."

Elizabeth winced. "Oh, my. That's terrible."

"Yes, it was a terrible tragedy." He paused a moment. "I was very upset with the mine, as well. They are to warn me when they're going to be blasting, so I can warn the town. If he would have known they'd be blasting that day, he wouldn't have been shoeing a horse. I was so upset about it I shut the mine down for thirty days. I'm sure next time they'll let me know in advance like they're supposed to. Unfortunately, though, that won't help Ben any."

He looked up at Elizabeth, who still looked so pale he was concerned. "I know this is a big shock, and I'm sorry to have to go through that. It's a big loss for you, as well, and I wish I had an easy solution for you. Are you all right? You look so pale."

"I'll be fine, Mr. Haywood. I just need a few moments to pull myself together."

"Call me Clint. Everyone else in this town does. I've talked to Clyde Carpenter at the hotel, and he's holding a room for you. I'm sure you're tired after that long trip. Why don't you get settled in there? He can bring a bath up for you, and then you rest a little bit. I'll come by and we'll go get some supper and talk a little bit. If you want to send any telegrams back home, we'll do that."

Elizabeth's head was spinning, but that suggestion sounded better than anything she'd been able to come up with. "Thank you, Mr. Haywood."

"Clint."

"I'm sorry; Clint. Maybe after I get cleaned up and rested a bit I'll be able to think better and can decide what I should do now." He saw tears fill her eyes, but she was fighting hard to maintain control. "I'm afraid I don't have a lot of options available." She looked around to insure their privacy and spoke to him very quietly. "I'm afraid I don't have much money, but if the cost is not too much, I believe I can handle one night at the hotel. Then I'll have to come up with some kind of idea."

"Let's get you to the hotel," Clint said. "Once you're rested up, we'll talk. We'll come up with something, and once you at least have a plan, I'm sure you will feel better."

She fought back the tears threatening to spill from her eyes, and he watched as she pulled her shoulders back and lifted her head. "I am sure I will. Thank you, Sheriff, for reserving a room for me at the hotel. That was very thoughtful of you."

He smiled at the little lady. Now that he actually looked at her, he realized she was very pretty. She had dark brown hair and pretty emerald eyes. What he was mostly impressed with, though, was her spunk. She was just a little thing, couldn't be much over five feet tall, and she'd just been dealt a terrible blow. But it sure looked to him like she planned on meeting the situation head on. He had respect for this pretty little lady.

He offered his arm and turned toward the hotel, but she stopped him. "What about my things?"

"I'll have them taken to the hotel for you. What do you have?"

"I have three trunks," she said as she turned back toward the train.

Clint was shocked, but tried not to let it show. "I'll go talk to them." He was back in a couple of minutes and offered his arm once again. "They'll be delivered to the hotel within the hour. We'll get you settled in and order a bath be brought up for you. Maybe your trunks will have arrived by then." He stopped and turned to look at her. "I'm sorry, I should have asked sooner, but are you hungry? Did you have anything for lunch on the train? The hotel has a good restaurant if you're hungry."

"No, I really don't have much of an appetite. I need to do some thinking, but right now I'm not sure my thinking is real clear. I believe I'll be much more able to make good decisions after I get cleaned up and rest a bit. Thank you for asking, though. Again, that was very kind of you."

He nodded as he proceeded to lead her to the hotel. He introduced her to Clyde, and kept a straight face as he told him the train porter would be bringing three trunks over. Clyde's eyes opened wide. "Three trunks?"

Clint gave Elizabeth a sideways glance before speaking. "Yes, three. She would like a bath brought up so she can clean up after her long trip. If you would have her trunks delivered to her room, please, when they arrive, she'll have some clean clothes to change into."

"Certainly," Clyde said quickly. "I'll have them delivered right away upon their arrival, and I'll start heating the water for a bath immediately." He turned to address Elizabeth. "Miss Caldwell, I'm very sorry for your loss. I know this puts you in a very difficult situation. If there's anything my wife or I can do to assist you with anything, please ask."

"Thank you, Mr. Carpenter, for the kind words. I'm sure a nice bath and a bit of rest will help immensely."

