

Love Inspired HISTORICAL

LINDA
FORD



*Klondike
Medicine Woman*

Healer, helper, pioneer

Mills & Boon Love Inspired

Linda Ford

Klondike Medicine Woman

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Dr. Jacob Calloway was the answer to her prayers—whether he liked it or not. Teena Crow is desperate to learn his scientific healing methods to help her people. But Jacob is too suspicious of Teena’s native remedies to allow her near Treasure Creek’s clinic. So she decides to earn his respect—and teach the good doctor to see beyond surface differences to their common goal. But it’s not just Teena’s medicines that render Jacob uncomfortable. Her warm gaze and determination dare him to open his heart. But can their fledgling love weather a town’s disapproval, or the secrets they both hide?

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“My heart belongs to God,” Teena said.

Jacob pressed his hand to his chest as Teena had done. “Mine, too.”

They studied each other openly, frankly, for the first time. A sense of something he could only explain as unity wrapped about them, though he could not say if she felt the same. Only that her eyes held his, dark and bottomless, opening to him with trust. He vowed he would treat her fairly from here on. No more judging her with the same anger he judged the shaman who killed Aaron.

Life was more complicated in his world. However, he considered himself a fair man, and there was one more thing he must do to be fair.

“I would like you to help me at the clinic,” he told her. The words were easier to say than he anticipated.

**ALASKAN BRIDES:
Women of the Gold Rush
find that love is the greatest treasure of all.**

Klondike Medicine Woman—Linda Ford, May 2011

LINDA FORD

shares her life with her rancher husband, a grown son, a live-in client she provides care for and a yappy parrot. She and her husband raised a family of fourteen children, ten adopted, providing her with plenty of opportunity to experience God's love and faithfulness. They've had their share of adventures, as well. Taking twelve kids in a motor home on a three-thousand-mile road trip would be high on the list. They live in Alberta, Canada, close enough to the Rockies to admire them every day. She enjoys writing stories that reveal God's wondrous love through the lives of her characters.

Linda enjoys hearing from readers. Contact her at linda@lindaford.org or check out her website at www.lindaford.org, where you can also catch her blog, which often carries glimpses of both her writing activities and family life.

Klondike Medicine Woman
Linda Ford



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But God commendeth his love toward us, in that,
while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

—Romans 5:8

To Tom, Yvonne, Jordyn and Chris
for sharing our trip to Alaska and Yukon.

You made it a memorable event. Thank you.

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Chapter One

July 1898, Treasure Creek, Alaska

These people were set on destroying not only the land but themselves, as well.

Teena Crow bent over the injured man. Blood pooled under his leg, a fresh stream joining the black patch in the grass. If she didn't stop the bleeding soon, he would die beside the Chilkoot Trail like so many others had. She took in his pain-filled eyes, the way the color seeped from his cheeks. Shrugging out of her fur shawl, she wrapped it around him then took out the reindeer moss, the plant known as mare's tail and other healing remedies she always carried with her. She carefully packed the wound. The blood flow stopped immediately. She watched it a moment then returned her gaze to the man, wondering if he would say with his eyes or mouth, or both, what he thought of a native tending him. Many she'd helped showed no appreciation nor spared their hatred of the people who were here first.

The man's eyes were already losing their fear-filled pain and he showed nothing but gratitude.

She smiled. "How long have you been here?"

"Since first light," he croaked.

Light came early in July. That meant he had been there up to twelve hours. Teena held her canteen of water to his lips and he drank heartily. She sat back on her haunches and looked about.

All winter, they had come in boats of every sort in a mad race for the gold fields. They had flung themselves into the water, headed for land like fish thrown up at the knees of the newly formed town of Treasure Creek, Alaska, founded by Mack Tanner. They brought with them a mountain of goods that soon lay scattered across the beach. They clawed their way up the Chilkoot toward the lake and onward. They paid Tlingit Indians like her brother to pack their belongings over the pass where the Canadian Mounties waited to make sure they had the required amount of supplies. All for the glittering gold.

She shook her head. She would never understand the white man. But she had vowed to learn their ways of curing their diseases.

This was not the first one of their kind to be ignored at the side of the trail, as hundreds passed by without once pausing to help. Last winter her brother, Jimmy, had tossed his pack aside and left the path to pick up a man with a broken leg who had lain there all day without anyone helping. Jimmy brought him down the mountain to Teena. He had lived, though he might never walk as well as he once had.

There were many who got help too late.

She checked the man's wound. No longer bleeding.

He sucked in air in a way that said his pain had let up.

"You will need to rest a few days—" she began.

"Step aside," a firm voice ordered, interrupting her suggestion that the man should rest until his wound healed.

Teena didn't move except to turn to stare at the man who spoke. A white man, of course. She'd known that immediately. Over time, she had gotten used to the strange appearance of these people. But this one was different. Eyes brown as spring soil, a little furrow they called a dimple in his chin. A strong face. No head covering, so she got a good look at his close-cropped, dark hair.

As she studied him from under her lowered lashes, something inside her uncurled like a flower opening to the brilliant sun.

He edged her aside and spoke gently to the man. "I'm Dr. Jacob Calloway—a medical doctor. You're in good hands now."

Teena dismissed the way he said the words—as if the injured man was in danger of dying before he arrived. All she cared was he said he was a doctor. A white healer. She'd heard such a

man had gotten off a boat a few days ago. This was what she needed. What she'd prayed for, not knowing if God would listen to her prayers. Yes, the missionary, Mr. McIntyre, had assured her the Great Creator heard the Indian as much as He heard the white, but she wondered how he could be so certain. Had he ever been a Tlingit and asked for something? How then could he know?

She would watch everything this newly arrived man did, and learn his way of healing.

A boy almost as tall as the doctor stood at his side. He had the eagerness of a child, the height of a man, but not yet the weight. No longer child. Not yet man. With an eager, yet cautious expression. He seemed to belong to the doctor. Perhaps his son, though there was no resemblance. The boy-man was as fair as the doctor was dark.

Dr. Calloway pulled something from his pocket and put a plug in each ear as he pushed aside the injured man's shirt to press a tiny, cup-like thing to his chest. He then leaned forward and listened. What did he hear? Was this their way of healing, or was there more?

The doctor straightened, folded his instrument and placed it back in his pocket. "Now let's have a look at this gash." He made to pull the moss off.

Teena captured his hands, gently stopping him. "You must not lift it yet. It needs time to work."

Dr. Calloway gave her a faintly reproving look. "No doubt you mean well, but this requires proper medical care."

She knew nothing about the white man's methods. But she knew how to treat a cut. "If you take it off it will get..." She struggled for the English word but couldn't find one, and had to settle for describing what would happen. "It will get red and oozy."

"Exactly." He turned his attention back to the injured man. "You need to keep your wound clean. I have some dressings with me." He again began to pull off Teena's work.

The man sat up. "I'm feeling a whole lot better. Whatever this girl did has worked. I'm heading back up the trail." He pushed to his feet.

Jacob stood, too. "You'll end up losing your leg if you aren't careful."

"I guess I'll take that chance." He limped away, Dr. Calloway at his heels, as if he meant to stop him.

The gold seeker paused as he remembered Teena's fur around his shoulder. He pulled it off and handed it to the doctor. "Give this to the little lady, and my thanks."

Jacob stared after the man.

Teena shared his sense of helplessness, but had long ago learned people did not always listen to advice, no matter how wise.

"I fear you will get infection," he called to the man's back as he limped up the trail. "If you do, please come back to Treasure Creek. I am going to start a medical clinic."

A medical clinic. White man medicine. Teena's heart soared. She would offer to help. She'd do anything he asked, if he would only teach her his ways.

The doctor returned to Teena's side. He slipped her shawl over her shoulders, caught her two braids and lifted them from under the fur. He performed the task naturally, his thoughts obviously elsewhere, but his touch gave the pelt gentle warmth, as if from the noonday sun. For a moment she closed her eyes and enjoyed the comfort.

"I'm going to ask you to stop using your primitive practices on these people."

Teena slowly turned to stare. "What do you mean?"

"Ignorance kills many." His expression tightened, marring his strong face and filling his eyes with hardness, but Teena did not back away. She needed this man's help. Besides, she agreed. Thousands had come seeking the glittering gold—unprepared for the cold, the mountains or any of the dangers. Far too many perished, and hundreds more sat defeated and broken at the edge of the water.

