BORN OF THIS FIRE

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In this book, terms such as *Negro, slave, colored*, and *Indian* mean no disrespect but reflect expressions of the era. May we continue developing language that honors all people.

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Dedication

To Mary Ann Sachse Brown, whose friendship and intrepid research have inspired me to write this trilogy

Chapter One

Annie

Leavenworth, Kansas: February 16, 1864

Annie Osborn Anthony stepped down from the stagecoach and drew a slow breath, her teeth pressed tight against the cold. She was standing in Platte County, Missouri, looking out across the river. Though she had traveled fifteen hundred miles, it was this final stretch to Kansas—the last fifteen hundred feet—that nearly undid her.

Here in Western Missouri, slavery gripped many homes, fields, and back rooms like a vice. Daniel had taught her to read the telltale signs—the weary movements of Black men forced to haul trunks, the wary glances exchanged along depot benches, the silence that clung to those who had "no right" to speak.

Over the river lay Kansas, the state that Daniel had given so much to keep free. But between her and its shores lay a vast obstacle, the frozen Missouri River.

The wind bit through her cloak as she stepped toward the river's edge, heart pounding. This was no familiar shoreline. The ice looked solid, but she knew how it could deceive. Coming from the shores of Martha's

Vineyard, Annie knew water—knew ice, too. She had seen it swallow a man and his cart without a trace.

Daniel approached, brushing frost from his beard. "Sleigh's ready."

She followed him down the slope, boots crunching through crusted snow. The sleigh waited at the riverbank, runners sunk deep, horse shifting nervously in the traces.

"No bridge?" she asked.

"Not here. Ice is thick enough. We'll ride across."

She bit her lower lip. "Are you sure it's safe?"

"Would I risk losing you if I wasn't sure?"

Smiling, she gave him her hand so he could support her up into the sleigh. Then he climbed in beside her and tucked the blanket across their knees.

As the driver flicked the reins, the sleigh jerked forward. Wind swept across the open river, cold and sharp, as Annie braced against the seat, watching for cracks, listening for change.

At the midpoint, the river almost blinded her, the light glaring as the sun bounced off its surface, as it stretched for miles in either direction. Her bonnet ties flew out behind her, standing straight in the biting wind. She looked back; Missouri glinted under the winter sun—a land still ruled by chains.

Ahead lay Kansas, a free state. Her husband was a Union patriot. Her new life had begun.

The sleigh's runners rasped across the ice, smooth but uneasy. Daniel leaned close, his breath warm and moist next to her cheek. "There's the Planters Hotel. It'll be warm."

Annie nearly wept with relief as they stepped onto the snowy bank and the wind eased its bite. The hotel porter swung the door wide, and at last—blessedly—they crossed the threshold.

Heat enveloped her. Firelight flickered across gleaming floors. The scent of roasting meat and beeswax polish rose to meet her, mingling with the faintest trace of pipe smoke. For a moment, she just stood there, blinking at the golden grandeur: velvet drapes, brass sconces, a crystal chandelier that glittered like ice without the danger.

Daniel removed his hat and announced, "Planters House, Mrs. Anthony. I told you it would impress."

She was too weary to answer with a quip. Instead, she gave a soft nod and tried to absorb the moment. It had been days since she had stood in a place meant for comfort rather than endurance.

A tall man in a velvet-trimmed coat strode toward them with a broad smile and a jovial clap on Daniel's back. "Welcome back, Mr. Mayor," he said. Then, turning to her, he swept a courtly bow. "And you must be Mrs. Anthony. I'm Jep Rice. We've been expecting you. Your rooms will be ready within the hour. In the meantime, we've added clam chowder to the menu—just for you."

Tired as she was, Annie knew the importance of making a good first impression. Summoning her best smile, she said, "That sounds divine. Thank you."

As she sank into a brocade dining chair, the tension in her shoulders eased for the first time in days.

She wasn't on the road anymore. And yet, even as her limbs rested, her mind drifted eastward—back to the mercurial Atlantic Ocean, the salt air of Martha's Vineyard, the well-tended lanes and whitewashed fences. Everything she had once called home now seemed impossibly distant.

Across the table, Daniel studied the menu intently. When the waiter arrived, he ordered pork and sauerkraut, then reached across the table and enclosed her hand in both of his.

His gray eyes softened as they met hers. "You. Here. You're the answer to a dream I've carried for years, Annie Anthony." His voice dropped to a hush, as if afraid the moment might vanish if spoken too loudly. "I've waited so long to bring you to Kansas."

Amusement tugged at her mouth. "We only met in August."

"I know"—the corner of his mouth turned up slightly—"but I was looking for you long before that. And now you're here—more than I hoped for. Better than I dreamed."

His words curled around her like a shawl, warming her deeper than the fire in the grate.

"I can't wait to see the places you've told me about," she said, "and meet the people who matter to you."

Later, after sharing a slice of chocolate pie and lingering over coffee, Annie followed him out to a waiting carriage. Warmed and revived by lunch at the Planters, she now found the wind brisk rather than biting, its sharpness waking her instead of wearing her down.