"Thanks, Clyde," Clint said. "I'll show her to her room." He held his arm out for Elizabeth, who took it with a gracious smile. He unlocked her door, went in first to check it out, then went back out in the hall and waited for her to enter. He handed her the key. "You rest now. I'll be back this evening and we'll go downstairs for supper, and we can talk. If you need anything before I get here, ask Clyde to send someone over to my office for me. Make sure you lock your door after I leave."

"Thank you, Sheriff. I appreciate all you have done for me."

Clyde was waiting for Clint when he came back down the stairs. "Three trunks? I thought you said she came here to escape working in a textile factory. They don't pay much at all. I expected her to show up with a beat up valise that carried everything she owned."

"I was a little surprised myself," Clint answered. "I know very little about her, though. Ben just had three letters, and he didn't share all of them with me. All he really said is she agreed to come here to marry him because she was looking for a different life. He said she doesn't have any

family and had been working in a textile factory. I guess we'll just have to wait and see what these trunks look like and what's in them."

As they were talking, a wagon pulled up in front of the hotel and the train porter came into the hotel lobby. "I have Miss Caldwell's trunks here, Sheriff. Could I get someone to help me unload them?"

"I'll help you," Clint said.

"Thank you, Clint. The water's hot for her bath, so I'll get my sons to help me and we'll take that up to her."

The two men unloaded all three trunks and took them upstairs to Miss Caldwell's room, while Clyde and his sons took her bath up. After checking to be sure she had everything she needed, the men went back down to the lobby.

Clyde waited until the porter left before addressing Clint. "Those were three very nice looking, very large trunks."

"They certainly were," Clint agreed, "but let's not jump to any conclusions. We don't know anything about her yet."

"Other than the fact that she told her intended she worked in a textile factory and wanted a new life, and she showed up with three very nice trunks."

"Again, Clyde, let's wait until we know what her story is before we judge her. No matter what her background is, she's facing an uncertain future right now. Coming clear out here to find out she has no husband waiting for her is going to be difficult. This is no place for a single woman who doesn't know the ways of this area. I'm very concerned for her safety."

"I'd say the sooner you can get her on that train heading back to New York City, the better."

"What if that's not an option, Clyde?"

"Why wouldn't it be?"

"I know Ben said she didn't have the money for the train ticket here. He sent her a ticket. If she didn't have money for a ticket here, how would she have money for a ticket back?"

Clyde's eyebrows drew together tightly. "You're telling me someone with three big fancy trunks full of stuff doesn't have enough money to buy a train ticket? I find that a little hard to believe. I think she's pulling the wool over your eyes, just like she did Ben's."

"Maybe," Clint conceded, but I still think we have to give her the benefit of the doubt before we accuse her of something like that. So far she's been very polite, and I see no reason not to hear her out first. I think you should do the same."

He met Clyde's eyes so the hotel keeper could see he was sincere in his beliefs. Clyde was a good man, but he and his wife both had a tendency to spread a little gossip now and again. He hoped Miss Elizabeth Caldwell did have the money to return home to New York City. If she didn't, or for some reason decided to stay even without a husband, he didn't want the town looking down on this little lady before they even got to know her.

Upstairs, Elizabeth leaned back in the tub, hoping the hot water would soak through all the dust from the trip and relax her weary body and mind. She was devastated. Although she'd never met Ben Tuttle, she felt like she knew him through his letters. She had envisioned him from his description, and she'd planned a life with him on his farm. She'd told him she didn't know how to care for chickens, but he promised he'd teach her. She was looking forward to having her own coop, she believed he said that was what they called a house for chickens, and gathering fresh eggs every day.

As she leaned back in the tub, she grieved. She grieved for the man she'd never actually

met, but had agreed to marry. She grieved for the life she'd been looking forward to and would now not have. She even grieved for the chickens she'd never have. No matter how hard she tried to stop them, tears started to flow from her eyes. Try as she might, she couldn't control the emotions running through her. As tears continued to flow seemingly unhindered, she found herself grieving for her mother and father, the only family she'd had. She hadn't allowed herself to grieve for them until now, but once the tears had started, she gave in, and grieved for them, as well.

She cried until the water started cooling, which brought her back to the reality of her situation. Crying wasn't going to change anything, and certainly wasn't aiding her in deciding what she should do. She was a stronger person than that. With that thought in mind, she squared her shoulders and lifted her chin. She could get through this, one step at a time.