“These people deserve proper medical care.” He picked up his black leather bag and turned back toward Treasure Creek, the boy-man matching his gait stride for stride. He grinned at his young friend. “Seems I got here just in time.”

The boy gave Dr. Calloway an admiring glance.

“You are going to do white man’s medicine?” she asked.

Jacob did not slow his steps, forcing her to hurry to stay at his side. He was a tall man. Taller than most she’d seen. And he walked with purpose. The boy hurried to keep up, too. “That’s why I’m here.”

“You will need help at this clinic?” She congratulated herself on remembering the word.

“I trust there are those who would be interested in assisting me.” He smiled again at the boy.

She rushed onward. “I am Teena Crow of the Tlingit tribe. I will help you.”

He stopped. For a moment he didn’t move, then he faced her, his expression like granite. “Do you know scientific methods?”

Not certain what he meant, she shook her head.

“Are you willing to abandon the practices you’ve been taught?”

She did not answer directly. “I want to learn more.”

“I’m afraid I can’t help you.” He strode on.

His words—although softly spoken—were like blows to her. This was what she had longed for, hoped for and prayed for. He was several yards ahead of her and she ran to catch up. “I do not understand.”

“Your people’s ignorant ways have killed many. Now that I’m here, I can save others from such malarkey.” He continued to the busy town that hadn’t existed a few months ago.

Teena stared after him. She must have misunderstood him. Or he had misunderstood her. She followed the pair slowly, at a distance, as they made their way to the center of town. Jacob paused at the church—the first building Mack Tanner had constructed. Now he was adding to it to allow more people to attend services. Across the street stood another building—the school. They taught children to read and write. Mack said the native children were welcome to learn along with the whites, but the Indian children had accompanied their families to the fishing streams and helped with drying fish for the winter.

Teena wished, not for the first time, she could read. Then she could learn how to treat white man’s diseases without need of a teacher.

Dr. Calloway hurried onward to the street opening to the waterfront, the boy still at his side, pointing and talking. The store on the left did not draw the doctor’s interest. Instead, he turned to the empty space across the street. Was this where he intended to have his clinic?

The man-boy spoke, waving his arms wildly. The doctor nodded and the boy hurried toward the waterfront and the throng of people and supplies.

Teena would never get used to the scurrying crowds, the unending noise, the strange smell of so many unfamiliar things.

She hung back, watching as the doctor paced the piece of land.

“What are you staring at?”

She didn’t take her attention from the scene before her as she spoke to her brother, Jimmy. “Him.” She pointed. “Dr. Jacob Calloway. He’s going to start a white man’s place for healing.” They had automatically fallen into their native language.

“More white men. Just what our land needs.”

“We must accept the changes. Learn how to work with them.”

“Who says?”

“We see what happens if we stick to our old ways.”

“If they hadn’t come, our people wouldn’t have died of strange diseases.”

“But they did come. Our people did get sick.” She shuddered at the memory of one after another of her clan dying, their skin marred by the dreaded pox. “We need their medicine to cure their diseases.”

Jimmy didn’t answer. They disagreed on so many things, but he had no argument for this. “I wish they had never come.”

“We cannot push the sun back one hour, let alone the days and weeks it would require to go back to who we were before the white man came.”

“They have brought us a curse.”

She studied him, her face happy with a smile. “They brought us the news that we can know the Creator. We have always known about Him but feared His anger. We did not know He had sent His Son to open up the way for us to lift our hearts to Him.”

Jimmy’s face darkened. “Sometimes I think He is angry at us for being so bold. That is why we are punished with diseases we can’t conquer, and the swarm of people seeking gold, who care not about the land.”

Side by side they stared at the mud and confusion around them.

Teena had her share of doubts, too, but she wasn’t about to confess them to Jimmy. So many times, she wondered if God loved her people as much as He did the whites. “I asked for a chance to learn their healing way. I believe Dr. Calloway is what I need.”

“He will teach you?”

She sighed inwardly, not wanting Jimmy to know what Jacob had said. “God has sent him. He will teach me.”

“Let us hope you can learn what our people need.”

“Let us so pray.”

“I have to get back to work. There’s no end of people willing to pay for someone to take their goods up the mountain.” Jimmy’s voice grew strong with pride. Day after day, he packed a hundred-pound burden up the trail in return for gold.

“I notice you don’t mind taking the white man’s gold.”

“It is in our land. It is our gold.”

“Can you eat it? Can you wear it to keep you warm? Can it cure a dying child?”

Jimmy took a few steps away, then turned to face her. “Trading with the white man takes gold. Did you not say we have to change?” He strode toward the waterfront, found the man he sought amidst the confusion and shouldered a heavy pack.

Yes, they had to change. Learn new ways.

She turned her attention back to Jacob. He stood on the boardwalk and stared around him.

She saw his careful assessment. Then his gaze rested on her. Again she felt a quickening of her heart. As if the future held a thousand unspoken promises. As if she had set foot on a bridge over a deep valley—a bridge between two worlds. As if God had heard and answered her prayer, just like Mr. McIntyre had said He would.

Jacob continued to study her.

Her skin grew warm and prickly. Perhaps now was not the best time to try to explain why she must learn his ways. Let him get used to the idea first. She turned and retraced her steps to the edge of town. She passed the dwelling place of Viola Goddard and paused to consider how anyone could abandon an infant. It was unthinkable. Her people protected their young, knowing the future lay with them. Yet someone had simply left a baby on Miss Goddard’s doorstep, with some gold nuggets to provide for her care. As if gold could make up for family, a clan. How strange these people were. Yet learning some of their ways was essential for her people to survive.

She resumed her journey, following the trail through the trees to her village.

Jimmy came home later in the day. “I thought you would be with the doctor. They brought a man down from the mountain who almost cut his foot off with an axe.”

Teena sprang to her feet. This was her opportunity to help, to watch and learn. “I will go now.”

Her father coughed. Did the white man have a cure for this troubling affliction of her father’s? He’d once been so strong and proud. He was still proud and strong in his mind, but his skin hung on his body and he moved like an old man. “Teena, daughter, do not think you can become white.”

She stopped and slowly turned. “Father, I only want to learn what we need to survive.”

“Perhaps you are right.” He waved her away, coughing with the effort.

She scurried from the winter house. Normally, they would have all moved to the fishing camps, but this year only a handful had gone. Only a handful were well enough. Jimmy stayed to work for the gold hunters. Father had survived the pox, but it had left him too weak to hunt or fish. Teena remained behind to care for him and learn the white ways, so she would know how to help him get better. She trotted noiselessly to Treasure Creek. A crowd gathered on the walk before the place where she had last seen Dr. Calloway, and she guessed they had a reason to be hanging about.

She pushed through them to observe.

A miner held a mask over the man’s nose and dripped some sort of liquid to it. Not only was his foot torn, his stomach was ripped deeply.

She groaned inwardly. A man did not survive that kind of injury.

But Jacob sewed the layers back together. The man didn’t move, though she couldn’t imagine the depth of his pain.

Teena edged closer, but, at a warning glance from the doctor, went no farther. She could see from where she stood. What had Jacob used to render the man so motionless? If not for the way his chest rose and fell, Teena might have thought him dead. The white doctor had a powerful medicine for pain.

Her eyes followed his every movement. He was so intent on what he did. So sure. His fingers steady. Healing hands. She could barely take her gaze from them, but spared a quick glance at his face. His expression led her to think he was both concerned about the man and determined to fix him. Teena understood the feeling of wanting to overcome injury and illness. She also knew the frustration of failing.

Jacob finished and put on a spotless white piece of cloth, then turned his attention to stitching the man’s foot. An axe, they had said, but the foot was torn badly and looked more like the man had caught his foot in something powerful. Besides, how would he accidentally cut his stomach with an ax? It made her wonder if he’d been in a fight with another man brandishing a weapon of some sort. She’d often enough noted how the white man could turn on his friends and try to destroy them. This man looked as if someone had tried to tear him apart.

Dr. Calloway finished and straightened. “He’ll live and likely walk again.”

The crowd cheered.

At the doctor’s signal, the man stopped letting the liquid drop to the mask.

“Did I hear there was a doctor here?” A voice called from the back, and a burly man pushed forward. “You a doctor?”

“I am.”

“My wife is in poor shape. Come and help her.”

Dr. Jacob glanced around the crowd. “I need someone to stay with him until he comes out of the anesthesia. Who will help?”

Anesthesia. Teena had never heard of it. Was that what he did to make the man sleep through being sewn together?