When Daniel proposed marriage, he had painted a vision of taming the wild edge of civilization—a mission that made her heart beat faster. But it wasn't just his dreams of Leavenworth that stirred her. It was his bravery. His stories of storming Confederate farms and rescuing enslaved people from bondage had ignited something deep within her. His fire and righteous fury drew her like a river pulled to the sea.

Her first glimpse of the levee district sobered her idealism.

Warehouses sprawled along the river like sentries—stark, utilitarian, and colorless. The rutted roads, bare of trees, carved lines through the landscape. She watched the scattered buildings go by—some hastily erected and unpainted, their mismatched facades jarring to her Vineyard-bred eyes, accustomed to established neighborhoods and charm.

Daniel tapped the reins to set the horse in motion. "The river runs east of the city. All the north-south streets are numbered—the further from the water, the higher the numbers." He gestured as they rode, but to Annie, each direction felt the same. When the carriage jolted over a rut, she straightened the lap robe across her knees.

"They named the east-west roads for Indian tribes," he continued. "Main Street stands in for First."

Annie listened, but the landmarks blurred together. Back home, she needed no compass—just the sea on either side to tell her where she was. Here, everything was flat. Directionless.

Still, she lifted her chin. In time, she would learn to love this place. Perhaps, in time, its people would love her too.

They drove past a stone building with commanding columns. "That's Clark Gruber Bank," Daniel said. "Milton Clark's the president—we're having dinner with him and Lydia tomorrow night. And over there is the telegraph office. That's the opera house on the corner . . ."

Opera? Her brows rose. "I'd love to go to the theater. Especially if they're doing Verdi."

"We'll go," he promised, before continuing the parade of names and places. Hotels. Bakers. Dry goods sellers. "That one burned down last year . . . The man who ran this shop died on a trip back East, and his widow took over . . . The *Commercial* newspaper office—an old friend from Rochester owns it. And here's the post office."

He pointed toward a corner window. "That's my office."

She smiled at him. "So this is where you mailed me all those love letters."

"And where I paced back and forth waiting for yours," he replied, flicking the reins.

"You care as much about this town as you do your family in Rochester," she teased, nudging his shoulder with a smile.

Only three days had passed since they left his mother's house, but the visit clung to her thoughts—especially the hours spent with Daniel's sister Susan B. Anthony. Annie had braced herself for a firebrand but found instead a woman of conviction and careful words. Susan's fire burned low and steady, guided by a calm diplomacy that could defuse a room without raising her voice. By contrast, Daniel blazed bright and hot—sharp-edged, intense, and often unfiltered. They were siblings, yes, but different kinds of flames.

"Shhh—Susan might hear you," he said, glancing theatrically over his shoulder. Then he grew serious. "You're my family now, Annie. I want you to be happy here."

In Leavenworth, the Civil War made its presence known. Horse-drawn carts groaned under the weight of army supplies. Union troops threaded through throngs of refugees, while newsboys shouted battle headlines on the corners.

At City Hall, Daniel turned up Fifth Street, then rounded onto Pottawatomie. The street ended at the river. He stopped the horse.

"There," he said. "That's the land I bought. This is where we'll build our home."

Annie swept her gaze across it. Scrubland, scraggly brush, no trees. No garden path or hedgerow. She tried to picture a house rising here—one with porches and rose trellises—but the image wouldn't come. Still, he sounded proud, and she didn't want to dampen his spirits.

"It has a good view of the river," she said.

He nodded, satisfied. "Better than that, it's right across from Leavenworth's first park." A row of saplings lined a narrow green strip. "One day," he said, "I hope this'll be a peaceful border with Little Dixie."

"Little Dixie?" she asked.

"The slave counties along the border."

She shivered. "So close."

He gave a grim nod. "Too close."

Daniel gave the reins a subtle shift and clicked his tongue once. "All right, boy—let's go."

The horse responded without hesitation, easing into the harness with a steady pull. Annie watched from the seat beside him, struck by the quiet authority in Daniel's voice. No need to shout or jerk the reins—just a murmur and a motion, and the great animal obeyed.

There was something reassuring in it, this quiet command of his. Not the bluster of politics or the fire of an argument, but a steadiness she hadn't noticed before. Looking downstream, she saw the Planters Hotel—its very presence promising hot water and a place to change her clothes.

After freshening up and unpacking some of her things, Annie entered the Giacomini Restaurant on Daniel's arm. Faces turned. She lifted her chin, every inch the mayor's wife. By some miracle, she had managed to subdue her honey-colored hair without the aid of a proper hairdresser.

A dapper man rose from a corner table. "Someone's finally caught Leavenworth's most eligible bachelor," his eyes warm behind his round glasses. "Welcome, Mrs. Anthony. I'm Milton Clark, and this is my wife, Lydia."

Lydia's dark hair gleamed, pulled back into curls that framed her cheeks. She looked to be a few years older than Annie's nineteen years and had a warm sparkle in her eyes.

"I once tried to match D.R. with a friend from Nebraska," Lydia said with a laugh. "But he insisted on marrying someone from back East. And here you are! What has he shown you of Leavenworth so far?"

Annie described the carriage ride.

