

*Through
the
Deep Waters*

Kim Vogel
Sawyer

A NOVEL

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the
Deep Waters*

BOOKS BY KIM VOGEL SAWYER

Echoes of Mercy

Just as I Am

The Grace That Leads Us Home

What Once Was Lost

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the
Deep Waters*

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WATERBROOK
PRESS

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*For those who feel broken inside,
with prayers for you to discover healing
through the precious touch of Jesus*



And he said unto her, Daughter,
be of good comfort:
thy faith hath made thee whole.

—LUKE 8:48

Chapter 1

Chicago, Illinois, 1883

Dinah

Dinah Hubley curled her arms around the coal bucket, hunched her shoulders to make herself as small as possible, and then made a dash for the kitchen. The odors of stale tobacco, unwashed bodies, and stout whiskey assaulted her nose. Each time she made this trek through the waiting room, she tried to hold her breath—the smell made her want to give back her meager lunch. But weaving between the haphazard arrangement of mismatched sofas and chairs all draped with lounging men took longer than her lungs could last. So she sucked air through her clenched teeth and did her best to make it all the way through the room without being stopped.

No such luck. A man reached out from one of the overstuffed chairs and snaked his arm around her waist.

Dinah released a yelp as the man tugged her backward across the chair's armrest and into his lap. Lumps of coal spilled over the bucket's rim and left black marks on the bodice of her faded calico dress. But she was worried about something more than her only dress being soiled.

Keeping her grip on the bucket, she pushed against the man's chest with her elbow. He held tight and laughed against her cheek. "Hey, what's your hurry, darlin'? Stay here an' let ol' Max enjoy you for a bit." He nuzzled his nose into the nape of her neck, chortling. "I always did like gals with brown hair. Brings me to mind of a coon dog I had when I was a young start."

His foul breath made bile rise in her throat. She rasped, "Let me go, mister, please? I have to get the coal to the cook."

Max plucked the bucket from her arms and held it toward a lanky man who'd sauntered near. "Take the coal to the kitchen for this little gal, Jamie. Free her up for some time with me."

Jamie took the bucket and set it aside. Then he caught Dinah's arm and gave such a yank, she feared her arm would be wrenched from its socket. She didn't lose her arm, but the drunken man in the chair lost his grip. Her feet met the floor. She would have stumbled had Jamie not kept hold, and a thread of gratitude wove its way through her breast.

She regained her footing and offered the man a timid smile. "Th-thank you, mister."

Jamie's eyes glittered. Dinah knew that look. She tried to wriggle loose, but his fingers bit hard while his thumb rubbed up and down the tender flesh on the back of her arm. Shivers attacked her frame. He leaned down, his whiskered face leering. "How about ya show me instead of tellin' me? Gimme a kiss." He puckered up.

Dinah crunched her eyes closed. Her stomach rolled and gorge filled her throat.

A voice intruded. "Jamie Fenway, if you want to keep coming around here and making use of my girls, you'd better let loose of that one."

Relief sagged Dinah's legs when she realized the proprietress of the Yellow Parrot had entered the room.

The man released Dinah with an insolent shove, sending her straight against Miss Flo's ample front. Barrel-shaped and as strong as most men, the woman didn't even flinch. She took hold of Dinah's upper arms, set her upright, then turned her kohl-enhanced glare on Jamie and Max. "How many times do I have to tell you no free sampling, fellas? Everything you want is waiting upstairs, but until you've paid, you keep your hands, your lips, and whatever else you think you might be tempted to use to yourself."

The men waiting their turns with Miss Flo's girls laughed uproariously. One of them wisecracked, "Besides, Jamie, that one you grabbed on to ain't hardly worth stealin' a pinch. If she was a striped bass, I'd throw her back!" More guffaws and sniggers rang.

Jamie's slit-eyed gaze traveled up and down Dinah's frame. "Even the smallest fish tastes plenty good when it's fresh."

Dinah hugged herself, wishing she could shrink away to nothing.