The crowd melted away amidst murmurs of having work to do. Soon there was only the impatient man who sought Jacob’s help, Teena, Jacob and Wiley, a wizened old man who had spent too much time lost on the mountain and now rambled nonsense. Someone had brought him down the trail a little while ago. Mack’s kindness kept him alive.

“I can help,” Teena murmured.

Jacob acted as if he hadn't heard. "You, mister, can you watch this man?"

"His name is Wiley," Teena offered. "He left his mind on the mountain."

Jacob gave her a quick glance, then shifted his attention back to Wiley. "Wiley, can you help?"

Wiley looked far away, as if seeing his many days lost and alone. "It's cold. The wind fair tears at a man's soul." Wiley shuddered. He brought his gaze back to Dr. Jacob. "It stole mine. It did." He turned and shuffled away, mumbling about finding his lost soul.

"Doc, hurry. My wife needs you now."

"I will stay with him." Teena stepped forward. "Or I could go with—" She indicated the pacing man.

Jacob looked as if he would about as soon cut off his own foot. He glanced at the sleeping man. "I don't seem to have much choice. He will likely vomit when he comes to. Make sure he doesn't choke." He bent to plant his face a few inches from Teena's. "You are not to give him any of your stuff." He indicated the bag slung over her back. "Do you understand me?" His words were quiet, meant only for her ears.

"I am not deaf," she muttered.

"None of your superstitious rituals, you hear?"

Teena turned her back and squatted by the injured man. She would not agree to anything she didn't want to, and this was one of those things. He might know about his kind of medicine, but she knew about her kind.

"I would not let him suffer if I could help."

Jacob squatted at her side. "Listen to me. I expect you are only following the practices that have been handed down through generations, but they are outdated. There are better, safer ways of treating the sick and injured."

"Then teach me them."

"You must first be willing to abandon your old ways."

She considered the options and shook her head. "How can I, when I know they work?"

"Doc? Come on."

Jacob made a rough sound of exasperation and followed the man.

Jacob Calloway returned to the rough wooden sidewalk and stomped the mud from his boots. This place was a disaster. In the few days he'd been here, he'd seen nothing but mud and ignorance. The woman he'd visited needed a better diet to relieve some of the symptoms responsible for her pain. He guessed her biggest problem was she really wanted to go home.

His boots thudded on the plank sidewalk fronting the row of businesses, though from all appearances, one would conclude most of the transactions were conducted on the rowdy beach. Which is where Burns Morgan had disappeared. The boy had attached himself to Jacob on the ship, and seemed in no hurry to join the climb over the mountain toward Dawson City and the gold fields. Only sixteen years old, he doubtless liked the idea of adventure more than the reality of it. Jacob didn't mind in the least, providing a bit of guidance and protection to the boy.

Jacob could have used him to watch the patient he'd sewn together a short time ago. Instead, he'd been forced to accept the only volunteer. That Indian woman.

She was not what he expected at all. A dusky-skinned beauty with big, dark eyes that seemed to delve into the deep recesses of one's mind. Her flawless skin reminded him of silk and satin. No—something warmer. Alive. He shook his head to stop his foolish thoughts, but they immediately returned to recounting each detail of that moment on the trail.

She had twin braids which seemed to be traditional. Every native woman he'd seen wore her hair in exactly the same fashion. Only, on her it looked vibrant. He'd been surprised by the warmth and weight of them.

His steps slowed. Why was he giving her so much thought?

He intended to discourage further contact. If only someone had intervened when his brother was injured... forbidden the native to treat him... It was too late to save Aaron, but he intended to do his best to save others from the same fate—death by ignorance and superstitious ritual.

Despite his insistence Teena only watch the patient, he had no assurance she wouldn't do some little dance, wave a rattle over him and sprinkle him with ashes and blood as soon as Jacob turned his back. He picked up his pace. His patient would be in need of pain medication by now. And nauseated from the ether.

He had come to fulfill a promise to his dying mother. Not that she would know if he kept his word or not. But he would know, and his conscience would give him no peace until he got on a boat from Seattle to Alaska. He intended to set up a medical clinic, train a nurse or two to care for patients and advertise for a doctor to take his place. Many doctors had left their practices to chase after Klondike gold. Surely, one would be wanting to return to medicine. When he accomplished all this, he would return to his practice in Seattle.

Jacob was close enough now to see the patient and the woman. She was taking something from her pack. Or was she putting something back? He broke into a run. "Stop. Get away."

She turned, a smile beaming from her.

He almost stumbled. A giant invisible fist slammed into his solar plexus. What would it be like to have such a smile greet him every day? He scrubbed the back of his hand across his forehead, forced his senses into order and closed the remaining twenty feet between them. He glowered down at her, but couldn't remember what he meant to say.

Good grief. He was thirty-two years old and acting like Burns, simply because a woman—a very young woman—had smiled at him. Why, she couldn't be much older than Burns.

His insides churned at his stupidity.

"I told you not to give him any of your superstitious concoctions." His frustration made him speak more harshly than he meant to. He dropped to his knees, flipped open his bag and reached for the laudanum to provide the man pain relief. Then he realized his patient rested quietly. No complaint of pain. No retching. "What did you give him?" He checked the man's pulse and reactions, but apart from being comfortable, he detected nothing amiss.

His patient opened his eyes and focused on Jacob. "Hi, you must be the doctor. Teena here told me how you sewed me up without me feeling a thing."

Teena. For some reason, the name suited her. She seemed keenly interested in medicine. If only she would agree to abandon her old-fashioned ways, based on superstition and tradition rather than science, he might consider training her as a nurse. But she'd been very clear she didn't intend to. He did his best to ignore her, and instead spoke to his patient. "What's your name?"

"Donald Freed. Thanks for fixing me up, Doc."

"Did this woman give you something?"

Donald's smile was mellow to say the least. "Whatever it was, it took away the pain."

Anger roared through Jacob like a raging storm, destroying everything in its path. His brother had died not far from here, with a native caring for him. If Aaron had received proper medical care he would likely still be alive. Instead he'd been deprived of modern medicine, and worse, poisoned. He jolted to his feet and grabbed the young woman by the arm. "What did you give him?"

Her eyes widened but she showed no fear. Perhaps it was compassion filling her expression with such warmth.

Ashamed of his behavior, he dropped her arm and stepped back. "Tell me what it is so I can know how to counteract it." He feared the ignorant cures of these people would poison Donald as it had Aaron. "Tell me before it makes him sick."

Teena smiled, gentle and reproving. "It is only all-heal root. It will not make him sick. It will make him comfortable. Happy."

"Doc, I feel great. Happy, like she says."

Who knew what Teena had fed the man? Or the consequence. Frustration twisted with Jacob's anger. How was he to combat ignorance if men like this encouraged it? His only hope was to insist Teena stay away from the clinic. He leaned closer to Teena, making sure she heard and understood every word. "I want you to stay away from the sick people. I will treat them."

She didn't move an inch. Her eyes didn't so much as flicker. "You need my help. I need yours. I have prayed for a chance to learn the white man's ways of healing. You will help me and I will help you."

"Not in this lifetime," he vowed.

She smiled and calmly walked away. "We will see each other again."

He groaned. Was this some kind of punishment for an unknown omission of his? Was God testing him to see if he would falter?

I will not fail in keeping my word to Mother. I will do my best to bring proper care to these people who are seeking their fortune in gold. Then I will return to my pleasant life in Seattle.

His resolve strengthened, he again checked Donald, who rested comfortably. Then he pulled out paper and pencil and started a list of what he needed.

A little while later he entered the general store and spoke to Mack Tanner. "I'll need these supplies to build the clinic. And I need to hire someone to construct it for me."

Mack was the founder and mayor of the town. He had strict regulations against saloons and dance halls. He'd built a church in the center of town to signify that, in this place, God was honored. Knowing Treasure Creek was established on moral principles had been the reason Jacob had chosen this particular location to set up a new practice. Plus, the letter informing them of Aaron's death had stated that Aaron was buried here.

Mack took the list and nodded. "I have the building material at hand. I'll have it delivered to the site."

"I'd appreciate that."

"As to someone to do the work..." He shook his head. "Most people are trying to get to the gold fields. Now, if you've no objection to a woman doing it..." He let the unspoken question dangle in the air.

Jacob could think of no reason to care who did the construction and said so.

"Then I'll ask the Tucker sisters to help you. They're kind of jacks-of-all-trades."

"Fine. The sooner the better. It's hard to provide adequate care out in the open."