With renewed determination, she hurried and washed herself and her hair. That was the first step in moving forward. She got out of the tub and dried off. She slipped into her wrapper while she used the towel to dry her hair as much as she could. Next she went to her trunks to find a suitable dress.

What to wear became her next dilemma. If she were home, she would be wearing her mourning dress, which of course was black. Out here, though, she wasn't sure. She'd heard people telling about how different things were out here, and she believed someone had said they didn't wear mourning clothes, other than possibly on the day of the funeral. She didn't want to stand out in this town, so she decided not to wear that. The black dress and black hat may draw unwanted attention to her. She certainly didn't want to wear a bright color, either, or people may think Ben's passing had meant nothing to her.

She went to the window, standing off to the side, and peeked out at the street to see what most of the ladies were wearing. She'd try to match them, so she wouldn't stand out. She had been so nervous on the train that she hadn't paid much attention to what anyone was wearing. Looking outside now, she was a little surprised. She expected to see the ladies in day dresses, and they were, but the day dresses they were wearing were more the type she wore at home. When she went into town to do any shopping or take care of any business she had to attend to, she changed into a nicer day dress. These women all seemed to be wearing more the stay at home style, which was a plainer dress, no ribbon or lace. They also seemed to be wearing a single petticoat, if that. She certainly didn't see anyone who appeared to be wearing more than one, like they often did in New York.

She debated several moments, unsure of herself. Dinner tonight at the hotel would be the first chance she had to meet people, other than Mr. Carpenter here at the hotel, and Sheriff Haywood. If she wore one of her older day dresses, she may fit in, but she knew she wouldn't be comfortable meeting people. She decided on a day dress she hadn't worn often because it was a little modest, not very fancy to wear out, but with a bit of lace at the neckline and around the sleeves, it seemed a little too nice for at home. It seemed a good choice, so she put it on.

She got her comb and sat down on her bed to tackle her hair. It was long and had enough curl to make it difficult to comb through after washing it. She worked until it was untangled, then did what she could to encourage it to dry. She used her hands to fluff it, and ran her hands through it, pulling it up off her head and letting it glide back down. When it was dry enough she felt she could work with it, she wound it back up into a neat bun at the back of her head, as she'd seen many of the women on the streets below had done with theirs.

They all seemed to be wearing a bonnet, and she would wear one, as well, so she wasn't overly concerned with her hair. She would wait until the sheriff came to get her to put it on, giving her hair every possible opportunity to dry first. Looking out the window again, she hoped her bonnet wouldn't look too out of place. Ladies in New York tended to wear hats more often than

bonnets, but like most of the women, she had a couple bonnets for when she planned on working outside in the garden, which she enjoyed, or if her family went outside the city, riding in the carriage.

Once she had her bonnet laid out and was ready to go when the sheriff got there, she sat down to wait and rest. It was too late to lay down and take a nap, but she'd rested in the tub until the water got too cool. She didn't really think her mind would be still long enough to allow her to sleep anyway. She couldn't stop herself from again thinking for a moment about what she thought her life would be like once she got here, married Ben, and they lived on his farm.

She sighed, and scolded herself mentally for letting her mind go back there again. That life was gone, and she had to focus on what her life would be like now, without Ben.

With that thought in mind, she had to admit her life now looked pretty bleak. She had nowhere to go. She didn't have any family left in New York to go back to, even if she did have enough money to buy a train ticket, which she certainly did not. She began to feel sorry for herself momentarily, but soon stopped, scolding herself once again.

She had to find a solution to her problem. She'd talk to the sheriff tonight and see if there might be something she could do here to earn a living. She knew there weren't any textile factories or any such thing, but maybe he would be aware of something. She'd heard some ranch owners would hire a lady to cook for them and their hired hands. Maybe she could find something like that.

She was considering that possible option when she was startled by a knock on her door, followed by a lady's voice. "Miss Caldwell, are you awake, my dear?"

"I'll be right there," Elizabeth called as she went to the door and opened it.

A lively little lady with a big smile met her. "Hello, Miss Caldwell. I'm Bernice Carpenter. I believe you met my husband, Clyde, earlier."