"Pish," said Lydia. "Typical man. Telegraph offices and City Hall! I bet he didn't tell you where to get *Godey's Ladies Book*, or the best confections or linens, did he?"

Annie shook her head, laughing.

"Then you must join me on a ladies' tour tomorrow morning. It will be the perfect preparation for the "at-home" reception we've planned for you in the afternoon." Lydia arched her pretty brows and cocked her head. "Say yes?"

"How can I resist?" said Annie, charmed and relieved. When Daniel had first told her about the event he and Lydia had planned, she had felt nervous. But spending time with this new acquaintance beforehand would ease her fear of meeting so many strangers at once.

"Thanks, Lydia." Daniel gave a slight nod of his head before turning to Annie. "Until you're better acquainted with the city, I'd rather you not go out alone."

Annie nodded, lulled by the firelight and the clink of silverware.

Over dinner, they discussed the women she would meet tomorrow, the customs of Leavenworth society, and the larger party Daniel planned to throw once she'd settled in.

"I hope many of tomorrow's guests become your true friends," Lydia said. Reaching into her reticule, she brought forth a box of calling cards with Annie's name on them. "You can give these to whomever you wish tomorrow. The reception begins at two."

"How thoughtful," Annie murmured. She handed one to Lydia with a smile. "I hope you'll call on me often."

As Annie drifted off that night, nestled in a hotel featherbed at last, she thought of her stepmother back home, and her best friend Cora. She missed them. But perhaps—perhaps—new friendships would take root here.

She pulled the quilt up to her chin.

She had chosen this life. Chosen this man. The real question was not whether she loved him—she did—it was whether love would be enough in a land as raw as this.

As snow began to drift across the windowpanes, Annie closed her eyes and whispered the only prayer she dared.

"Let me be strong enough to stay."

Tuesday afternoon's reception took place in the Planters' small parlor downstairs, a comfortable room furnished with many small refreshment tables and groupings of velvet chairs for conversation.

By four o'clock, Annie had already encountered several women who assisted their husbands with various tasks, such as selling tickets for the railroad and taking photographs. She discovered that Daniel's black stallion, Bully Boy, was quite the admired creature in town. Rumor had it that Daniel, in his role as postmaster, had significantly enhanced the speed of letter delivery. She received two invitations to dinner and a caution about a particular establishment near Fort Leavenworth, which posed as a restaurant yet was, in reality, a house of ill repute.

"They also have cockfights there," Lydia said, shuddering. "Can you imagine anything so barbaric?"

As the last parting pleasantries faded, a quiet hope stirred in her chest. Maybe she could find her footing here, build a circle of friends, a place to belong. Though she missed the familiar faces of Martha's Vineyard, her time with Lydia reminded her of the giggles, whispers, and plans she had shared with her childhood companion Cora. She would do her best to plant seeds of friendship in this new soil.

After dusk that evening, Daniel returned from work bearing a letter. "It's from Martha's Vineyard . . ." he teased, holding it just out of her grasp. "Uh-uh—I need a kiss first. Otherwise, I'll never again bring your mail early. Like everyone else, you'll have to wait a full day for the carrier to sort the sack."

With a smile, she flattened herself against his chest and stretched her arm along the length of his. His other arm folded around her, the envelope pressed against her back, while he kissed her firmly.

As soon as she got her hands on the letter, she exclaimed, "It's from Cora!" Overjoyed, she bounced on her toes.

He smiled. "I bet you'll get one from Eliza soon, too." Annie had already sent two letters to her beloved stepmother during their wedding journey. "How was your reception?"

"Lovely, although I thought it best to decline an invitation to Mary Stillings' sewing circle—since I don't sew." She paused, recalling new names and faces. "Sally Harvey said she works in the lobby downstairs and can usually accompany me when I want to go out."

"Good," he said. "She works at the ticket booth in the north corner."

She wondered which way was north. "I did accept an offer to attend a book club. And do you like to play euchre? We were invited to a card party."

"Great game." He eyed her with mock resignation. "I guess now that you have a new letter, you'll be too preoccupied to take a short outing after dinner."

"That's an odd time to make a social call, isn't it?"

"Yes, but I thought you would like to meet this fellow as soon as possible so you can resume one of your old *habits*." He arched his brows, waiting for her reaction.

"What old habits of mine do you know about, Colonel Anthony?" she mused, cuffing him playfully. "We've only been married three weeks. Not even that. Do you mean having lemon with my tea for breakfast, or brushing my hair a hundred times, or . . ."

"I was actually thinking of your love for horseback riding."

"Oh!"

"On that abominable saddle, swathed in that riding costume that you ladies call . . ." He made a prompting motion with his hand to elicit the desired word from her.

"A habit!" The double meaning clicked into place, and laughter bubbled up within her. She loved his wordplay. "So who is this fellow you wish me to meet?"

It was dark by the time they walked down to the livery where, the day before, D.R. had introduced Annie to Bully Boy, the large black stallion that had maneuvered him through the war. As they entered the barn, the sweet smell of hay transported her back to the livery where she stabled her mare on Martha's Vineyard.

A man in dusty brown pants looked up from the account books he was working on. "Colonel, Mrs. Anthony." He nodded.