"For sure. How about a tent for now? In case it rains." He glanced out the window. "Which it's bound to do soon."

"That would help." A short time later, he left with the promise of delivery of tent, lumber and other supplies, though much of what he needed in the way of supplies had to be ordered, with no assurance of when they'd arrive.

He hurried back to the place where his clinic would soon stand. Two men brought over the tent and erected it and helped him move Donald under its shelter, then delivered the lumber, and the news that the misses Tucker would show up in the morning. Despite the urgency he felt, he understood this was the most he could hope for. Soon he would offer adequate medical assistance. No longer would the injured and ill have to depend on superstitious claptrap.

He smiled as he recalled Teena's quiet stubbornness. She would soon learn she was no match for his determination. And why that should make him chuckle he was at a loss to understand.

He looked into his cup of coffee. Had she secretly poured in some kind of native drug that would make him anticipate a duel of wills with a native?

Snorting at his foolishness, he tossed the rest of the coffee into the dirt.

Chapter Two

At the sound of voices close to his head, Jacob was instantly awake and paused to orientate himself. He'd slept on the ground, softened by furs Mack had sent him. Burns had returned about 11:00 p.m., all wound up because it stayed light so late.

"A person never needs to go to bed."

"You'll want to sleep sometime." Jacob wasn't sure he'd ever been so enthused about staying up all night. Or so eager to experience life.

He glanced across to where Burns had thrown himself down on his own soft fur and lay snoring gently, his arms outflung like a baby. He didn't look as if he meant to leave his bed in search of adventure for several more hours.

Jacob smiled, a feeling of affection and protectiveness warming his insides. He'd grown fond of the boy. Perhaps Burns reminded him in a small way of Aaron—young, naive, so certain adventure carried no risks. Maybe Jacob could make up for not being able to protect Aaron by keeping Burns out of danger.

The noise outside his tent grew louder and Jacob scrambled from his covers. He checked Donald. Several times in the night, he'd risen to tend the man, who rested quietly at the moment. A quick glance at his pocket watch, where he'd left it on a small table by his makeshift bed, revealed it was—

He grabbed his watch and held it to his ear. Yes, it ticked. He wound it to make sure. Four in the morning, and yet the racket outside gave him reason to think it was high noon. One voice called, "Right there is good, boys." It sounded as if the speaker was only a few feet away. A crash fairly rocked him where he stood. Burns grunted and rolled to his side. Donald started, moaned and sank back into oblivion.

Jacob took a moment to smooth his hair. His chin was rough with whiskers. At some point he needed to shave. But first he had to find out the cause of the commotion outside. He pushed aside the tent flap and slapped at the cloud of mosquitoes attacking him.

A handful of men, nudging each other and jeering, stood watching two people struggle with armloads of lumber.

"Frankie, hang on. It ain't that heavy," one of the wood-toting persons called.

"You wait until I get a good hold, and don't drop it without telling me. You left me holding the whole thing," Frankie sputtered as he rubbed his palm.

"Daylight is wasting." The second person tapped a mud-covered boot and glanced at the sky, as if to suggest the sun was crossing the sky at a furious pace.

"You tell 'er, Margie," one sunburned man yelled.

This was a woman? And Frankie, too? The women Mack had said would help? Jacob took a good look at the pair. Both had dark, short hair—or at least what he could see of it, hidden by knitted caps, suggested so. Both dressed in plaid jackets that seemed to be uniform for both native Alaskans and the bulk of the outsiders. And both stood with feet planted a good width apart.

"You gonna take that from your sister, Frankie?" another spectator called. "Come on, show her who's boss."

Plainly, the onlookers hoped to see a fight between the two. In fact, he figured the men itched to get a good brawl going. Jacob took a step forward, hoping to prevent such a thing.

The one called Frankie closed the distance separating her from her sister, her expression dark and forbidding.

The men cheered.

Frankie stood in front of her sister and planted her hands on her hips.

The cheering intensified.

Jacob held his breath, wondering if he'd be handing out dressings in the place of his future clinic.

Both women let out a whoop that sent shudders down Jacob's spine and, laughing uproariously, threw their arms around each other, administering vigorous back pats.

The crowd muttered their disappointment and most of them moved off to attend to their own affairs. That's when he saw the Indian woman again. Teena Crow, she had said was her name. Her dark eyes watched him with unwavering purpose. I will help you. You will help me. His face felt brittle. His eyes stung as he silently signaled his determination. It would not happen. He had come to provide scientific medical care. He tipped his chin in a gesture that said he wanted her to leave. She held his gaze without a flicker of concern.

Frankie and Margie watched the silent exchange. Then one stepped forward. "Margie Tucker at your service. Mack said you wanted someone to put up a building. This here is my sister, Frankie. She might lend a hand if she can manage to hold up her end."

He shook hands with the pair. "Appreciate your help." He glanced toward the last place he'd seen Teena. Only to check that she'd left, he assured himself. She was indeed gone. He glimpsed her heading down the trail leading over the mountain, her graceful gait unmistakable even at this distance. He felt satisfied she had moved on, though somewhat disquieted—only because he'd been rude. Out of necessity, he firmly explained to himself. He turned back to Margie. "I've got a young man with me who will assist you." He would pay Burns to work. Perhaps it would provide incentive for him to stay in Treasure Creek, rather than heading to the gold fields.

"The more the merrier. 'Specially as our younger sister seems more interested in her new husband than in giving us a hand." Margie's words growled out, making it sound as if having a husband was worse than having the plague. She turned to Frankie. "Why'd you let her up and marry Caleb anyways?"

Frankie sputtered. "I tried to convince her no Tucker woman needs a man, but you saw how stubborn she was."

Margie and Frankie rolled their heads and scratched their hairlines in mutual sadness.

Then Margie laughed. "We'll be glad of your friend's help. It'll make the job go faster, too. Now show us what you have in mind, so we can get to work while the sun shines." She roared with amusement.

Seeing his surprised and somewhat stunned reaction, she patted his shoulder. "My idea of a little joke. In the summer we have no shortage of sun." She slapped at the mosquitoes. "Nor these little blighters. You get yourself some of that stuff Teena Crow makes up. It helps keep them off."

"I don't want her around here."

The pair gave each other a glance rife with secrets. "You got something against her?" Margie's voice was soft, but Jacob didn't miss the warning note.

Not knowing the situation well enough to venture too far, he heeded the warning. "I'm a medical doctor prepared to use my understanding of scientific principles to help people. That woman's methods are based on superstition and—"

Margie nudged Frankie hard enough to cause her to stumble. "I think our city doctor will soon learn the difference between what matters and what doesn't. Don't you think so?"

Frankie guffawed. "There's those that look only at the outside and judge. Don't we know that?"

The pair slapped each other on the shoulders and laughed.

Margie grabbed some stakes. "Now, where do you want the building?"

He showed them what he had in mind and helped them stake the corners. When they finished, he went into the tent and nudged Burns from his sleep. Last night, when Jacob offered to pay him, the boy had eagerly agreed to assist with the construction.

"What's wrong?" Burns mumbled, burrowing deeper into the comfort of his bed.

"I thought you wanted to help." It was imperative to get the building up as soon as possible.

Burns groaned but made no move to rise.

“I can think of ways to make you get up.” Jacob stood over the boy, remembering the times he’d teased Aaron to get him out of bed. “I used to toss cold water in my brother’s face when he refused to wake.”

Burns squinted through one eye. “You wouldn’t.”

Jacob shrugged. “Not if you get up on your own.”

Burns moaned. “Is it even morning yet?”

“Open your eyes. Daylight is burning.”

A crash of dropped lumber jolted through the small area and Burns’s eyes flew open.

“What is that?”

“That, young man...” he pulled the covers from Burns “...is two women beginning to build the clinic.”

“Women?”

Jacob laughed. “You going to let them put you to shame?”

For one second, Burns looked as if the idea was unacceptable, and then he settled back into the warm furs.

“They’re so eager, let them do it.”

Jacob nudged the boy with the toe of his boot. “Need I get a pitcher of water?” He was more than half-serious. The boy needed to learn responsibility. Maybe if Jacob had been able to have more influence on making Aaron be a man, his brother would still be alive. But his parents had always excused Aaron’s behavior as exuberance. Jacob recognized it for what it was—irresponsibility. “You can choose to be a child and cuddle into your bed, or be a man and do some work.” Words he wished he’d spoken to Aaron when he had the chance. Though, likely, Aaron would have scoffed at him.

