

## CHAPTER ONE

### *The Rescue of a Fallen Woman*

*Late March, 1865*

Daniella Post, née Mayfield, originally of Ottawa, Illinois, was sure she was in the wrong place. How she'd arrived was a blur of countryside and belching cities: A train full of Union men coming and going, returning from the war not yet over. Tattered, dirty uniforms. Slings. Empty sleeves. Straggly beards and scabbed faces. Trousers tied off at one knee. The ripe odor of earth and sweat, of endless days on the road. She felt as broken as they, but her pity for them temporarily had lifted her out of her own plight, her reason for escaping Chicago to New York City itself too horrific to remember, and too horrific to forget.

The discreet sign on the brownstone near Sixth Avenue and Greene Street shocked her: the female physician who'd helped her escape her abusive husband had sent her to her cousin's, not saying that it was a "Mission for the Rescue of Fallen Women." The same women she blamed for leading her husband astray! Before she could decide to go elsewhere—there was nowhere else for her to go--the door opened and she was greeted by a stocky woman of perhaps fifty years.

"You must be Mrs. Post," the woman said.

"I'm calling for Mrs. Evangeline Applewood," she said.

"I am Mrs. Applewood," the woman said, and Daniella handed her the envelope from Mrs. Russell, the female physician. Mrs. Applewood scanned Daniella's formal letter of introduction with a pursed smile, accenting the dark hair that shaded her upper lip, nodded, and

led her into the parlor. Whether because of something said in the letter or the fact that it was from her cousin, Daniella couldn't know, but the woman's shoulders softened. "We have a room," she said. "Shared, of course, and you will need to earn it, but you must be tired. You must sleep first."

"Thank you," Daniella whispered. She wanted to ask what kind of place this was, but she was very tired, and keenly aware she had no other choice. In Chicago, she had trusted Mrs. Russell, and so now she must trust Mrs. Applewood. If not for the shelter and hope she offered, Daniella would be terrified. She didn't know any women her age who didn't live with their parents or their husband. How long could she stay at the Mission?

She wanted never to be dependent on a man again. She figured that to be independent she must find a job and her own place to live. She could work hard and take care of herself. But what was she qualified to do? How was she to earn her way at Mrs. Applewood's? What kinds of jobs would she be suited for in New York City?

Growing up, she hadn't expected to have to work outside her home, not even in one of the few professional occupations, such as teaching or midwifery, which permitted women. She didn't have the education for either of those, although she'd gone to school through the age of fifteen, could read and write well--she'd excelled in penmanship--and she was competent enough to teach little children. She was a good seamstress and wondered if she could rely on her domestic skills or whether she would be reduced to the drudgery and toil of factory work. She was no longer the naïve girl who'd married Mr. Post. She would keep her wits about her. She would do whatever it took—within the confines of virtue--to provide for herself.

She'd brought only a duffel and the small trunk, packed for her by her former landlady. It contained three dresses, including her wedding dress and her wedding Bible, inscribed, in her

mother's hand, with a family tree lopsidedly headed by Rev. and Mrs. Maysfield. Daniella's name was on the left and her two dead siblings—designated only “Baby Son” and “Baby Daughter” --on the right. Her landlady had also packed Empress Eugenie, a porcelain doll with human hair dressed in an elaborate gold silk and lace dress and pearl-buttoned jacket, with white kid gloves, a gold chain-link purse and a pendant of emerald-like gems. Mr. Post had brought it to her from France, and while she didn't want to remember that evil man, it was hers, and perhaps valuable, and she couldn't afford to be wasteful. Mrs. Applewood showed Daniella to a room with two cots, separated by a table just wide enough for two chairs, creating the illusion of separate spaces. A servant followed them with Daniella's things, and they said good night.

When they left, she felt terribly alone: Her father dead, her mother in her own private world. Her only child in heaven. She was free of Mr. Post, but she was starkly alone, disconnected. She didn't know anyone in New York who she could rely on right now—except, presumably, Mrs. Applewood—or anyone one who cared for her and who she could care for in return.

