

K. Bender

(Bloody Benders)

By Phoebe Von Satis

Chapter One

As the sun dipped below the horizon, casting long shadows across the dusty plains of the American Midwest, Kate Bender led a young man through the dusty path towards the Bender farm. The man's steps were heavy with worry, his gaze fixed on the looming silhouette of the farmhouse.

"What can you tell me about the Benders?", the man's voice trembled with unease, his eyes darting around as if expecting danger at every turn.

Kate smiled with ease, "Folks say they keep to 'emselves, but they've always be'n accommodatin' to me. Pa Bender's a quiet man, Ma's got a sharp tongue, and Junior... well, Junior's a bit touch'd in the head. But they mean well. They'll welcome you's like one of their own"

The man's jaw eased slightly, yet his hands remained clenched. "You were right, the land out here is awfully splendor".

"I'm sure the fam'ly would love to help", Kate responded with her best attempt at a well-spoken accent.

As they reached the front porch, the air grew thick with palpable tension. Kate hesitated momentarily before knocking on the weathered door, the wood groaning in protest. A muffled sound came from inside the house, followed by a low hum that sent a chill down the man's spine. The hairs on the back of his neck stood on end. Kate turned and exchanged a calming glance with the man beside her. Kate knocked again, only this time, the door knocked open.

"We have to go in," the man's voice was strained, his resolve wavering. "We've come all this way"

Kate pushed open the door, the hinges squeaking. The interior of the farmhouse was dimly lit, the air heavy with the scent of decay and something far more sinister. Shadows danced along the walls as they stepped inside, the floorboards creaking beneath their feet. The man's eyes scanned the room, taking in the eerie sight of mismatched furniture and dusty trinkets that littered the space. A figure emerged from the darkness, a stooped silhouette that sent a

chill down the man's spine. It was Pa Bender, his eyes devoid of warmth as he regarded them with a steely gaze.

"What brings you to our humble abode?" Pa Bender's voice was as cold as ice.

The man stepped forward, his jaw set in determination. "I was informed you were selling your land, and as fate would have it, I'm searching for something just like this".

Kate stood behind him, her amused grin growing as she locked eyes with her Pa. Pa Bender's lips curled into a sinister smile, revealing a row of yellowed teeth. "Only to the right buy'r, but it comes at a price".

The man's fists clenched at his sides, his eyes narrowing in suspicion. As tension filled the room, Ma Bender emerged from the shadows, her eyes sharp and calculating. "We don't take kindly to strangers poking around where they don't belong."

The man felt a knot form in his stomach as he watched the exchange unfold, the atmosphere growing more oppressive with each passing moment.

"I don't want any trouble, I assure you any offer I make will be serious", the man's voice wavered.

Junior Bender appeared from a dark corner, his eyes wide and vacant, a twisted grin on his face.

The man's heart sank at the sight of Junior, a sense of dread creeping over him. "Are you selling your land or not? Kate here informed me you were hurrying to sell. I've travelled a long way, so I demand to hear your price."

Junior's laughter echoed through the room.

Pa Bender's expression darkened, a dangerous glint in his eyes. "You demand? You have no right to demand anything in our home."

Kate could see the man's resolve faltering, his fear and frustration warring within him. He knew he was in grave danger, trapped in the clutches of the enigmatic Benders.

"We should leave," he whispered to Kate, his voice barely above a breath, "This ain't a place for us."

But before he could make his escape, the sound of heavy footsteps echoed through the house, drawing closer with each passing moment. Kate closed the door behind her, bolting it shut.

The man's eyes widened in realization, his gaze darting around the room for a means of escape. He was alone, and his chances of survival were slimming by the second.

As he turned to flee, a door creaked open across the room, revealing a hidden passage that led deeper into the darkness of the farmhouse. Footsteps echoed through the narrow corridor, the walls closing in around the man as he raced into the unknown. As he ran, he could hear the Benders' enraged shouts behind him, their voices filled with malice and fury. Kate's laugh reverberated through the narrow space, cutting sharp like a knife. The man's breath ragged as he pushed forward, his only goal to escape the clutches of the sinister family. Suddenly, he emerged into a dimly lit cellar, the air thick with the scent of damp earth and decay. The sound of dripping water filled the space, echoing off the stone walls.