"Evenin', Sweeney. We'd like to look at the new black gelding that came in today. Where is he?"

Sweeney pointed.

Making their way down the aisle, Daniel explained that a horse sired by Bully Boy's father had come up for sale and he had claimed first rights, pending his wife's approval.

Daniel moved inside the stall they had reached and called out, "Annie, I'd like you to meet Bill. Bill, this is your new mistress, if she'll have you."

As he led the animal out of the stall and tied the bridle ropes to opposite posts, she marveled at the horse's height. Stroking Bill's nose, she said, "He's beautiful. But I've never ridden a horse this size."

"This is the West, Annie," he teased, "and everything is bigger—the land, the horses, the spirit of the people. He's been well trained, but if you think you can't handle him . . ."

Remembering some heart-thumping rides she and her mare had taken along the Atlantic shore, Annie thought being a horsewoman was a part of the West she could adopt with enthusiasm. Bill was built for speed. "I'm up for the challenge. Thank you!" She kissed his cheek.

He paid cash on the way out, and they headed home with her arm nestled into the warmth of his side.

Chapter Two

Annie

February 17, 1864

"I'll see you at the bank at one o'clock," Daniel said at half-past five the next morning as he buttoned his shirt. "It's just one block south and one block west of here. Can you find it on your own?"

Raising herself on one elbow in bed, Annie watched him with a heavy heart as he prepared to leave her alone for another whole day. "Yes, Lydia and I passed it the other morning."

"Good. Oh, by the way, I've arranged for some friends to meet us at the farm on Saturday afternoon. It would be best to wear an old skirt."

Annie caught her breath. If separating from him at dawn was almost more than she could bear, going to a farm on Saturday was beyond endurance. "Why? What are we going to do there?"

He bent to look in the dresser mirror, combing back his wavy hair and smoothing his mustache. "I just like to get away from the city now and then. It's a nice break from politics." He put his wallet in his pants pocket.

"But it's the middle of winter! What can you possibly be growing now?"

"Not the middle of winter, the end. In a month, the wagon trains will be back in town, outfitting themselves for the Santa Fe Trail going west. To

answer your question, I'm growing apples. They have to be pruned before active growth begins, and now's a good time to start."

"I was hoping we could do something fun," she said, taking hold of his pillow and hugging it. "Like taking a ride. Or going to the opera."

"I have horses to ride at the farm, don't worry. And there's nothing playing this week at the opera." With his hand on the door to the main hall, he said over his shoulder, "Anyway, you'll like Chas and Ella." He left.

Annie got up, unbraided her hair, and began to brush it as her sadness and irritation grew. She missed the intimate moments of their honeymoon when he had eyes for no one but her. Now she had to share him with the whole town.

Staring at the ceiling as she reviewed their last conversation, she frowned. She had not brought any old clothes to Leavenworth. How could she possibly lay her hands on a suitable skirt in only three days? Though Lydia might have loaned one, she was much shorter than Annie. And what would she need it for, anyway? Thinking of manure, she wrinkled her nose.

Daniel hadn't asked; he'd told her, matter-of-fact, as though her time were his to arrange. The sting of it sat hot in her chest. She wasn't a child to be managed. She was his wife.

She rose a little too quickly and caught her reflection in the mirror. There it was—that pout. Hardly a becoming expression, but an honest one. She didn't even have plans of her own for Saturday, and that only made it worse. Still, today wasn't over.

At three o'clock, Lydia would take her to the Sanitary Commission meeting in town. Leavenworth's version of the soldier-aid circle she'd known on the Vineyard—familiar territory. Maybe it would lead to real introductions—women with names and voices, neighbors who might become friends.

If someone invited her to call, she would go. Daniel wasn't the only one who could make plans.

In the meantime, she would find a skirt suitable for the farm. She went to the lobby to ask Sally Harvey to join her on this errand and they planned an outing for one o'clock. By the time she had lunched alone with a book, it was time to meet Daniel at the Clark Gruber Bank to open her very own bank account. During their brief visit to the Anthony homestead

on the journey to Leavenworth, Susan had advised her to do this in case something happened to Daniel.

After finishing up at the bank, Annie went right to Sally's booth in the Planters' bustling lobby. Situated on the river, the hotel was the locus for travelers by steamer, rail, express wagon, stagecoach, and the ferry that ran in better weather.

The diminutive Sally met her with a swift apology. "I'm sorry, but my husband has stepped out for a few minutes, so I'm the only one here right now. I can't go with you, but I can recommend some shops to try."

Annie backed away so Sally could wait on an approaching traveler. "I'm sure I can find something on my own, Sally. Thanks anyway."

On Shawnee Street, Annie entered Fisk's, the first dressmaker shop she found, and browsed while the middle-aged clerk chatted quietly with a customer who, by the look of her, was having gowns altered for her advancing pregnancy. "Yes, I expect she will be looking for a modiste to make her dresses and hats. But I want nothing to do with that homewrecker or his wife. Imagine him torching the whole town of Pleasant Hill! And now he wants to settle down. Men of that age often marry for money, you know." She gave a knowing look.

Annie felt sorry for whomever the dressmaker was maligning. She would have to be careful not to give this woman anything to gossip about her.