Miss Flo grabbed a handful of Dinah's hair and gave a harsh yank. "What are you doing carting coal through the waiting room, anyway? I don't want that mess in my parlor."

A few smudges of coal dust would hardly be noticed among the years' accumulation of tobacco stains and muddy prints on the worn carpet. But Dinah ducked her head and mumbled meekly, "I'm sorry, Miss Flo."

"I know you're sorry, but that doesn't answer my question." Miss Flo's voice was as sharp as the teacher's—the one who berated Dinah for wearing the same dress to school every day and checked her head for lice in front of the whole class. "We've got a back door to the kitchen. Why didn't you use it?"

Dinah winced and stood as still as she could to keep her hair from being pulled from her scalp. "I couldn't get in through the back. The door's blocked."

"By what?"

Miss Flo's newest girl, Trudy, liked to meet one of the deputies on the back stoop. He was so tall Trudy had to stand on the stoop for their lips to meet. The image of them pressed so tight together not even a piece of paper could come between them was seared into Dinah's memory. But she wouldn't tattle. It was bad enough she had to listen to the taunts in school and on the streets of town. She wouldn't set herself up for belittling under the only roof she'd ever called home.

When Dinah didn't answer, Miss Flo growled and released her hair with another vicious yank. "Get that coal out of here."

Dinah bent over to grab the handle of the discarded bucket.

Miss Flo kicked her in the rear end, knocking her on her face. "And don't let me see you traipsing through this room again. Next time I might not be around to stop the men from taking their pleasure from you." She stepped over Dinah, the full layers of her bold-yellow skirt rustling. "All right, fellas, how about some music while you wait?" Men cheered and whistled. Miss Flo, her

smile wide, plopped onto the upright piano's round stool and began thumping out a raucous tune. Drunken voices raised in song.

Dinah scrambled to her feet, grabbed the coal bucket, and raced from the room. She darted straight to the coal box in the corner and leaned against the wall, panting. So close. . . Jamie'd come so close to claiming her lips. She covered her mouth with trembling fingers as Miss Flo's warning screamed through her mind. The proprietress often screeched idle threats in Dinah's direction, but this one was real. The older she got, the more likely it became the men who flocked to the Yellow Parrot after sundown seven days a week would see her as more than Untamable Tori's unfortunate accident.

The cook, a hulk of a man with a bald head and forearms the size of hams, glanced in Dinah's direction. "You gonna dump that coal in the hopper or just stand there hugging the bucket?"

Dinah gave a start. "S-sorry, Rueben." She tipped the bucket and dumped the coal into its holding tank. Black dust sifted upward. Some of the black bits were sucked up inside her nose. She dropped the dented bucket with a clatter and turned to cough into her cupped hands.

Rueben stirred a wooden spoon through a pot on the massive cast-iron Marvel range. The rich smell of rum rose. Another cabinet pudding in the making—Tori's favorite. For years Dinah had suspected Rueben was sweet on her mother, and when Dinah had been much younger, she harbored the whimsical idea that he might be her father. But when she asked him, hoping she'd finally get to call somebody Pa, he laughed so hard she scuttled away in embarrassment. Now, at the wise age of sixteen, she realized the question of her paternity would never be answered. Not with Tori's occupation being what it was.

Dinah inched toward the stove where the scent of the pudding's sauce would be stronger. The smell of rum on someone's breath turned her stomach, but somehow when rum was blended with cream and sugar, it became delightful. She leaned in, and Rueben grinned knowingly.

"Wantin' a sniff, are you?"

Everyone who called the Yellow Parrot home and everyone who visited knew better than to disturb Rueben when he was cooking. He considered

preparing tasty dishes an art, and he tolerated no intrusion on his concentration. But he'd never sent Dinah away. She nodded.

"Well, tip on in here, then."

She put her face over the pot's opening. Steam wisped around her chin, filling her nostrils with the sweet, rich aroma. The foul smells from the parlor drifted away, and Dinah released a sigh of satisfaction.