The man's eyes scanned the shadows for a place to conceal himself. Minutes stretched into eternity as he waited, the sounds of the Benders' search growing fainter with each passing moment.

Just when he thought he was safe, a flickering light pierced the darkness, casting long shadows across the cellar floor. The man's hand tightened, his eyes wide with fear as the light drew closer, revealing the sinister figures of the Benders.

"You can't hide from us," Pa Bender's voice echoed through the cellar.

The man's breath caught in his throat, his body tense with anticipation as the Benders closed in on his hiding spot.

With a sudden burst of courage, the man stepped forward, his voice steady despite the fear that gripped him. "I won't let you take me."

Pa Bender's laughter filled the cellar. "You have no choice in the matter, boy. You're in our domain now."

"I won't go down without a fight!" The man shouted.

Junior Bender's eyes lit up with manic glee, a twisted smile stretching across his face. "Fight? Oh, this'll be fun."

The cellar erupted into chaos as the Benders lunged forward, their movements quick and predatory. The man fought back with all his might. The sound of grunts, groans, and desperate cries filled the air, mingling with the sickening thud of fists meeting flesh. Despite his best efforts, the odds were stacked against him as the Benders' strength proved too much to overcome. Pain shot through the man's body as he felt a blow land against his side, knocking the wind from his lungs. The man's voice rang out in a cry of anguish as he was overwhelmed by the sheer force of his attackers. In a last act of desperation, the man reached for a nearby object, his fingers closing around a heavy shovel that lay discarded on the floor. With a primal scream, he swung the shovel with all his might, the metal connecting with a sickening thud against one of the Benders, although it was too dark for him to witness which one.

The room fell silent as the Benders staggered back, shock writ large on their faces as they realized the tables had turned. Seizing the opportunity, the man fought with renewed vigor, his determination fueled by the taste of survival. Blow after blow rained down upon his enemies, the sound of impact echoing through the cellar like a drumbeat of defiance. Slowly but surely, the Benders began to falter, their once confident façade crumbling under the relentless assault. With a final push, the man forced the Benders back, their bodies retreating towards the cellar entrance.

"You can't defeat us," Ma Bender's voice was laced with venom as she glared at them with hatred in her eyes.

The man's gaze was steely as he stood tall, his resolve unshakable. "I already have. And I'll be back!"

The Benders stepped back, allowing the man to scamper up the stairs, leaving the darkness of the cellar looming behind.

But little did he know, Kate was awaiting him at the top of the stairs, hidden just out of sight. The Kansas sunlight grew bright like a reassuring angel, guiding the blood-covered man to his escape. As he reached the top of the stairs, Kate swung a hefty meat cleaver, which sunk into the man's neck like a knife into butter. The man's wide eyes locked with hers. Kate took great pleasure in watching the light leave his eyes. The rest of the Benders emerged from the darkness grins as wide as ever. They silently observed the man's corpse as the blood ballooned out from his neck, filling the uneven cracks in the cold floor below.

Chapter Two

Kate Bender scribbled hurriedly in her diary; her words were frantic as her mind sprawled across the pages. The homestead was silent in the fading light, concealing the dark secrets that lurked within its walls.

"Ma, we got another one comin' through t'morrow," Kate called out as she flipped through the pages of her diary, the worn leather cover creaking with each movement. "Make sure to set an extra place at the table."

Elvira Bender let out a low hum as she stirred a pot over the crackling fire, her eyes glinting a sinister light. "Another one, eh? Well, we'll make sure they don't leave empty-handed."

Junior Bender burst into the room, a wicked grin etched on his face. "I'll take care of 'em, Ma. Ain't nobody gonna suspect a thing."

John Bender entered next, his presence commanding the room. "Remember, no screamin' this time. We don't want the law sniffin' around."

With their faces twisted in anticipation, the family gathered around the table. The flickering fire cast eerie shadows on the walls, intensifying the ominous atmosphere of the homestead. Kate's fingers traced the edge of her diary, her eyes darting between her family members. She knew the routine all too well, the facade of hospitality that masked their true intentions. Elvira's stirring of the pot filled the otherwise silent room with a rhythmic sound, a steady beat that underscored the tension in the air. Junior's laughter echoed, his eyes gleamed with malice as he eagerly awaited the arrival of their unsuspecting guest.