Sumptuous silks, soft velvets, and crisp sheer fabrics invited her touch as she moved about the shop. She especially liked a blue riding habit. The tailored jacket would hug her curves while the wool skirt would drape beautifully over her legs and the horse's hind quarters.

She and Daniel had not discussed a clothing allowance yet, but he would surely be generous, judging from his praise for some of the clothing she already had. And, of course, she had her inheritance, but she preferred not to touch that except for an emergency. As mayor, he would understand her need for gowns for evening entertainments and official events. She looked forward to wrapping herself in styles fashioned by this woman's skillful hands. Today, however, she needed a plain farm skirt that did not show dirt.

Would the dressmaker be too busy to make her something for the weekend? If she knew Annie was the mayor's wife, maybe Mrs. Fisk would put Annie ahead of her other customers.

The customer who was expecting excused herself to look at ribbon, so now it was Annie's turn to make the dressmaker's acquaintance. When the dressmaker's eyes turned appraising eyes Annie, she was glad that she had unpacked her favorite suit for this excursion.

With a practiced smile, the woman said, "That blue velvet would suit your eyes beautifully."

"I love your work." Getting right to the point, Annie extended her gloved hand and said, "I just moved here. I'm Mrs. Colonel Anthony."

The smile vanished from the modiste's face as if she had erased a chalkboard. Annie felt a warning chill.

"Ah, yes. I heard the mayor had taken a young wife. I'm sorry, I can't assist you today."

"But all I need is a farm skirt."

In a clipped tone, the modiste answered, "We don't do that sort of sewing here; we are more devoted to modern fashion." She turned and began to move away.

Annie wanted to disappear. Immediately. Unfortunately, she didn't know where else to turn for the clothing she needed now. "Is there another shop that could help me?"

The woman sniffed. "Amelia Bennett on Shawnee between Second and Third might assist you. Her clientele tends to be more practical-minded."

Outside, the cold rejection stung more than the cold wind that blew down her neck. Why hadn't Daniel's name elicited the respect she had anticipated?

Turning up her collar for protection and trying to get her bearings, she almost tripped a one-legged man with a crutch.

"I'm so sorry," she gasped, wondering whether he had sustained his injury in the war.

The shop owner had described her destination on Shawnee Street as one block north, two blocks east. But how was Annie supposed to know which way was north when the noonday sun was at its apex? She began by heading

the way the woman had pointed, keeping the tallest structure in town—the Planters Hotel—in view.

She always knew where to shop on the Vineyard, and the streets were in better condition because many were paved with shells, which allowed water to drain quickly once the snows receded. But here she risked turning her ankles on late-winter ruts of mud crisscrossing the roads. She had meant to accomplish a small task in obtaining her farm costume. Instead, she had wandered into a maze of uncertainty.

Chiding herself for not memorizing the Indian tribe streets in sequence, Annie crossed an alley. In an open doorway there, a woman in a worn dress and green shawl was stuffing something into her cloth bag. She darted a glance at Annie before hunching over her prize and hurrying away. The poor woman must be starving to pilfer food from the rubbish.

As the wind settled down and she turned a corner out of the shadows, she marveled at the February temperature. She hardly needed gloves. But as she crossed the road, the mud threatened to suck the boots right off her feet. Just before she reached the sidewalk, she recoiled as a passing coach splattered her skirt with muck. She brushed off what she could, her spirits sinking once again.

A hundred yards later, she stopped short. Where was she? Looking around she spied the welcoming sight of the Planters rooftop behind her. Though she couldn't see the name on the top of the building, she still recognized it from this angle. She soldiered on.

Her heart began to thump harder, and her palms became moist inside her gloves. Nothing at street level, however, looked familiar. She replayed the directions in her mind—counting streets, noting turns—but Shawnee Street wasn't where it should have been. Had she gone too far? Or not far enough? Leavenworth was so much bigger than Edgartown!

Then, at last, she saw it—the small sign of the Amelia Bennett shop. Relief crashed over her so suddenly that her knees nearly buckled. She pushed open the door, the chime of the bell above sounding a gentle welcome in the midst of her inner chaos. The warm scent of polished wood and lavender sachets wrapped around her, and the tension drained from her shoulders.

She was safe. She was here. She'd found it.

Mrs. Bennett's was indeed a shop for the practical-minded, with serviceable fabrics and few embellishments for sale. After examining the workmanship on the mannequin's plain outfit, Annie approached the counter.

When she inquired about the skirt and blouse on display, the shop owner smiled and nodded. "As luck would have it, I am just finishing a spring outfit to replace that one."

While she was folding Annie's purchase, a man came in lugging a shipping crate of goods. When she asked him to suggest her return route to the hotel, he stood by while she wrote it all down. Calmed and fortified by the couple's kindness, she set out with renewed confidence.

On this return trip, Annie took the time to study the buildings lining the street. Unlike the neat brick and clapboard buildings of Edgartown, many of the buildings on the main streets of this frontier city looked as if someone had thrown them together in a hurry. Leavenworth's business district was noisy and distracting, but she did like the large variety of things they had for sale.