"All right, move back now. I need to dump this over the sponge cake an' get it in the oven if it's gonna be done by suppertime."

Supper at the Yellow Parrot was served well after midnight. More often than not, Dinah was asleep by then and didn't have any supper. But Rueben always put a filled plate in the stove's hob for her breakfast. Rueben poured the thick sauce over chunks of sponge cake dotted with chopped figs and currants. She licked her lips. "What else are you fixing besides the pudding?"

"Got a leg of lamb with cherry sauce slow bakin' in the oven out back. I tucked in some whole sweet potatoes studded with cloves, too—I'll mash 'em with pecans and cinnamon."

Dinah's mouth watered.

"Plannin' to steam a batch of brussels sprouts and fix up a cream sauce to pour over 'em to kill the smell. You know how your ma pinches her nose when I fix those things. But she always gobbles them up anyway." He shrugged. "Nothin' much." Rueben moved to the washbasin and began trimming the thick stems from the brussels sprouts with a flick of a paring knife.

She should go upstairs. Her duties for the day were done, and unlike Miss Flo's girls, she didn't have the luxury of sleeping until noon. But instead, Dinah perched on a stool in the corner and watched Rueben work. She preferred the kitchen to any other room in the stately old house outside of town that Miss Flo had turned into a place of business. The good smells, the warm stove, the clean-scrubbed floor and work counters—Rueben wouldn't allow even a speck of dirt to mar his domain—provided her truest sense of "home." Until Rueben told her to get on up to her room, she'd stay.

Rueben sent a brief frown in her direction. "I heard the commotion in the parlor."

He had? “I didn’t do anything wrong.”

“You were in there durin’ working hours. That’s wrong.”

Dinah’s face flamed.

Rueben tucked the pudding into the oven, closed the door as gently as a mother placing a blanket on her sleeping newborn, then faced her. He put his beefy hands on his hips. Although he didn’t scowl, his huge presence was intimidating enough. “I know why you used the front door instead of the back. I’m gonna tell Flo she needs to keep a tighter rein on Trudy. But that don’t excuse you. You’ve gotta defend yourself, Dinah. You ain’t a little girl anymore.”

Dinah cringed, recalling the way Max’s hand had roved across her rib cage. Although not as buxom as her mother’s, her chest strained against the tight bodice of her one calico dress. She was womanly now. And in a place like this, being womanly was an invitation.

He went on in the same blunt tone—not kind, not harsh, but matter-of-fact—as if Dinah should already know these things. “If you want to carry coal through the back door, then you need to tell whoever’s in the way to step aside. If you don’t want somebody pestering you, then you need to come right out and tell ’em to leave you alone. If you don’t want to stay in a brothel, then you need to pack a bag an’ move on.”

Dinah’s jaw fell slack. She’d never had the courage to stand up to the sniggering schoolboys or snooty girls who taunted her. How could Rueben expect her to be brave enough to set out on her own? He’d lost his senses. “Where would I go? What would I do?”

He sauntered to the oak secretary where he planned his meals and made shopping lists. He pulled down the drop door that formed a desktop and reached into one of the cubbies. When he turned, he held a scrap of newsprint that he laid flat against the desk’s scarred surface. “C’mere.”

On quivering legs, Dinah obeyed.

He tapped one sausage-sized finger on the paper. “Read this.”

She leaned over the desk. The dim light made it difficult for her make out the print, but she read slowly, painstakingly, reciting it word for word inside her head. “*Wanted: Young women 18 to 30 years of age, of good moral character,*

attractive, and intelligent, to waitress in Harvey Eating Houses on the Santa Fe in the West. Wages: \$17.50 per month with room and board. Liberal tips customary. Experience not necessary. Write Fred Harvey, Union Depot, Kansas City, Missouri."

The reading complete, she hunkered into herself, deeply stung. Didn't Miss Flo call her an ugly duckling? Didn't the teacher at school remind her on the days she managed to attend classes she should just stay away because she'd never amount to anything? She was neither attractive nor intelligent and everyone knew it. Why would Rueben—the one person who'd been kind to her—tease her this way?