Chapter Three

The sun cast long shadows across the barren fields as Kate Bender sat at her writing desk, the scratching of her pen against paper slicing the quiet. The long stretches of silence were abruptly broken by the sudden intrusion of John Jr., his voice eager and menacing.

"Sister, have yo' found us a new guest yet?" John Jr. demanded, his beady eyes glinting with anticipation.

Kate looked up from her diary, her expression unreadable.

"Not yet, Junior. Workin' on it. The last one weren't worth the risk" she replied coolly, her voice smooth and calculated.

Elvira's voice floated in from the hallway, cold and ominous. "We need fresh blood fer Pa's rituals."

The atmosphere in the room grew tense as their shadows loomed over them like devilish ghosts. The family were growing impatient, starved for another kill. Junior slammed the meat cleaver into the table, his frustration expelling with an aggressive thud. Kate gazed out of the window, her mind racing with her latest scheme. But something caught her eye. Her expression melted into a grown as she realised, *someone* was coming unannounced, their silhouette ballooning as they moved closer. Kate jumped out of her seat as she realised a man on a horse was approaching the homestead from afar.

"Quick! Y'all scatter", Kate yelled to her family, warning them of the potential danger.

The family were quick to listen, retreating to the shadows of the house with an eager smile, ready for another game of cat and mouse.

"I'll take care of 'em" Kate told the family as she composed herself.

She sprung outside with just enough time to pretend she hadn't seen him and was instead working on the overgrown yard. She heard the horse's hooves click and clack as it came to a halt at a safe distance away from her.

"This your homestead?" the man said.

Kate turned, showcasing a surprised performance.

"Name's Alexander. I'm an attorney, and my other brother, Samuel, is in the State Senate. Our brother is a doctor, if you happen to come by one," he introduced himself.

"Your parents must be greatly proud," Kate commented.

"I wish. We know some doctors get murdered for the medicine they carry.

"Isn't that terrible?" Alexander said.

"Surely is, sir" Kate agreed.

Alexander asked for her name, and after a playful exchange, she told him it was Vera. He complimented her name, and she responded with a witty remark. He then mentioned he would be dining at the Silver Bullet pub that night and invited her to join him.

"I'd love to join ya. But tonight is so far away. Why don't ya come inside? My parents and brother are in, maybe they've seen somethin'," Kate suggested.

Alexander smiled, remaining cautious but intrigued. "I'd like nothing more," he finally said. He tied his horse's reins around a small tree branch and followed Kate to the homestead, feeling a sense of blissful anticipation. Kate opened the stiff door and turned back, gesturing for Alexander to come in. He obliged as he stepped into the house.

"Home sweet home! They're around 'ere somewhere. Mom! There's someone I want ya to meet," Kate called out.

As Alexander walked in, he glanced back and saw his horse galloping away from the Bender's residence.

"Philip, hey! Come back!" he shouted, but the horse didn't respond. Turning to Kate, fear consumed his gaze. "I can't stay, I have to catch him. I'm so sorry! But, meet me at the pub at 7 o'clock."

"You got it," Kate replied.

Alexander ran off after his horse. Watching him from inside, Kate folded her arms and tapped her foot impatiently.

Chapter Four

On the imposing cast iron stove, a pot was boiling. Elvira stood next to the table, shucking corn while, nearby, John Sr. sat at the table; he was drinking from a coffee cup while packing his corn cob pipe with tobacco. John Jr. busied himself by arranging kindling for a fire in the fireplace. When Kate entered the kitchen, Elvira immediately turned to her.

"Cookin' beef stew. Can you help me with the corn?" she asked.

Kate spoke in a quiet tone, "Maw, I got some bad news. We might be in hot water." Kate rolled up her sleeves and pulled away the green leaves from a corn ear.

"How you figure?" Elvira asked.

"Met this young man," Kate began. John Jr. blew on the fire.

"I don't see no problem with that. Were you able to slit his throat?" John Sr. asked as he looked up.

Elvira's eyes lit up with excitement as she added, "Ya hit him over the head with a mallet?"

John Jr. interrupted, "I want two cobs, maw!"

Elvira grumbled, "Okay, okay. Wouldn't hurt ya to ask nicely."

"Please," John Jr. corrected himself, prompting Elvira to frown.

John Sr. puffed on his pipe, sending clouds of smoke into the air, the family remaining uncomfortably calm.