Burns sat up and scowled at Jacob. “I’m a man.” He scrambled to his feet and pushed out of the tent.

Relieved the boy had chosen work over sleep, Jacob checked on Donald, gave him some more laudanum then followed Burns outside, smiling when he saw the boy following Margie’s orders and laughing at her teasing.

He walked around the proposed clinic, envisioning the modern facilities. At the corner of the lot he paused and studied the trail up the mountain. It was hard to believe men and women, even children, had scaled it in the midst of winter. He’d seen the upper portion up close, seen the way people had to bend over to keep from falling off. He’d seen, too, the things that suddenly had little importance when they had to be packed on a person’s back up such an incline. So much stuff had been tossed aside that the place looked like a giant dump.

What must the natives think?

And yet Teena seemed eager to help.

Suspicion tugged at the back of his mind. Had she gone up the trail seeking injured people to practice her malarkey on? He thought of asking Margie and Frankie about her, but they had laughed like they shared some secret when he mentioned his concerns about the superstitious ways. Maybe he’d go find out for himself what she was up to.

“I’m going to see if anyone on the trail needs my help.”

Frankie and Margie stopped work. They glanced at each other, then Margie nodded. “Sure. You go do that.” Again, that darted look at her sister and the flicker of a smile between them. Then, as if sensing his curiosity about what they weren’t saying, they bent and picked up some boards.

“I’ll be back later.” As he walked, a hundred questions burned in his brain. What did they know about Teena? Were there other shamans in the area? He had come here for one thing only: to build a clinic and establish adequate medical care. Then he would return to Seattle. Without getting involved in any complications.

Teena stood over the unconscious man. The trail was too rugged, too rocky for her to help him here. The man was too heavy for her to move. She needed help, but a glance to the side, where men and women marched upward, caring only about the promise of gold across the mountains, and she knew she would not find help from them. Mr. McIntyre promised God would never fail her. And the white man in the hut tucked into the trees, who carried the Good Book up and down the trail, reading it to others and praying with them and for them, promised the same thing.

Teena had stopped to visit him on her way up the trail. Thomas Stone was a kind man with a troubled soul. But he loved the Tlingit and the gold seekers equally. Perhaps it was God's love that made his heart so open to others. Thomas Stone had prayed with her when she told him about Dr. Jacob and her desire to learn the white man's healing ways. "Pray and trust God to open the door for you," Thomas Stone said. "God hears your prayers and answers as He deems best."

Well, if God heard the prayers of a Tlingit woman and did what was best, she could ask Him to send help for this injured man. God, I need to get him where I can care for him. But I can't move him on my own. Please, send someone to help me.

The stream of gold-hunting humans kept trudging by, unmindful or uncaring about the injured man. She perched on a rock and waited.

"Siteen." It was her Tlingit name, spoken by her brother. God had sent help, and it was the best help she could ask for. Jimmy was strong as a papa bear. She sprang to her feet and clambered over the rocks to his side.

"I am glad to see you. I need someone to carry this man down the mountain."

Jimmy hesitated only a moment before he stepped off the trail, dropped to the ground the pack he carried and followed Teena to the injured man. He grunted as he heaved the man across his shoulders, then picked his way over the rocks toward Treasure Creek.

"I thought you would be helping the doctor," Jimmy said.

"He is not ready." Let Jimmy decide if she meant the building or something else.

"Remember what Father said. You cannot become a white woman."

Why did her family have such concerns? She had no desire to leave her native ways. "I only want to learn their healing ways. Besides, who would ever think I could be a white woman? Look at my eyes, my skin, my hair. I am native. Even if I wanted, I could not be anything else."

Jimmy made a noise in his throat that could be concern or doubt. "I don't want to see you searching for something that can't be yours."

"Do you mean learning from the doctor?" Had he heard Dr. Jacob's order to stay away?

"That. And more. These people are different than us, though some of their ways are interesting."

"Like what?"

"Reading. Don't you wish you could read from their books?"

"Yes. And I would like to read from Thomas Stone's Bible." She stopped so suddenly that Jimmy, following her, had to pull up hard.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing." She forced her feet to continue onward. She told herself it didn't matter that Dr. Jacob climbed up the trail, yet her lungs had grown strangely tight and she was again aware of a quickening in the bottom of her heart. He hadn't yet seen them. Perhaps they could slip by unnoticed.

"I think 'nothing' is the doctor. Why do you care so much?"

"Because he is the answer to my prayer to learn their healing ways."

"Make sure that's all it is."

"What more could it be?"

Jimmy sighed. "He is a man, even if he is white. And you are a woman. If you weren't my sister I would say you are pretty, but I will only admit you aren't hard to look at. But who knows what the white man sees. How he feels about us."

She didn't respond, because she knew what he meant. Whites and natives liked different things, even in what they admired in the looks of each other.

Dr. Jacob glanced up and saw her. Their gazes crashed like waves against the sand during a high wind. Her heart pounded insistently. He was white. He didn't welcome her presence. Yet she saw nothing in his looks she disliked. It was more than the square shape of his face, the dark mystery of his eyes, the gouge in his chin. It was what she felt—his devotion to helping others, his trueness, his...

She couldn't explain it, but she knew, she just knew, he was a man who could be trusted, a man who would honor his word, a man who would love deeply.

She jerked her gaze away. Her father had already promised her to a man in the Wolf clan. Even if he hadn't, Dr. Jacob had already made his opinion of Teena clear, and the very things she admired in him made it impossible for him to change.

Yet he was the answer to her prayers. Somehow she must convince him to let her learn from him.

He stepped off the trail and climbed toward them.

"He is going to help?" Jimmy asked.

"He's a white doctor." She didn't say more. Dr. Jacob seemed to think the Tlingit could offer nothing to a white man's needs. A white doctor for the white man. Would he also think a native healer for natives? Would he help a native if the need arose?

He reached them, and ignoring Teena, went directly to Jimmy's side. "Let me examine this man."

Jimmy stood still but did not lower his burden. "I'm taking him off the mountain."

"Let me make sure he's not in danger of bleeding to death."

Jimmy and Teena exchanged amused looks. As if they would not attend to a wound before they moved the man. But Jimmy waited as Dr. Jacob lifted the man's eyelids and felt his head, then checked the rest of his body for wounds. He found nothing. Teena could have told him he wouldn't. She'd located only a lump on the back of the man's head.

"Could you carry him down to the clinic?"

At least he hadn't ordered Jimmy to do so. And Jimmy didn't ask where this clinic was. They all knew Dr. Jacob spoke more from hope than fact.

Jimmy agreed.

Dr. Jacob turned to Teena. "Is this your man?"

Teena giggled. "He is my brother, Jimmy."

Dr. Jacob nodded, somehow approving her answer, and reached out to shake hands with him.

Jimmy barely touched the man's outstretched hand then resumed his journey. Teena followed at his heels, Dr. Jacob close behind. She felt him with every breath, every thought. Somehow she had to convince him to teach her. Perhaps this would be her opportunity.

She fell back so she could speak without raising her voice. "You will need someone to watch him. I could do so." She allowed herself to meet his gaze briefly, before giving her attention back to the rocky path. But it was long enough to see a flash of possibility, and her heart swelled with hope.

"Would you promise not to use any native medicine?" He said the word in such a way she knew it must hurt him to say it.

"I have nothing to help a man who cannot wake up."

"That isn't what I asked."

She could not forsake the things she'd learned, the ways of nature that worked. He took her silence for what it was—refusal to agree to his conditions. "We can learn from each other."

"It cannot be." He clambered past her and followed on Jimmy's heels as they picked their way downward and reached the packed level path beside the town. A few minutes later, they reached the crowded lot that had been empty just two days ago.

"Bring him in here." Dr. Jacob lifted the tent flap. Jimmy ducked inside and lowered the injured man to the fur bedroll.

Teena followed and glanced around. Donald lay on a cot, his color good, his breathing easy. What did the doctor give for pain, if he wouldn't use the plants and herbs nature provided?

Dr. Jacob knelt beside the man from the trail as Jimmy stepped back. He lifted the eyelids again and pressed his fingers to the man's wrist.

Teena studied his every move, wondering why he did those things and wishing she dared ask. Perhaps if she remained quiet and motionless he would not notice her presence and give her another of those dismissive looks he'd given her earlier in the day.

Again, he pulled out the thing that fit into his ears and listened to the man's chest. "He seems fine, except for his unconsciousness."