"Yes, of course. I'm sorry, I should have come down to tell you I was done with my bath a long time ago. You probably need the tub for someone else."

"No, no, that was fine. If you're done, I'll tell my sons and they'll come and get it. I came up here to tell you Sheriff Haywood is here to see you. He's waiting downstairs. He says he's taking you for dinner."

"Yes, he is. That was so kind of him. Thank you for coming to tell me, Mrs. Carpenter."

"Please, call me Bernice. I'm so sorry about Ben. He was a good man. I know this must be difficult for you. Will you be staying here, or going back east?"

"I'm not sure yet what exactly I'm going to do. I'm going to talk to Sheriff Haywood tonight, and then maybe I'll be able to make some decisions."

"Of course. I'm sure you have a lot to consider. If there's anything I can do to help, please say something. I'm not sure how much help I can be, but if you have questions about the area, I can probably help you with that, at least."

"Thank you, Mrs. Carpenter."

"Bernice."

"Thank you, Bernice. I'll keep your kind offer in mind." Elizabeth put her bonnet in place and tied the strings. "Does this look all right for a bit of a walk and dinner?"

"It's beautiful," Bernice answered. "You look fine."

The two ladies walked together down the steps, where Sheriff Haywood was waiting. "Good evening, Miss Caldwell. Were you able to get some rest?"

"A little. I have a lot on my mind and I'm afraid that made it difficult to rest much, but I feel so much better having had a chance to clean up."

"It's a lovely evening out. Would you like to walk around town a few minutes before we eat, or would you rather we go straight to the dining room?"

"I would love to get a little fresh air, if you don't mind. It was so hot and stuffy on the train all those days."

"I thought a little fresh air might feel good to you." He offered his arm and they stepped out onto the boardwalk. They made small talk, nothing important, while he showed her around town a little bit. Everyone they passed said hello to the sheriff, and he introduced her to each of them.

Elizabeth thought everyone seemed friendly, but a bit aloof. They all seemed to be looking her over rather well. That was starting to worry her, until she realized this was a small town. They were probably all curious as to what Ben's intended mail order bride looked like.

After a stroll around town, the sheriff took her to the restaurant in the hotel. He suggested to Hilda, the waitress who seated them, that the table in the corner would be nice, as they needed to do some talking. "Of course," she answered with a sad sort of smile. "I'm so sorry about Ben," she added, looking at Elizabeth.

Elizabeth was shocked, and a bit speechless, but did manage a nice smile. It seemed everyone knew she was Ben's intended bride, even though they'd never met her, or even seen her.

Her mind was brought back to the situation at hand when she heard the waitress speaking. "We have your favorite tonight, Sheriff; fried chicken with mashed potatoes and gravy, and green beans. Or June made a meatloaf."

The sheriff frowned. "Is it like most of her meatloaves?"

"Yes, sir, it is," she said with a scrunched up face.

He turned to Elizabeth. "Do you like fried chicken?"

"Of course."

He turned back to Hilda. "We'll take two of the fried chicken dinners, please."

Hilda gave him a grin. "Good choice."

After she left, the sheriff answered the question in Elizabeth's eyes. "June is a wonderful cook, but she can't make a meatloaf to save her soul. You can't beat her fried chicken, though."

Elizabeth tried to keep from laughing, but did chuckle a bit. "Maria, our cook, was just the opposite. She made wonderful meatloaf, and good chicken and dumplings, but her fried chicken just wasn't very appealing."

The sheriff smiled, but quickly got serious. "Do you mind if I ask you a question?"

"Of course you may, Sheriff."

"Clint. Maybe this isn't any of my business, and tell me if that's so, but you said you had a cook. I also noticed you're wearing very nice clothes, and your trunks are larger than most, and beautiful. Ben and I were very good friends, and although he didn't show me your letters, he did share some of the information in them. I thought he said you were working in a textile factory and it would take you quite some time to save enough money for a train ticket out here. Did I misunderstand him?"

She looked down at her lap, and her face blushed a bit. She shook her head slowly a few moments before she looked up at him, took a deep breath, exhaled slowly, and answered his question. "No, you didn't misunderstand, Clint. I was working in a factory, and I do have very little money. I never thought about how this must look. I guess I need to explain a bit about my past."