He bumped her shoulder. "What'd you think?"

She set her jaw and refused to answer.

He caught her chin between his thumb and finger and raised her face. "There's your chance. Write to this Fred Harvey. Get yourself outta here."

Rueben had chided her to speak up and say what she thought. She jerked her chin free of his grasp and spouted, "He won't take me! I'm— I'm—" She couldn't bring herself to repeat the hurtful words people had thrown at her all her life. So she said, "I'm only sixteen."

He snorted. "You won't be sixteen forever. An' with hotels an' restaurants poppin' up along the railroad line all the way to California, he'll be needing waitresses for a good long while." He folded the advertisement and pressed it into Dinah's palm. "Keep that. Write to him when your eighteenth birthday's past. Because, girlie, sure as my pudding'll come out of that oven browned just right and tastin' like heaven, if you stay here, you're gonna end up bein' one of Flo's girls." He curled his hand around hers, his big fingers strong yet tender. "Wouldn't you rather be one of Harvey's girls?"

Chapter 2

Dinah

*W*ouldn't you rather be one of Harvey's girls?" Over the next weeks as Dinah browsed the markets and filled shopping lists for Rueben, she thought about becoming one of Harvey's girls. When she washed the soiled linens and ironed the working girls' fancy robes and underthings, she imagined being one of Harvey's girls. As she sat at the desk in the back corner of the schoolroom completing lessons, she daydreamed about becoming one of Harvey's girls. Late at night in her attic bedroom, listening to the noises coming from the rooms below, she longed to become one of Harvey's girls.

Toward the end of May, school ended for the season. Although she'd passed the exams, she didn't attend the graduation ceremony to receive her eighth-grade certificate. If only she could be like the other students who walked across the teacher's platform and received the rolled document tied with a crisp black ribbon! But she'd look the fool, being so much older than the others who were privileged to attend daily rather than hit or miss. And she had no one who would attend, smile with pride from the audience, and offer congratulations afterward. Thus, participating in the ceremony for which she'd worked so long and hard held little joy.

Her seventeenth birthday arrived the first day of June. Rueben prepared her favorites for lunch—glazed ham with scalloped potatoes and steamed green beans seasoned well with bacon and onion—and baked her a spice cake with a half inch of fluffy vanilla cream between each of the three moist layers. All of Flo's girls trooped downstairs and partook of her birthday treat, but they fussed about eating such a heavy midday meal in place of their customary noon breakfast. They didn't sing to her, and no one gave her a present. Everyone else's

lack of attention made Dinah appreciate Rueben's gesture all the more. She thanked him over and over for his kindness until he told her, "Hush now. You're embarrassing me."

When the girls shuffled back upstairs for a few hours of rest and quiet before the men began storming the doors, she offered to help clean up the mess. But Miss Flo looped elbows with her and tugged her away from the table.

"No dish washin' on your birthday. Come into the parlor with me instead."

Dinah caught a glimpse of Rueben's brows descending in a scowl, but Miss Flo ushered her out of the dining room so quickly she didn't have a chance to explore the reason for it. Miss Flo aimed Dinah for the bay window where two brocade chairs were crunched close together beneath heavy draperies. It would be a cheerful spot if the curtains were ever separated to let the sun pour in.

Miss Flo pointed to one chair, and Dinah sat while the proprietress flopped into the other with a loud *whish* from her silk skirts. Miss Flo folded her hands in her lap, crossed her legs with another wild rustling of skirts, and smiled—the warmest smile she'd ever aimed at Dinah. "Well now, seventeen, are you?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"And as unsullied as new-fallen snow..."

An uneasy feeling wriggled through Dinah's belly. "Ma'am?"