Teena pressed back a desire to giggle. She could have told him all that. She sobered. Did he have a way to bring the man awake? All she knew to do was wait for nature to heal him or not.

"I'll watch him and wait for him to regain consciousness."

Teena swallowed back her disappointment. It seems the white man had no cure for this, either.

Dr. Jacob glanced at Donald, again pressed his fingers to the inside of the wrist, then he rose to his full height, brushing his head on the top of the tent and faced Jimmy. "Thanks for bringing him here." His gaze slid past Jimmy to Teena, and his gratitude shifted to disapproval. He didn't say a word, but his eyes signaled she wasn't welcome.

Silently, she backed from the tent.

Jimmy followed. "Why are you afraid of him? I thought he was meant to teach you their ways."

She met his hard gaze without flinching. "He does not know it yet." But if God could answer her prayer by sending the doctor, God would surely make the man agree to teach her.

Jimmy shook his head and strode back up the trail to retrieve his pack.

The Tucker sisters—the two who had not yet married and had vowed to never do so—nailed together walls for the new clinic. Teena moved closer. "Thought you were supposed to be working on the church. Didn't Mack decide it was time for a little room on top for a bell?"

Margie paused to answer Teena's question. "Mack decided this here clinic was more important. He gave us permission to leave the church work for the doctor. We don't care who pays us to work."

Frankie didn't stop adjusting the board, readying it to nail into place. "The doctor's young friend was helping, but he ran off two minutes after Jacob was out of sight. Ain't seen him since." She kicked the board into place. "About as bad as Lucy. Seems to me she runs off at the least little excuse."

Margie made a noisy sound. "Gotta make a meal for my man." The way she spoke told Teena she mimicked her sister.

Frankie kicked the board again unnecessarily. "You think the man could make himself a sandwich if he was hungry."

The pair looked as unhappy as twin bears perched on a beehive.

An idea sprouted and blossomed in Teena's busy brain. Dr. Jacob had ordered her to stay away from his patients, and he likely also meant the clinic. But the clinic was nothing more than an idea and hope right now. And if she assisted Margie and Frankie...well, surely he would see it was to his benefit. "I could help you."

Both Frankie and Margie stopped and stood like twin rocks. They stared at her, then shifted and considered each other. Margie turned back to Teena. "You know anything about building?"

"I've helped my father."

Again the sisters silently assessed each other, as if wondering what experience helping her father constituted.

Margie nodded. "I 'spect you can do as well as any man. We accept."

"Thank you." She looked about her. What did they want her to do?

Margie didn't let her wait long to find out. "Grab that board and haul it over here, will you?"

Teena did as instructed, and in a few minutes was wielding a hammer and driving home nails. She giggled softly. Driving them home was perhaps a bit of exaggeration. She missed as often as she hit the nail.

Frankie let out a hearty laugh. “You’ll catch on soon enough. Ain’t nothing a woman can’t learn to do, so far as I can tell.”

Teena grabbed the hammer with both hands and aimed at the nail, giggling when she again missed.

Margie moved to her side. “Hold the hammer like so.” She pulled Teena’s hand lower on the handle. “Swing with your arm.”

Teena did as instructed and soon had the nail in place. “There.”

Margie chuckled. “You’ll do just fine.”

Teena felt Dr. Jacob’s presence, and without turning, knew he had stepped from the tent. All the while she banged on the nail she’d been acutely aware of him. Between blows to the wood, she heard his murmurs as he dealt with the two injured men. But she dared not tiptoe closer to listen.

“Margie,” he called, his voice soft but insistent. “May I speak to you?” He tipped his head toward the other side of the tent, indicating she should join him there.

Margie didn’t move. “Ain’t nothing you need to say in private.”

Dr. Jacob considered the three women, then nodded. “Very well.” He cleared his throat. “I’m a medical doctor—”

“Yeah. We know.”

He went on as if Margie hadn’t interrupted him. “I believe in science. Superstition is not only ignorant but harmful.”

Teena knew he meant her. Nevertheless, she stood her ground. Whether or not he liked it, and even if he denied it and fought against it, she was determined to learn his ways of healing. If that meant learning to hammer a nail and build a white man’s house, she would do that, too. But she would not give up.

Margie and Frankie now stood side by side. “Say what you mean, Doc.” It was obvious Margie spoke for both of them.

“I told you, I don’t want a shaman near my patients.”

Margie and Frankie dropped their tools and looked about ready to get mad.

Teena started to back away.

“You’re not leaving.” Margie’s words stopped Teena’s intended escape. Margie hadn’t shifted her gaze from Dr. Jacob. “Seems to me, if you’re interested in getting this here clinic built in a timely fashion, you can’t be so all-fired concerned about who does the work. So long as it’s getting done.” Although her voice was low, Teena knew it held a load of anger.

She didn’t dare breathe, feeling as if her life hung in the weight of Margie’s deceptively soft words. Neither Margie nor Frankie moved, awaiting Dr. Jacob’s decision. Teena knew the Tucker sisters well enough to know they would leave in the blink of an eye if Dr. Jacob pushed them the wrong way.

She watched the doctor as he assessed the sisters, knew he understood their silent ultimatum and was considering how to best deal with it.

When Jacob sucked in air like a drowning man rescued from the waters, she knew he realized his limited options. “I have no problem with her helping you.”

He gently emphasized the word you, making it clear she could help them but not him. His words clawed into the secret depths of her heart.

Ignoring the way her eyes stung, she picked up another nail and pounded it into place. When she finished and glanced to where Dr. Jacob had stood, he was gone, and Margie and Frankie were busy measuring a board.

Chapter Three

Jacob strode toward the waterfront, as if he needed to put out a fire. Anger burned through his veins. He fought for control. He did not want a shaman hanging about his clinic. If his brother had received real medical help he would likely be alive still.

Jacob had tried to convince Aaron not to go north seeking gold, but once Aaron made up his mind to do something he refused to listen to reason. He'd been the same since he was a child.

He searched through the crowds. Where was Burns? He'd agreed to help with the construction of the clinic, though it wasn't the building he was concerned about as much as Burns's safety.

He went as far as the beginning of the trail without a sign of Burns. Surely the boy wouldn't head up there on his own.

Jacob sighed. The boy would do anything that entered his mind, without regard for the consequences. If only Jacob could instill a little sense of responsibility in him before he made a foolish decision. He realized his desire sprang not only out of concern about Burns, but also from a wish that he could have prevented Aaron from a choice that lead ultimately to his death.

He spun on his heel and took a slightly different route, hoping to locate Burns among the throng, but he passed the place he'd started without any sign of the boy. He pressed onward. Again he reached the end of the beach, and saw a trail leading through the trees and followed it. A few hundred yards later, the path opened to a clearing with several wooden structures, each with a narrow, low door but no windows. Smoke drifted from one building.

The place was quiet. Peaceful. No gold seekers here. A movement caught his attention. A man sat in the sunshine, a basketlike hat on his head. The man was an elderly native. Was this where Teena's family lived? It suited her. He could imagine her quiet and serene in this setting. Nothing seemed to ruffle her. Not even his rudeness. He considered himself a gentle, refined man, and yet something about her brought from him harsh, unkind words. It didn't make sense.

Suddenly, he realized his patients were alone while he stared at an old man rocking in the sunshine. He turned and rushed back through the crowds, seeing nothing of Burns as he trotted to the clinic. Already the walls began to take shape. The three women worked side by side. Margie turned to Teena and laughed.

He slowed momentarily, wishing he knew what Teena said. Then he dismissed such foolishness and hurried on.

He didn't notice Burns until he reached the boardwalk. The boy sat cross-legged on the ground, playing with a pup. When he saw Jacob he jumped up, clutching the pup in his arms.

"Look what I got."

Jacob jerked to a stop. "A dog?"

"Some man gave it to me. Said he didn't want to drag around a useless pup. Isn't he sweet?" Burns scrubbed the animal's ears and gave Jacob pleading eyes.

Aaron had once dragged home a sorry-looking pup and begged to keep it. He'd spent hours with the animal, but it wasn't healthy, and died despite everyone's efforts. Aaron had cried. He'd cursed God when Mother and Father couldn't hear him. Said it was unfair. Jacob had been powerless to help either the sick pup or his heartbroken brother.

"He looks like he'd grow to the size of a horse. I think you'd better take him back." His words, fueled by a thousand regrets and a lifetime of sorrow over his brother, were harsher than he intended.