She coveted that riding crop with a jeweled top and the hat with streamers on the back. Such beautiful leather boots. More intriguing than anything else, however, was George Kohn Furniture across the street, with its window showcasing a carved table and chairs fit for King Arthur.

She longed to settle into her very own home with Daniel. He had promised that construction would start after he began his second term as mayor. That wasn't too far away, was it? Surely it wouldn't hurt to simply peek at some of the furniture brands available at this crossroads of civilization. Visiting such a treasure trove would be worth the chore of removing more mud from her skirt later.

By the time she left Kohn's with a mental list of furniture she liked, she had only twenty minutes left before meeting Lydia for the Sanitary Relief Commission. A tall storefront blocked her view of the Planters, but she was as certain of its location as she was of the sun in the sky. She pressed on until an especially muddy intersection prompted her to take a detour.

Five minutes later, in a somewhat unsavory section of town, Annie admitted to herself that she was lost. There were no inviting shops here, just grimy businesses. Raising her eyes in desperation, she searched for the

rooftop of the Planters, but couldn't see it. Her heart pounded and breath quickened.

Then, glistening in the sun and sparkling clean, a carriage emerged from the nearby livery. She beckoned to the driver, who stopped and lifted his cap.

"I wonder if you could direct me," she began, a tremor in her voice. "I seem to have lost my way to the Planters Hotel."

"I'm headed over that way to pick up someone now. Would you like a ride?" said the driver—a dark-haired man who held the reins with beautiful leather gloves. Noting the name "Bauer Brothers Livery" in gold letters on the carriage door, Annie blushed. She had never hired a ride for herself.

He eyed the mud on her skirt and boots. "On second thought, I don't have time to clean out the carriage after you," he apologized. "Would you mind sitting up here with me? It's just a few blocks. No charge. I'm Martin Bauer, by the way."

Cheered by his professional appearance and demeanor, Annie hesitated no longer. "That would be so kind! Thank you."

Mr. Bauer jumped down and helped Annie up next to him in the driver's seat. Her panic gave way to calm when she recognized the familiar landmark of the Clark Gruber Bank. She gathered her package and purse when hoofbeats pounded up beside her, then slowed to match the pace of the carriage.

Her heart quickened with joy at spotting the rider.

"Daniel!" she called over the din. "What brings you out of the office at this time of day?"

Ignoring her, Daniel leaned across his horse to shout at her driver. "Bauer. Stop the carriage." Annie had never seen her husband wear such a menacing face.

Bauer said, "Leave me alone. I'm headed to the Planters to pick up a fare." He did, however, pull back slightly on the reins.

"Stop right there, Bauer." Drawing his pistol, Daniel aimed at Annie's companion.

She stared, horrified.

"You got no call to harass me," snarled Bauer, bringing the carriage to a jarring halt.

In front of the hotel, a bald man stood in the middle of the street, aiming a revolver toward the vehicle. Despite the winter chill, Annie began to perspire. What was all the commotion about? Was Mr. Bauer a dangerous criminal?

From the other direction, another bystander drew a gun on Daniel, demanding, "What's the problem?"

Annie shifted fearful eyes from one pistol to the other.

In seconds, a knot of townsmen stood with arms folded, staring at Daniel. Another man pulled out a pistol and trained his sight on Martin Bauer. Annie sat wide-eyed, her pulse galloping along in alarm. Daniel was the mayor, in charge of the whole town. Who would dare challenge him?

When the bald gunman ran up, panting, she noticed a marshal's badge glistening on his chest. He was not aiming at Daniel. Good. Two colored officers fell in behind the lawman, their revolvers all pointing at Bauer. Now the stakes were even.

Through gritted teeth, Daniel fixed his eyes on the driver. "Bauer, if this carriage moves one inch, I'll shoot your hand off. Understand?"

"Confound it, Anthony, I'm not even armed." The driver raised one hand, keeping hold of the reins with the other.

Now Daniel shifted his gaze to Annie. "Step out of the carriage, Annie, and get behind the officer."

The man with the badge gently helped her down. From the corner of her eye, she spotted Lydia approaching in her blue cape and waving at the front of the hotel.

Seated on Bully Boy, Daniel occupied the highest position in the throng. The glare he conferred on Bauer was enough to make any man squirm. "Now, suppose you tell me *where* were you planning to take my *wife?"*

"Your wife?" Bauer echoed. "I had no idea you married such a young girl." When his eyes flicked to Annie cowering behind the man with the badge, she wanted to dissolve into the mud.

"Where were you taking her?" repeated Daniel.

"To the Planters. She stopped me to ask directions. I offered her a ride."

Daniel swiveled in his saddle to look at Annie. "Is this true?" he demanded, his eyes drilling into hers.

"Yes," she replied, hating the squeak in her voice. "I was late to meet Lydia. This man was very kind." She waited for whatever would happen next, barely daring to breathe.

The bystanders began to disperse, but not before one of them said, "Suppose, Mayor, that you apologize to this innocent citizen and allow him to pick up his next customer?"

Daniel nodded awkwardly to Bauer. "As you were." Then he instructed the bald man with the badge. "Follow her to the Planters." He returned his revolver to his pocket.