Miss Flo barked a short laugh. "Oh, I was just thinkin' how different you are from the girls upstairs. Them all bein' so...experienced. You're something of an oddity in a place like this, Dinah." Her well-rouged cheeks and kohldarkened eyes gave her a hard appearance, yet Dinah believed she caught a hint of envy in the woman's expression. "By the time I was your age, I'd been workin' for over two years. Young but old already. This work will make you old fast. All you gotta do is look at your ma to see how this work ages a person."

Yes, Tori appeared much older than her thirty-nine years. She applied kohl to her eyes and bold rouge to her lips and cheeks, powdered her pale face, and dyed her hair with India ink—all attempts to look youthful. But nothing hid the truth. The woman who'd been known as Untamable Tori to the men of Chicago for the past twenty years was worn out.

Dinah's chest constricted. "I know."

“And she’s sick, too.”

Miss Flo spoke so flippantly Dinah wasn’t sure she’d heard correctly. She crunched her brow. “What?”

“Sick. She’s sick.” Miss Flo examined her long fingernails, then picked at a loose cuticle. “It happens in this business if you ain’t careful.” She raised one brow and aimed a knowing look at Dinah. “An’ considerin’ that you came to be, we both know Tori ain’t careful.”

She’d noticed Tori’s drop in weight and the dark circles under her eyes, but she’d just thought her ma was tired. “She’s with child?”

Miss Flo rolled her eyes. “She’s *sick*, I said.”

Then Dinah understood. Twice she’d watched others of Flo’s girls succumb to a sickness that turned their skin yellow and made them waste away to nothing. And now the sickness had its hold on Tori. Dinah folded her arms across her ribs and held tight as fear and worry attacked.

Miss Flo lifted one shoulder in a shrug. “She didn’t want me to tell you, but I figured you have a right to know. She is your ma, after all.”

Dinah had never been allowed to call Tori by anything other than her name—she always claimed the men wouldn’t be interested in her anymore if they knew she had a child. The few times she’d slipped and said “Ma” or “Mama,” Tori had slapped her hard, so Dinah learned not to say the terms out loud. But inwardly she’d called her mother by the affectionate titles and longed for the day they’d leave this place and become a real mother and daughter. Another dream that would never come true.

Tears stung. She forced her voice past her tight throat. “Is there anything you can do?”

Miss Flo shook her head. The feathers she wore in her streaky black-and-gray hair gently waved, as if offering a sweet farewell. But there would be nothing sweet about Tori’s passing—not if she had the same sickness as those other girls. “Not a thing. In fact, I ought to make her leave. Another week or two and she won’t be able to work anymore. And you know everyone has to earn their keep around here.”

In all of Dinah’s lifetime, Tori had never set foot outside the confines of

the Yellow Parrot. She rarely even ventured into the yard. Tori would die of fright if told to leave. Dinah clutched the carved armrests to keep herself in the chair. “But you can’t send her away!”

“Well, I can’t have her fillin’ a room meant for moneymakin’.” Miss Flo glared at Dinah. “This is a business, not a charity or a poor farm. If she can’t earn, she can’t stay.”

No poor farm would take in a soiled dove. No charity house would extend a kind hand to someone who’d sold herself to men. Dinah’s heart beat fast and hard. Panic made her dizzy. The girls of the Yellow Parrot were trapped here like birds in a cage. She hung her head, helplessness sweeping over her with the force of floodwaters breaking through a dam.

“But maybe...”

Dinah jerked her gaze at Miss Flo. The woman was smiling again. Sweetly. Invitingly. Whatever idea she had to keep Tori from being tossed onto the street, Dinah would listen.

“I could let your mama stay here through her last days. It would be hard on her, wouldn’t it, to be sent off somewhere to die all alone? So I could put a bed for her in the attic, let her live out her final days under the roof where she’s been sheltered an’ fed all these years.”

Hope ignited in Dinah’s chest.

“I could do that if you’ll give me, say, twenty-five dollars.”

The hope fizzled and died.

“See, I figure with her bein’ sick, she won’t eat much. Accordin’ to the doctor, she ain’t gonna last even another three months, so I figure twenty-five dollars’ll cover the rest of her life.”