Burns drew back. The three women stopped work to watch the proceedings.

"I aim to keep him. I'll move to the beach if you won't have him here."

Jacob could not imagine how the boy would survive out there. In about two days he would be starving, and if anything like Aaron, too proud to admit his mistake. "Who will feed him? And you?"

Burns's expression revealed his worry about food. After all, food, and plenty of it, were essential for growing boys and...Jacob sighed...and growing dogs. He didn't want to do anything he'd live to regret, and he knew if he allowed Burns to stalk off in anger, he would regret it in the depths of his soul. He examined the pup. He'd at least make sure it was healthy before he gave his verdict. The pup's fur was silky and thick. It glistened, indicating he'd been fed a good diet. Jacob lifted the pup's lips and examined his mouth. The pup wriggled eagerly and tried to lick his hands. "He seems in good health." The last thing he wanted was to watch another young man put through the pain of losing a pet. "I'll make you a deal." This was an opportunity to help the boy learn a little responsibility.

Burns brightened.

"I'll let you keep the dog here on one condition."

"I'll do anything. Just name it."

Burns had already agreed to work on the clinic, but seemed to have forgotten. Perhaps this would add a needed incentive to get him more involved. "Work on the clinic as you agreed."

Burns nodded. "Then he can stay?"

"I would expect you to work hard. Help build the clinic and give me a hand with the patients."

Burns looked agreeable until Jacob mentioned the patients. "I ain't never taken care of a sick person." He sounded like he'd as soon starve to death.

"I will teach you." He recalled Teena's desire that he teach her. He tried not to glance at her, but couldn't stop himself. Would she resent his offer to Burns? But she studied the ground and he couldn't see her expression. For some reason, he wished things could be different. However, there was no way of changing the facts. What she wanted was impossible. She had no education. Likely couldn't read. Trusted superstition rather than science for treatment, clung to her old ways. He forced his attention back to Burns. "Is it a deal?"

Burns nodded. "Deal."

"Fine. Then tie the pup and come help me."

Burns found a bit of rope and tied the pup to a stake. He spent considerable time patting the animal and reassuring it. If he gave Jacob's patients half the attention he gave the dog, Jacob would have no cause for complaint.

He didn't wait for Burns to finish with his pet, but ducked inside. Donald had rolled to his side, obviously feeling less pain. Good news there.

The other man breathed regularly but showed no sign of opening his eyes.

Jacob had finished his examination by the time Burns entered. As he explained what he expected from the boy, he heard the women talking as they worked. He couldn't make out their words but recognized Teena's musical, soft voice, a marked contrast to the heavier, heartier tones of the Tucker sisters.

He forced his mind back to the task of showing Burns how to check each man and care for any pressing personal needs.

Burns nodded, eager to earn the right to keep the dog, but shrinking back at the idea of touching either of the men.

Jacob tried to reassure him. "It's only when I need to be away." He would hang out a shingle today. People would realize they could come to him, but he would still have to tend to the sick and injured in their makeshift homes and on the trail.

"I'm going to name him Yukon. After the gold field."

Jacob knew then and there that the dog would get more attention than any patients.

"I'm going to teach him all kinds of tricks."

"Teach him to obey your commands. It's the only way to keep him safe."

Burns considered the suggestion. "Right. He will learn to sit, stay and follow. He'll be a good dog." He threw an arm across Jacob's shoulders in an awkward hug. "You won't be sorry. I promise." The boy stepped back, embarrassed by his show of affection. "Can I go now?"

Jacob nodded. Burns dashed out. Jacob heard him talking to the dog and scrubbed at his chin. He was glad to be able to have a small part in bringing some happiness to the boy. From what Burns had told him, he knew the boy had lost his mother a number of years ago, and his father was cruel and neglectful. No wonder he was anxious to get to the gold fields. Jacob understood the hunt for gold was of minor importance to Burns. Escape was the foremost reason for the trip to Treasure Creek.

Teena's soft voice reached him and Burns answered. He strained to hear what they said but couldn't make it out. He tried to decide if he minded Burns and Teena striking up a friendship; he found he minded, but his reason didn't make sense. He didn't feel lonely. Didn't wish he could enjoy a friendship with...

With a muttered sound of disgust he turned his attention back to his patients. He was here only to establish adequate medical care. Nothing more.

The next morning, he rose from his crowded quarters to the welcome noise of building. Somehow the pup had made it indoors and curled up beside Burns.

"Burns."

The boy jerked to a sitting position, guilt flooding his gaze. "He was crying. He's not used to being alone." He wrapped a protective arm about the pup and received a generous licking.

Jacob struggled to contain his amusement at the eager affection between the two. But he must bear in mind his responsibility to his patients. "Nevertheless, this is a hospital for now, and animals aren't allowed."

Burns scrambled to his feet. "Come on, Yukon. Let's go outside."

Jacob wanted to call the pair back. Tell them to make themselves at home. Instead, he turned to the unconscious man, noted his eyes flickering. He tried to say something.

"Rest," Jacob soothed. "You're safe. I'm a doctor. I'll take care of you."

The man let out a deep sigh and closed his eyes.

It was a good sign. Relief filled Jacob's lungs. He ducked outside, wishing he could share the good news about the patient with someone who understood. He saw Margie and Frankie and a third woman they introduced as their sister, Lucy—a gentler, softer version of the older two. But no Teena. "I thought Teena was going to help you." He assured himself it wasn't disappointment that made him sound so harsh and disapproving.

Margie and Frankie both considered him with dark, unreadable expressions, then Margie laughed. "Missing her, are you?"

He snorted. "It was just a comment."

The pair roared with unexplainable laughter. Lucy looked baffled.

"Okay, Doc. If you say so. She's gone up the trail to see if anyone needs her help." Margie waved toward the Chilkoot. "Does it regular-like. Though I don't understand why she should care about the people tearing up their land, and most of them rude to her on top of it."

She'd gone up the trail again. Seems she was bent on practicing her form of medicine, even with a real medical doctor now available.

Concern for his fellow man was the only reason he hurried along the trail. Not a stupid desire to hear her soft voice, see her gentle smile, look into her bottomless eyes.

All that mattered was doing his job. Doing it well and living up to his expectations of himself.

Teena climbed until she reached the river. There she left the trail and found a place away from the clump of many booted feet. She sat down and watched the water sing past. She tried to sort out her thoughts, make sense of the strange feelings rolling through her.

Dr. Jacob was a hard man. A white man with no regard for anything but his own interests. Not that it mattered. All she wanted from him was a chance to learn what he knew about healing. Nothing more.

Yet she'd watched the way he was with Burns and the pup, and she had seen so much more than a white man with white man's greed. She'd seen the flash of tenderness as he watched Burns,

the gentleness in his hands as he examined the pup, the kind determination as he talked to the boy about caring for the animal, quietly teaching responsibility as her people did when children were much younger.

Afterwards, when Burns had come out to play with the dog, she told him about fishing for food for the animal. About teaching it to remain at home when ordered to do so. “Is Dr. Jacob your brother or father?” she asked.

Burns grinned. “Neither. Only met him on the boat on the way up here.” His expression grew dreamy. “I wish he was, though. He cares about me more than my father does. Ain’t got no brother.”

That one statement—I wish he was—sat like something warm and sweet in the secret corner of her heart. A man who won the respect of someone younger deserved admiration.

Even if he saved his kindness for the white man.

She sighed. Life used to be so simple. So straightforward. She knew what was expected of her—work hard to feed the family, respect her elders, marry the man of her father’s choosing, follow the events of each season. But things had changed.

She brought her attention back to the trail. This hungry search for gold had turned her life upside down, shifted her world sideways. Things would never be the same.

As if her thoughts had brought him toward her, Dr. Jacob climbed the path. He didn’t look her way. She wondered that the silent cry of her soul at seeing him didn’t draw his attention to her. Who was this man? Why should she feel such a stirring inside at the mere sight of him?

She didn’t move. Barely breathed. She wanted him to see her. But hoped he wouldn’t. She was not in a mood to deal with the way his eyes alternately flashed disapproval then darkened with some kind of interest. Or was it curiosity?

He passed out of sight.

She sat there a moment or two, waiting for her insides to calm, her reason to return. Then she pushed to her feet and headed down the trail to help with the clinic construction.

The three Tucker sisters were hard at work in the afternoon sun when she reached the clinic. Perhaps they no longer needed her help. She hung back to watch and wait.