Annie avoided Daniel's gaze when he told her, "Wait for me there." As the officer turned her by the arm toward the hotel, Bauer pulled to the side of the road and rehashed his grievances with his friends.

Her cheeks flaming, Annie lowered her eyes as she and Lydia, arm in arm, followed the marshal toward the hotel. Behind her, Bauer sneered, "Anthony does nothing but cause trouble. If he hadn't ruined my homestead, I wouldn't have to drive for a living."

Striding along ahead of her, the lawman turned briefly to Annie and introduced himself as City Marshal Charles Goodman. Even taller and brawnier than Daniel, he looked equal to any task. Before taking his leave at the hotel, he mentioned that he and his wife would accompany the Anthonys to the farm on Saturday.

As soon as he left them in the Planters lobby and the women reached the Anthony suite, Lydia rounded on Annie. "We're too late to join the Sanitary Relief Commission now. Where have you been? I waited in the lobby for you and even asked Sally Harvey if she'd seen you. She said you'd gone out by yourself. Finally, we sent a courier from Milton's office to see if the colonel knew anything of your whereabouts."

Annie's lips formed a flat line of dismay at the furor she had caused. Before she could reply, Daniel burst into the room.

"Annie, what in tarnation were you doing over on West Seventh? Do I have to watch you every minute?"

Blushing, Lydia mentioned somewhere she had to go and quickly excused herself. Annie was left alone to face her husband, who paced like a lion about to roar.

Chapter Three

Daniel

Later that day

As soon as Lydia left, D.R. spun around to face Annie. Hang it all, why couldn't she understand the dangers here? His heart had nearly stopped when he'd spotted her in Bauer's carriage.

Throwing up his hands, he said, "Why were you out alone? I thought you were coming back here from the bank to wait for Lydia." He spoke gruffly, wanting his words, his fear, to get through to her. If she kept venturing into trouble, he'd never sleep again.

"Is Leavenworth so very dangerous, then? You scared the dickens out of me, pointing your gun like that." There was no mistaking the fury in her eyes—blue fire, hot and sudden, aimed straight at him.

D.R. blinked, fighting the urge to gape at her. His sister Susan was the only woman who'd ever spoken to him that way in the past. But now, Annie.

Her rosy cheeks flushed crimson as she continued, "Have you lied to me and brought me to a town where I can't go outside by myself? We were surrounded by men with guns! Where did they come from?" She swept her hand around the room.

If only she knew how complicated that question was. But he'd keep it simple for now. "Some were my friends, some were Bauer's."

"In Edgartown, men can disagree without pointing revolvers." Her nostrils flared as she jabbed her finger toward the ground, condemning his beloved town. "What's so different here?"

He had to make her understand. Had to find the right words.

"If your enemies carry guns, you need one, too." There. Simple enough. He shrugged, waiting for reason to dawn on her. "You can't just go walking into a hornet's nest without some protection."

"So Leavenworth is a hornet's nest?" Her voice rose higher. "Do you plan to keep me imprisoned in this hotel? Going out only with an escort? Is *that* your plan? Because my plan isn't to be some hothouse flower!"

Indeed, to him, that was just what she was: a rose, tender and fair, reared in that white mansion by the sea, sheltered from every harsh wind. Her honey-colored hair had slipped from its pins, falling about her face like a gentle halo. The thought of harm coming to her struck him like the desecration of something cherished—something he'd vowed to keep safe.

But there was no denying her unholy fury. When she paused for breath, he saw his chance to defuse it. He took a seat and evenly stated, "Of course not! I wouldn't bring you somewhere dangerous and lock you up. It's just that . . . this isn't Martha's Vineyard. As you just said."

The calmer he grew, the more her temper spiraled. "Another thing that's different from Martha's Vineyard is there *I* decided where I went, when, and with whom. No one dictated a schedule to me. Or told me when to get out of a carriage. I'm not one of your soldiers you can order around." Her eyes flashed defiantly. "What other plans have you made without telling me? Do you know how difficult it is to come up with a . . . a . . . *farming costume* in only three days if you don't have a dressmaker?"

Farming costume? D.R. stared blankly. "What is a farming costume?"

"You know. An old skirt, like you said. If a woman doesn't bring an old skirt to Kansas and she doesn't know anyone her size, how is she to acquire one?"

The absurdity of it almost made him laugh. "So you went out to acquire this item—er, costume?"

"Well, yes. But Mrs. High and Mighty on Shawnee Street wouldn't help me. She was so unfriendly."

"You mean Matilda Fisk? Yes, she would be." He studied Annie from the horsehair sofa, noticing her anger fade.

Curiosity flickered in her eyes. "And why is that?"

"Did you introduce yourself?"

"Yes, I believe so." She drifted closer to him now.

He blanked his mind from an image of the widow Fisk at the cemetery. "Her son died while serving under my command, and she blamed me. Then her husband got cholera. Now she's alone and, if I hear correctly, struggling to make ends meet."

"How sad." Annie's expression softened before she resumed her tale. "So, finally, I found my way to Amelia Bennett's on Osage, where I got a serviceable skirt and blouse.