Dinah sagged in resignation. “I don’t have twenty-five dollars.”

The woman’s gaze narrowed, her smile changing to a knowing smirk. “You could earn it.”

Oh no...

Miss Flo leaned forward, bringing her rouge-brightened face close to Dinah’s. “I know a man—a rich businessman who doesn’t visit the brothels. He has very specific...wants. And he pays well.”

No, no, no...

“For settin’ it up with him an’ providing a room, I’d need to take my standard half. But your share would be fifty dollars, Dinah.” Miss Flo’s tone became wheedling. “Twenty-five to give for your ma’s keep, an’ twenty-five to use for yourself any way you please. A new dress—two or three, even. Some new shoes an’ stockings an’ hair ribbons. All kinds of things. Fifty dollars is more than most people earn in a whole month, an’ you could make it just like that.” She snapped her fingers and Dinah jumped. Miss Flo reached across the short distance between the chairs and took Dinah’s hand. Her cold fingers squeezed, squeezed, squeezed. “I’ll get it arranged. Yes?”

Dinah’s ears rang. One line from the advertisement she’d memorized screamed through her mind: “...of good moral character.” She’d given up on so many dreams—having a father, a mother, a home. Could she let her dream of becoming one of Harvey’s girls die, too?

She yanked her hand from the woman’s grip and leaped to her feet. “I’ll find another way to take care of Tori!” She turned and raced for the stairs.

Miss Flo’s mocking voice trailed after her. “No pay, no stay—for either of you. Remember that.”



Every day during the month of June, Dinah set out in search of a job. She spoke to shop owners, café owners, clinic directors, and business office receptionists. She offered to mop floors, to scour pots, to wash linens or scrub aprons, to deliver messages—no job was too menial. And in every case when she answered the simple question, “Where do you live?” she was sent away with a firmly stated, “We don’t need your kind around here.”

After weeks of fruitless searching, she came to a grim realization. Her eighth-grade certificate, so slowly and painfully won, didn’t matter. Her willingness to work hard at whatever task she was given didn’t matter. By association, Dinah was tainted—trapped in the same cage that held her mother captive. She’d never find a decent job. Not in this city. And to get out of the city would take money.

With the summer sun waiting until late to creep over the horizon, the working hours at the Yellow Parrot moved forward. The customers preferred to visit under the cover of darkness. Dinah had always found it ironic that men who so eagerly and unashamedly forked over their dollars to Miss Flo didn't want to be seen coming or going. As summer descended, the most booming business took place between ten and midnight, with a few stragglers sticking around until two or three in the morning until Miss Flo finally gave them the boot.

On the last day of June, Dinah managed to stay awake until the very last man clomped off the porch, straddled his horse, and moseyed for home. She waited until the girls had eaten their supper and returned to their rooms. She waited a little longer, until all murmuring and bedspring squeaking had hushed. Then she crept down the narrow enclosed stairway from the attic to the second floor and entered her mother's room.

Scant moonlight filtered through a slit in the heavy curtains and fell like a pale thread across Tori's sleeping face. For a moment Dinah hesitated. Despite her illness, Tori had worked tonight. She had to or Miss Flo would send her away. Her sagging skin and slack mouth proved her exhaustion. Maybe Dinah shouldn't disturb her. But by morning the others would be awake and would possibly overhear. And Dinah needed this conversation to remain private.

Drawing in a breath of fortification, she leaned forward and shook Tori's shoulder. "Tori? Tori, wake up."

Tori snuffled and slapped at Dinah's hand.

Dinah shook her again, more forcefully this time.

Slowly Tori's eyelids rose. Her bleary gaze settled on Dinah's face, and she scowled. "What're you doin', pesterin' me? Get outta here. Lemme sleep." She started to roll over.

Dinah caught her mother's arm, holding her in place. "You can sleep in a minute. I need to talk to you. It's important."