"Did you use rope and a wooden stake as a tourniquet?" John Sr. asked.

Kate set bowls and silverware on the table as she thought for a moment, "No, to all y'all's guesses."

"Were it Indians?" Elvira asked, correcting Kate on the proper placement of the knives. "Kate, the blade of the knives should face the bowl."

"Sorry, Maw. No, heaven forbid they ever pay us a call."

"Sit down now, y'all. Dinner is served," Elvira announced.

They gathered at the table and sat as Elvira ladled out the stew.

But John Sr. resumed his questioning. "Then who did you meet? And how are we in trouble?"

Kate took a deep breath. "Well, the pediatrician y'all killed has an attorney and a senator fer brothers, and they are searchin' the whole county fer him."

Elvira shrugged. "Well, so he's a blue blood. I sure don't see any problem. Let us pray."

They reached out for each other's hands and bowed their heads.

John Sr. led the prayer. "Heavenly Father, bless this food and let it nourish our bodies. Amen."

"Amen," they echoed. Everyone reached for their silverware but simultaneously burned their mouths with the hot stew. "Ouch!" they exclaimed in unison.

"It's hot, y'all. Shouldn't be in such a hurry; it's bad manners," Elvira scolded.

Kate continued, "Well, I just met the attorney's brother, Alexander, who invited me to the pub fer a drink. I tried to get him inside, but his damn horse ran off, and he chas'd him. He and I are suppos'd to meet at the pub. Now what?"

John Sr. warned, "Stay away, Katiebug. Do not go to that pub."

"But wouldn't it be a great idea to meet with him, then bring 'em back to meet you two, and when I get him alone..." Kate drew a finger across her throat.

Elvira disagreed. "That may've worked with his brother, but by now he might've told someone about you."

"I gave him a fake name," Kate pointed out.

John Sr. shook his head. "That would have worked if'n you got him in the house. Now that he's out, talking to folks, it could cause more problems if we kill him."

"Exactly," Elvira agreed. "What we need to do is pack up, maybe try and kill a couple more drifters. You know, to throw the scent elsewhere. We should split too. I'll leave you with John Sr., while your brother heads in another direction."

John Jr. protested, "Maw, that ain't no way fer us to be a family."

Elvira remained firm. "The law gonna bare down on us afore long, son. It'd be better if we get the hell outta Dodge and split up, going to different states."

John Sr. suggested, "Say, we'll head to Fort Worth, much harder fer Kansas lawmen to get to. Y'all can go toward Denver..."

Kate raised practical concerns. "That'd be more than a month ridin' e'ry day. What would we eat? Where would we stay?"

"I'm sure you could scare up somethin'. Or you can go back to St. Louis, as you please," John Sr. replied.

"That's only a might closer, Paw," John Jr. added.

Kate tried to calm them. "C'mon y'all, ain't no lawmen lookin' fer us. They lookin' fer Jesse James."

"No, they ain't. Already done kilt'n him. I read it in the Sumner City Gazette," John Sr. corrected her.

"So, I should sell myself in every saloon from here to Denver, or what?" Kate asked, frustrated.

John Jr. smirked. "That might work."

Elvira turned to Kate. "You best start looking fer another gentleman in town that you can brin' home."

John Sr. gave his final instruction. "This time make sure he ain't an attorney or senator, and mo' importantly, doesn't get away!"

Chapter Five

The evening settled in with a gentle breeze rustling the leaves outside the Bender homestead. Kate sat at the wooden table, her fingers tracing the intricate patterns etched into its surface.

“Pa, I understand y’all’s concerns,” Kate began, her voice soft yet determined. “But Alexander just wanted to talk.”

Pa's brow furrowed as he stared at Kate, his hands gripping the edge of the table. “We can't ‘fford to associate with him.”

Ma's gentle hum filled the room, a soothing melody amidst the tension. “Best to stay well away, Kate. We don't need no more trouble.”

Kate glanced around the room, her heart torn between her family's wishes and her curiosity. “I...I don't want to cause any trouble, but I can't shake this feeling that I should go. I could get information from him.”

Pa's voice hardened. “No, Kate. Too risky.”