"Everything was fine up to that point. But then I had to detour around the mud." Her voice softened, turning a little rueful. "Leavenworth's bigger than Martha's Vineyard. I never get lost there. But here . . ." She trailed off, and something in the way she said it tugged at him.

"You were lost? In Leavenworth?" The words slipped out before he could stop them. "But the streets are *numbered!*"

The instant he said it, he saw the way her head dipped—but not before he caught the slight tremble of her lip. His chest tightened. That's why she'd ended up in that part of town. Of course. But still—the streets were numbered.

He couldn't imagine it. Not knowing where you were, how to get back. He read his own surroundings without thinking—to take in landmarks, directions, the subtle shifts of a place. That instinct ran so deep, the idea of losing his bearings felt . . . impossible.

But she had lost hers. And the vulnerability in that, in *her,* struck something in him.

Without thinking, he reached out his hand, and finding her waist, eased her onto his lap. She didn't resist. Didn't pull away. When he stroked her back, slow and steady, he felt softening of her body, the quiet way she melted into him. And when her arm slipped around his shoulder, it was all the answer he was waiting for. He held her a little closer. Just in case she needed it.

Her warmth against him calmed his own tension. "If you don't want to be pampered in a hothouse, then I guess I'd better equip you to be a sunflower."

"What do sunflowers have to do with it?" Though she grumbled, much of the fight had gone out of her.

"It's the Kansas state flower. Grows on the prairie like a weed."

She flicked her fingernail gently against his ear. "So I've degenerated from a flower to a weed?"

Her touch sent a pleasant shiver through him. "Sturdy as a weed, but still as beautiful as a flower." He leaned closer to her ear. "Good for many seasons of pleasure."

As his lips brushed her neck, warmth radiated from her skin. When he pulled back to look at her, the blush that had spread across her cheeks pleased him immensely.

Shifting her off his lap, he rose and rummaged through a drawer until he found what he needed—a detailed city map. "I doubt you spent much time at the docks on the Vineyard, right?"

"True," she admitted.

"It's the same here. Most places are fine for you to walk, but ladies avoid this neighborhood." He circled the dangerous section where she'd strayed. "Go around this way instead. Perhaps I should pencil in some landmarks?"

She liked that idea. "Landmarks are much easier than all that north-south-east-west business."

After marking a few more notes for her, he paused to pull out his pocket watch. "Hang it!" he declared.

"What's wrong?"

"I'm late for a meeting." He pressed a swift, earnest kiss to her mouth, her softness a comfort he hated to leave. Even as duty tugged at him, he savored that fleeting taste of home, his lips memorizing her warmth in that moment of borrowed time.

Then, he hurried down the hall and took the steps two at a time down to the street.

When they went for a stroll after dinner, arms intertwined, D.R. took time to explain his reaction to seeing her with Bauer.

"He hates me because I was in the cavalry." The memory still burned. "In Missouri, he used to have a tobacco plantation, farmed by slaves. And fine horses—far more than he needed for that kind of farm. Not plow horses, but built for speed, like Bully Boy."

They walked two blocks west to Third Street and turned left, their shoulders occasionally brushing in the cool evening air.

"My commander ordered us to destroy any support that bushwhackers—militant secesh—received from Missouri townsfolk. We reckoned the Bauers corralled horses and stored excess crops as reinforcements for the Confederates. So, we disposed of everything according to army policy. We wiped out most of Bauer's family fortune. And most of the other farms in that town."

"What's a secesh?" she asked.

"Sorry—short for secessionists, or Confederates."

She was quiet for a moment, taking in what he'd said. "How did he end up in Leavenworth?"

"He has a brother who lives out by Salt Creek, a Union man. Not too far from my apple farm, actually. Now he works for his brother, driving visitors around town. When he got settled here, he noised it about that he was a Union man like his brother. But I didn't credit that story."

"He was so friendly, such a gentleman. Did you really think he had kidnapped me?"

"It's his job to be polite," D.R. replied. Heat crept up his neck as he remembered the smirks and whispers from bystanders when Annie said she'd asked Bauer for a ride. Had they thought him a jealous fool? Perhaps he had overreacted. He sighed, the evening air cooling his flushed skin.

He halted and pivoted toward her. Their eyes met, his gaze intense and unwavering. More than anything, he needed her to believe him. What good were words if she couldn't see the truth burning in his eyes?

"But I may have jumped the gun. Men don't usually go after each other's wives. I wouldn't have brought you here if that were the case—truly, Annie."

This town had its dangers, yes, but he'd never knowingly put her in harm's way. The very thought made his chest tighten. He slipped his arm around her, loving the curve of her waist under his hand. Maybe it was a

good thing he was such an excellent shot. Nothing would harm her while he was alive.

About the author

Jeanne Gehret writes women's historical fiction that explores the emotional and spiritual journeys behind public lives, especially those of Annie and Daniel Read Anthony. Her Dauntless Series draws from years of archival research and a deep interest in how women endure—and transform—through hardship. With a background in spiritual formation and a passion for untold stories, Gehret brings the Anthony family to life through writing, blogging, and historical presentations.

Early in her career, she authored the first children's book about dyslexia, an international bestseller with over 60,000 copies sold.

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