“Burns,” Frankie called. “I could use a hand with this here board.” The boy hurriedly left his pup.

As Lucy waited for Burns to do Frankie’s bidding, she pulled out a pretty white hankie from her pocket and patted her brow. Both her sisters stared.

“What?” Lucy demanded.

“What good’s that little bit of cloth?” Frankie appointed herself spokeswoman. “Where’s your bandanna?”

“I gave it to Caleb.”

“Why?” Both her sisters looked her up and down like she had suddenly changed form before their eyes.

“Well, for goodness’ sake. Can’t a woman give her man a gift?” She jammed the hankie back in her pocket and picked up a hammer to drive a nail into a board with such fury that Teena flinched.

Burns stared wide-eyed. He glanced over his shoulder, as if wondering how to escape these rowdy women.

Margie and Frankie considered each other then shrugged, gave a sad shake to their heads and returned to work.

“You want to help me, Teena?” Margie gave Lucy a sideways look.

Teena worked alongside Margie for some time. “You remind me of a friend I used to have,” Teena said, after the tension had melted away.

Margie removed nails she held in her mouth to ask, “A good one, I hope?”

“Sarah McIntyre. Her father taught us about Jesus.” As they worked together, she told Margie about the white friend she’d had as a child.

“Sounds like she accepted you the way you are.”

Teena considered the words. “She never saw me as an Indian, but as a friend. I never saw her as white, but a friend.”

“That’s special. Not often we find such acceptance. I can tell you, not everyone sees past the rough exterior of the Tucker sisters to our hearts.” Margie shook her head. “I never figured any of us would marry. I don’t aim to give up my independence for the sake of a man.” She gave Lucy a sideways look, but Lucy either didn’t hear or decided to act as if she hadn’t. “How ’bout you, Frankie?”

“Not me either.” Frankie puffed out her lips and made a rumbling noise. “I got bigger aspirations.”

Teena wondered what those aspirations were, but she didn’t have the right to ask.

Apparently, Margie thought she did. “You still hankering for a man’s job?”

“Ain’t no man’s job I couldn’t do,” Frankie muttered, her shoulders rigid.

Lucy stopped work. “It’s not about proving you’re equal to a man. It’s about sharing—” She patted her chest then jerked her eyes downward and stopped speaking.

Teena waited, wanting to know what made Lucy smile like she had a special secret, but Lucy didn’t continue. Instead, she set her hammer on a stack of wood.

“I’m going home to make supper for Caleb.”

Frankie and Margie both stared after her departing figure. “Well, if that don’t beat all,” Frankie mumbled, then resumed work.

Teena and Margie did the same, the unnatural silence broken by hammer beats. For Teena’s part, she longed to ask Lucy if being married to Caleb brought that sweet smile to her lips.

“Anyone there,” one of the men in the tent called out.

“Guess he’s calling you,” Frankie said to Burns.

“I don’t know what to do for them.” The boy looked scared half to death.

Teena itched to step inside and offer her comfort, but she feared Jacob’s anger. Feared triggering it would end forever any hope of being allowed to learn from him. However, Burns’s discomfort was very real. “Just ask what he wants. Perhaps only a cup of water.”

Burns’s eyes were wide as he ducked into the tent. Teena listened from outside. If she was needed she would disregard Dr. Jacob’s order to stay away from his patients. Not even to please him would she ignore a person’s sufferings. Not even a white man’s.

Burns stepped out in a few minutes. “Donald wanted a drink just like you said.” He glanced at the trail. “I wish Jacob would get back. The other man opened his eyes and stared at me.” He shivered. “It gives me the creeps.”

Teena knew of a ground root that would ease the man’s worry as he recovered his mind, but she dared not give it to him. Perhaps she could make a tea using it, and ask Burns to get the man to sip it. She took a step toward her sack of remedies.

“Here comes Jacob,” Burns yelled. “Hurry up. That man is waking up.”

Teena slid back to Margie’s side and pretended an interest she didn’t feel at the position of a board.

Margie considered her. “You want to help, don’t you?”

“I want to learn.”

“He will come around. He’ll soon ’nough see that you can’t judge a person by the outside.”

Teena wished she could believe it was so.

She edged closer to the tent to listen to the conversation inside. She heard Dr. Jacob murmur to the patients but she could not tell what he did. She closed her eyes and imagined him touching the men’s wrists, pressing that little instrument to their chests. Why did he do those things? What did he learn about illness in doing so? What did he give Donald for pain? Did it work better than what she used? Why?

Margie and Frankie hammered away at the rising walls. The noise made it impossible for Teena to hear Dr. Jacob. God, the Creator, Mr. McIntyre said You would listen to me, even if I am a Tlingit. Hear my prayer. Let me learn from this man. Would He truly listen to a Tlingit woman—a superstitious healer, as Dr. Jacob described her?

“Burns,” the doctor called. “I need your help.”

Burns reluctantly ducked inside as Teena watched in longing frustration.

A few minutes later, the tent flap parted and Dr. Jacob and Burns shuffled out, the man who had lain without moving between them. He blinked in the sunshine and drew in a long breath, then murmured, “The sun feels good.”

Dr. Jacob settled him against a roll of canvas and handed him a cup of water. “Can you tell us your name?”

“Name’s Emery Adams.” He sounded weary, but at least he knew his name.

Teena slid a happy glance toward Jacob and caught her breath at the look he gave her. “It is good he knows his name,” she murmured.

“It is very good.” His gaze held hers, silently rejoicing. She couldn’t force her eyes away. Couldn’t think of anything but the shared gladness of this good news. At that precise moment, something happened she was at a loss to explain—a connection she’d never felt with anyone else, a spiritual experience almost as profound as when Mr. McIntyre told her about Jesus.

She would never again feel the same inside.

Jacob turned away first. “How did you injure yourself?”

Emery snorted a bitter laugh and grabbed at his head. “Oh, it hurts.”

Jacob touched the man’s shoulder. “Take it easy.”

Emery closed his eyes a moment. “I was attacked. Someone sneaked up and hit me. I heard them coming. Gussed what they had in mind but didn’t have time to defend myself.” He glanced about. “Don’t suppose you found any of my belongings with me?”

“I didn’t find you.” Jacob didn’t look toward Teena for two heartbeats. “This woman did.” He nodded toward her. “Did he have anything with him?”

She stepped forward and faced the man. “Nothing.”

Emery’s eyes narrowed. “Course not. Indians believe in finders keepers. No respect for a man’s belongings.”

Teena felt his dislike of her. Knew it was based on her being a Tlingit and no other reason. Little did he understand that a Tlingit’s honor would never allow them to touch the belongings of another.

Nor would there be thanks from this man. Not even for saving his life. She moved away, out of his sight.

Frankie edged closer. “Did you get a look at your attackers?”

“Fraid not.”

“Can you remember anything at all? A word? Their boots? Anything at all?”

Emery squinted. “I seem to remember one of them saying Harmon. I don’t know if it’s a name or what.”

Frankie squatted to eye level with Emery. “Can you describe any of your belongings? Something that makes them unique?”

Emery patted his vest pocket. “My watch. It was a gift from my father.” He described it.

“Good. That’s something to go on.” Frankie stood. “I’ll trot on over to the sheriff’s office and let him know.”

She returned shortly with Sheriff Ed Parker, who made a few notes.

“I’ll pass the information along. Someone will likely spot the watch. We’ll do our best to find it and the men who robbed you.” He touched the brim of his hat and left.

“That’s enough for one day. It’s time to get you back to bed.” Jacob signaled to Burns and they helped the man back into the tent.

Teena and the Tuckers returned to work.

Teena knew the moment Jacob stepped out of the tent, even though she couldn't see him. She didn't need to. Her heart felt him with every beat.

He poked his head around the wall she worked on.

The hammer hung in midair—halfway between her nose and a nail she intended to pound. But she couldn't move. He was too close. And he watched her.

"I'm sorry," he murmured. "Emery had no right to accuse you of stealing. Please forgive him."

Her gaze sought his. He looked so regretful it stung her heart.

"It's not your fault. Why should you be sorry?"

He shrugged and gave a crooked smile that melted every remnant of resentment at Emery's accusations. "I just feel I should apologize for his behavior."

His smile widened and the inside of her head felt washed with honey. "Apology accepted." She knew her smile was as wide as his.

Suddenly his lips flattened, his expression darkened and he turned away.

She hit the nail as hard as she could.

He might apologize for others, but it didn't change how he viewed her. Why did she think it would?

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