Kate nodded, her disheartened gaze flickering between her family members. With a heavy heart, Kate retired to her room, the weight of her decision pressing down on her shoulders like a heavy shawl. The night stretched on, the silence broken only by the distant howl of a coyote. As the clock struck midnight, Kate found herself unable to sleep, her mind swirling with thoughts of Alexander and the forbidden invitation. No one had asked her before, and the likelihood is that no one ever will again. With a resolute sigh, she slipped out of bed and crept to the window, the cool night air brushing against her skin.

The moon cast a silvery glow over the landscape, illuminating the path to town like a beacon. Kate hesitated for a moment, her heart pounding in her chest. But the pull of the unknown was too strong to resist. She dressed quickly, her movements careful and deliberate, not wanting to wake her family. Kate slipped out the door and into the night. The journey to town was filled with the sounds of the night – the chirping of crickets, the rustle of leaves in the wind. As she approached the local pub, a wave of nervous excitement washed over her. The warm light spilling from the windows beckoned her inside, where the murmur of voices and clinking of glasses filled the air.

Kate pushed open the door, her heart racing as she stepped into the dimly lit establishment. The smell of ale and tobacco hung heavy in the air, mingling with the laughter and chatter of the patrons. At a corner table, she spotted Alexander, his dark eyes locking onto hers.

“I'm glad you decided to come,” he said, his voice smooth like honey.

Kate felt a blush creep up her cheeks as she took a seat opposite him, the wooden chair creaking beneath her.

“Couldn't resist” she admitted.

Alexander chuckled, the sound rich and warm. “Curiosity is a powerful thing, isn't it?”

They talked for hours, the conversation flowing effortlessly between them like a gentle stream. Kate found herself laughing at his jokes, her guard slowly melting away in his presence. But as the night wore on, a nagging voice in the back of her mind reminded her of the consequences of her actions.

“Listen. You know these parts better than anyone, wouldn't you say?” Alexander questioned.

“S'pose so.” Kate responded.

Alexander leaned in, whispering to her in confidence, “I want you to help me find my brother. I don't trust the folks around here”.

Kate hesitated her response. She finished her drink as Alexander leaned away.

“I should go,” she said, pushing back her chair and standing up.

Alexander reached out a hand to stop her, his touch sending a shiver down her spine. “So soon? You can stay longer, can't you?”.

Kate hesitated, the internal struggle evident in her expression.

Kate glanced at the clock, her eyes widening in realization. “I...I have to go. It's late 'n all.”

Alexander nodded, his gaze intense. “I understand. But before you leave, there's something I need to tell you.”

Kate's heart skipped a beat, her pulse quickening with anticipation. “What?”

Alexander leaned in close, his voice barely above a whisper. “Someone here knows something. And I'm going to find out where my brother is, with or without you.”

Alexander glared into her eyes, his expression hard to read. She wondered whether he was trying to catch her out, or whether she had, for the very first time, been naïve enough to blow the family's cover.

Kate's breath caught in her throat, the reality of her situation crashing down on her like a tidal wave.

“I need time to think,” she managed to whisper.

Alexander's smile widened, a wolfish gleam in his eyes. “Of course, Kate. Take all the time you need. I'll stop by sometime with some of my colleagues... We'll be sure to find out who did this, don't you worry.”

With a nod, Kate rose from her seat, her legs trembling beneath her as she made her way to the door. The night air outside was cool against her skin, a stark contrast to the heat of the pub.

Chapter Six

The familiar sight of the homestead came into view, the warm glow of the lanterns welcoming her back. The Kansas homestead stood silent, casting long shadows across the worn wooden porch. Kate's footsteps echoed softly as she made her way back to the home, her worried mind still buzzing with the encounter with Alexander. Pushing open the creaking door, she slipped inside, the door creaking softly behind her as she entered the dimly lit kitchen. Inside, she found her family gathered in the dimly lit living room. Pa was sharpening his tools at the table with a stern look on his face as he stared at Kate.

“Where have you been, Kate?” he demanded, his voice sharp and accusatory.

Kate hesitated, her mind racing for an explanation. “I...I went fer a walk. I need’d some fresh air.”

Pa's gaze bore into hers, searching for any hint of deceit. “Don't lie to me, Kate. I know where you' been.”

Kate felt a chill run down her spine, the weight of her secret threatening to spill out.

“I...I met Alexander at the pub,” she admitted, her voice barely above a whisper.

Ma's worried hum filled the room, a mournful sound that tugged at Kate's heart. “You what??” Ma's voice was filled with disappointment, her eyes brimming with unshed tears.

