# Chapter Eight

June, 1888

Leadville

In an upstairs room in the parlor house, Richard Rutledge smoked a cigarette and savored his whiskey. He turned his languid gaze upon Faye. She was dressing herself in the lamplight. He watched as she slowly and methodically restored her appearance from its highly disheveled state. She was an attractive young woman with alabaster skin and expressive eyes. Her seductive figure would set any man aflame; wide hips, shapely thighs, slender waist, round breasts. He hated when she covered herself. The red satin bedspread was thoroughly rumpled. A pillow lay on the floor, his own clothes were carelessly strewn about. Their coupling had been impassioned, intense, and fevered. His time spent with Faye had brought this day to a highly satisfactory end. He was growing to enjoy her company too much. All those years without a woman would do that to a man. He reminded himself that her association with him was purely business.

His evening had started at the Black Diamond Saloon. It was payday for the workers at the Maid of Erin Mine. The crowd that had gathered to drink, gamble, carouse and let off steam had soon turned rowdy. Billy Allen, a faro dealer, was accused of cheating. A fight broke out. The main rabble rouser was ejected from the saloon with the speed of a cannonball. In the midst of the fracas, someone’s gold pocket watch fell to the floor unnoticed, and landed right where Rutledge stood. He scooped it up unseen and slunk back into the shadows as the brawl continued. The police were summoned and that is when Rutledge decided to leave. It was a wise choice. For Rutledge, it was best not to be in the crosshairs of law enforcement. There was always trouble brewing somewhere in Leadville. The sign that hung above the piano in the saloon was not a joke. It read: *Please do not shoot the pianist, he is doing his best*. Leadville had more than its share of schemers, rogues and greedy desperados and they all pursued one thing – a quick windfall with very little effort. Someone was always out to cheat someone else. Gold ‘fever’ was like a blight that brought out the worst in people and alcohol fueled the grievances of those who felt cheated. When situations got out of hand, it was best to step away. As Rutledge had it figured, there was quieter entertainment and more delightful company to be had at the parlor house. By the time he left the saloon, it was the ‘changing hour’ at the parlor house, when the girls would come on for the night shift.

Faye sat on the edge of the bed and pulled her hair into a tight bun, except for a few loose tendrils that escaped their pins. She smoothly rolled one dainty stocking up her pretty little leg and reached for the garter buckle. Rutledge had never really taken notice of the buckle before, but saw there was an inscription.

“Your garter buckle, there’s something written. What does it say?” he asked.

“Well, if you must know, *All hope abandon, ye who enter here*,” she replied.

“That’s bull shit,” he said, taking another gulp of whiskey.

“Oh, I don’t know,” she replied. “The visitors that came by today would seem to confirmate it,” she continued. “A couple of them evangelists visited here. They did their best to try and convert me and some of the other girls. I gave them each five dollars and told them not to bother with me as I already had a ticket to hell.”

“Giving them five dollars won’t make them go away. They’ll probably be pestering you again,” he said as he took another drag from the cigarette. “You are a fine looking woman, Faye. Why not give up this life? Go back to Denver or wherever and do something else. Why, you could easily find yourself a husband.”

“Is that a proposal?” she asked with a laugh. He rolled his eyes but gave no answer. Rutledge didn’t want the entanglements of a wife. “Anyhow, what would I do with a husband? I don’t like kitchens, only bedrooms and parlors. My years have been from the parlor chair to the bedroom door – from the door back to the chair. I’m doin alright. You don’t know what poverty is if you think I’ll ever go back to it.” She had a point. Faye made more money than he did. “Sides,” she added, surprising him, “I may have a chance to go to China – all the way to Hong Kong! Imagine me goin to the Orient! It would be a tall comfort to see something of the world.”

“You’re dreaming,” he said.

“Was my friend Laura who told me. There’s a man comes through all the mining towns once a year. He takes the girls up through Cheyenne and then over to San Francisco. Laura says he takes care of everything. She showed me pictures of the ladies out in those rickshaws with the natives. He takes two hundred girls at once, they all get ‘luck’ money and you should see their clothes!”

“Sounds risky to me,” he said. “Suppose you don’t like it, how will you get back?”

“Don’t know – haven’t thought that far,” she admitted.