With a grunt, Tori wrenched her arm free. "What's so blamed important it can't wait until morning?"

After easing onto the edge of the bed, Dinah clutched her hands together and whispered, "You." She swallowed. "I know you're sick, Ma."

Tori's face pinched into a horrible grimace. "I told her not to say nothin' to you. An' don't call me Ma."

"I can call you Ma now. Nobody's around to hear. I needed to know about you being sick. You should've told me." Even as she chided her mother, Dinah realized the pointlessness. She and Tori had never talked—not the way she imagined mothers and daughters were supposed to talk, sharing secrets and laughs and concerns. Mothers and daughters were supposed to look out for each other. They might have failed in every other sense, but maybe they could do at least one thing right. "Miss Flo says if you can't work, you can't stay here anymore."

"Stingy old biddy." Bitterness tinged Tori's weak voice. "All these years I stayed, lettin' her get rich off me, an' now she's ready to put me out like some dried-up milk cow. She don't know the meaning of loyalty."

"I want to help you."

A soft snort left Tori's throat. "You got a cure up your sleeve?"

Dinah hung her head. "I can't make you well. But I...I want to take care of you. I can't let Miss Flo send you away. Not when there's a way to let you stay here."

A glimmer of hope appeared in Tori's purple-smudged eyes. "How?"

Why couldn't life be like the stories in the fairy-tales book Rueben had given her one year for Christmas, where a knight rode to the castle and rescued the distressed maiden from the dungeon? No knight would help her or her ma. Dinah had to depend on herself. "If I give Miss Flo some money, she'll let you stay. Until you..." She couldn't make herself say the word *die*.

"Where are you gettin' money?"

Dinah forced a glib shrug. "I found a way."

For long seconds, Tori stared at her through mere slits. "I wanted to get rid of you when I found out you were comin'. There're ways, you know."

Chills rolled through Dinah, as if her blood had turned to ice water.

"But I'd already done so much wrong, an' doin' away with you wouldn't fix none of it. So I went ahead an' brung you into the world. Brung you into

this...this *den of iniquity*. An' over an' over I've wished I'd done different way back then. Wished I'd not brought you here at all."

Realization bloomed. Tori didn't regret Dinah's birth because she hated her, but because she hated the life into which she'd been born. Which meant her ma cared. Cared about *her*. The ice in her veins turned liquid and warm. Tears filled her eyes, and they pooled in Tori's eyes as well.

Tori continued brokenly. "Now here you are, a woman grown, offerin' to take care of me when I never in all your life did nothin' to take care of you." One tear rolled down her sunken cheek. "I don't deserve any kindness, Dinah. I don't deserve bein' cared for."

The rejections she'd faced over the past days, the past months, the past years swirled up like a giant whirlpool and threatened to topple Dinah from the edge of the bed. Even if she was just the illegitimate child of a prostitute, she'd deserved to be treated better. And even if Tori had sold her body to men to make a living, she didn't deserve to die alone on the streets. Why couldn't those high-and-mighty people in town turn up their noses at the men who paid the dollars instead of saving all their disgust for the women who pocketed the coins? Things sure were backward in the world.

She smoothed the tousled, dry strands of hair on her mother's head. "You deserve to be cared for, Ma, an' I'll see to it you are. You'll die warm in a bed instead of cold on a street."

Dinah returned to her room so her mother could sleep. She dropped into her tiny bed, resigned but also resolute. Tori would enjoy one small good in a whole host of bads. And Miss Flo said Dinah could use the money to buy anything she wanted. She'd use her twenty-five dollars to buy a train ticket and take herself to Mr. Harvey. So far away from Chicago nobody'd know where she'd been or what she'd done to earn her freedom. She'd be one of Harvey's girls, and nobody would look down his or her nose at Dinah ever again.



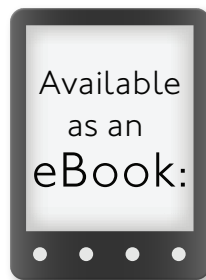
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