Pa's face darkened, his fists clenching at his sides. “You' betrayed us. You've put this ‘ole family in danger.”

Kate's heart clenched at his words, the reality of her actions hitting her like a physical blow.

“I...I didn't mean to cause no harm,” she stammered, her voice filled with regret, “I was just try’na get information from him”.

Pa's didn't respond, his fury bubbling beneath his skin.

The night dragged on, the tension thick in the air as the family grappled with the consequences of Kate's actions.

As the first light of dawn peeked through the windows, a decision weighed heavily on Kate's heart.

"I'll make this right," she vowed to herself, her voice steady despite the turmoil in her heart.

Kate crept downstairs so quietly that even the rodents couldn't hear her coming. With her dirt-stained diary, Kate scribbled a simple message. It was a final goodbye, for now at least, and a warning for her family to settle elsewhere while Alexander was hot on their case. She promised she would search for them when the time was right, but it was up to her to lead the trail elsewhere to make things right. As the sun began to rise, Kate emerged from the doorway barefoot, and crept over to a patient horse. She saddled up, her well-loved bag slung over her back that had been packed hastily. Kate rode stealthily, glancing around to ensure no one saw her, and holding onto the memories she cherished from within the home. It only took an hour or so before she reached Dodge City. As she rode along the muddy cobblestone street, the air in Dodge City was gray and thick. The clip-clop of her horse's hooves echoed against the pavement. She came to a halt outside the train station and once inside, Kate approached the ticket window.

"Ticket to Los Angeles... Please," she requested.

The clerk glanced up at her. "For one?"

Kate hesitated for what felt like a lifetime. She couldn't ignore the pull towards the unknown, towards a chance at a new beginning.

"Make it two" a familiar voice called from behind her.

It was Alexander, flustered from his search for her.

"Alexander?" Kate asked in disbelief.

Kate froze, her immediate thought that she had been caught. But he eased her worries, offering a soft hand on her shoulder.

"I enjoyed our delightful meeting at the pub last night. I've never met anyone like you, and, well there isn't anything for me here. Would you be opposed to me joining you?" He said with confidence.

It was no more than thirty minutes later when Kate found herself on the train to LA, Alexander by her side. The sun had emerged from the dense city smog, which Kate only took as a good omen. The train hurtled forward, its wheels clacking against the tracks in a steady rhythm as the landscape blurred past. Kate sat by the window, her gaze fixed on the horizon, lost in her thoughts. Alexander, with his piercing gaze and mysterious aura, sat next to her, his presence a comforting anchor in the storm of emotions raging within her.

Kate turned to him, her eyes reflecting a mix of fear and determination. "D'you believe yo' can outrun our past?"

He looked at her, his expression unreadable for a moment before a soft smile graced his lips. "I believe we can make peace with it, Kate.

The words washed over Kate like a soothing balm, easing the ache in her heart. She leaned back in her seat, a small sigh escaping her lips. "Thank yo' fer believin' in me, fer givin' me a chance," Kate hummed.

Alexander reached out and placed a hand on hers, a silent gesture of support. "We're in this together, Kate. No matter what."

Alexander sensed her inner turmoil and squeezed her hand gently. "You're stronger than you know, Kate. Don't let the shadows of the past dim your light." As the train thundered on, the sun dipped below the horizon. Kate was finally free.

But Kate's vision was over like a candle extinguishing. Kate was standing outside of the ticket booth, still in her moment of hesitation. Her venture with Alexander had been nothing more than a daydream. The all-too-familiar darkness crept in, enveloping the world in a cloak of uncertainty. Kate shivered, a chill running down her spine. The memory of her family's disapproving stares haunted her, their voices echoing in her mind.

"You can't escape who you are, Kate," Ma's stern voice echoed in her thoughts, a constant reminder of the past she sought to leave behind.

John Jr.'s anguished shouts and yells reverberated through her soul, a mix of anger and longing tugging at her heartstrings.

The clerk glanced up at her. "For one, miss?"

Kate nodded in response before sliding several wrinkled bills through the slot below the window with her trembling hands. She purchased the ticket to Los Angeles, feeling the weight of her decision settle on her shoulders like a heavy cloak. As the distant sound of the train whistle pierced the night, Kate stole one last glance at the city she was leaving behind. There was no going back.