She pinned her few remaining dollars into the shoulder of her night dress, relieved not to have to worry right then about protecting herself or her things from a fallen woman and lay down. In the darkness, she felt the terror and grief of being alone in the world. She crossed her arms on her chest, weeping for her lost son.

She wept, too, for her lost innocence. Not that she had fallen or sinned, but her marriage had not been what she'd envisioned when she was 17 and met Warren Post in the yard of her father's church, dressed dandily in a gray-striped walking suit and a blue bow tie. Immediately

she could see he was different than the other young men in her small river town, socially confident and worldly, not touched by the war. During fellowship in the church yard, Mr. Post had not been shy about introducing himself to the Reverend and the other parishioners. As he made his rounds, Daniella felt him looking at her, and she'd turned her right cheek away, the one with the silver dollar-sized rough black birthmark. Mr. Post seemed not to notice it, an ugly splotch the size of an acorn which had plagued her since her earliest school days. As a young girl, she'd overheard Miss Matthews tell Reverend Maysfield, "It's a shame. She could be such a pretty girl." The way she'd said it, she feared she'd become a spinster like the often joyless and shriveled Miss Matthews, but each day following, her father managed to tell her how pretty she was. While she didn't totally believe him, he gave her hope: he was a minister and wouldn't lie.

The next Sunday afternoon, having sought her father's permission, Warren Post came calling at their home. Daniella and he sat with the Reverend and Mrs. Maysfield and drank cold tea in tall glasses. He had lively, playful brown eyes, perhaps a bit mischievous. He sat on the edge of his chair, excited to tell them about his new interest in collecting fine art. Just five years ago, the Chicago Exhibition of the Fine Arts had whetted his appetite with a chance to view paintings like *George Washington Crossing the Delaware* and *Ruffled Grouse*. Reverend and Mrs. Maysfield were impressed by his refinement and encouraged him to visit again. To Daniella's delight, they allowed him to court her, taking her on rides in the country and to afternoon socials. He talked of Paris and London, teeming with art and culture and opportunity. She was enthralled, and soon, in love. Much to her growing pleasure, he would hold her hand and bow to kiss it as he returned her to her parent's home.

Six months after he'd first courted her, Mr. Post had asked for her hand in marriage, and her parents had approved, their only reservation her tender age. Then, he received a small

inheritance and decided to study fine art in Europe for a year, which suited the Maysfields, if not Daniella. Her mother assured her the year of waiting would do them both good. When Mr. Post left for France, he kissed her on her lips and thrust his tongue in her mouth. Goosebumps tickled her skin, and she'd been guiltily thrilled, hesitating before she pulled away. That taste of his passion awakened her curiosity about the wedding night, the anticipation becoming a kind of torture. Only one or two of her friends were married, and, perhaps because she was the preacher's daughter, they didn't share their secrets with her.

Her father died while Mr. Post was away, and her mother, always reticent, had retreated even deeper into her own world. Often Daniella would find her standing as still as a headstone in the church cemetery, communing with the spirit world, her arms raised to the heavens, more comfortable with the dead than with the living. Her mother didn't volunteer any information or instruction regarding the duties of being a wife, and Daniella couldn't bring herself to ask. The church ladies weren't eager to fill her in; when they'd heard that she was engaged they'd raised their eyebrows at each other and shook their heads, congratulating her with weak smiles, as if hiding a sad secret. What she'd gleaned from the book was alarming: "virtue" required her to "submit" and "to bear and forbear is the perfection of humanity." It was her responsibility, as a wife, to understand:

Men are less called and less accustomed than women, even from their earliest youth, to exercise the virtues of self-denial or self-control; and, being naturally more sensual, and, by the law of decorum and the usages of society, less restricted in the indulgence of their appetites and the gratification of their passions, are less ready to sacrifice their own personal pleasures and propensities for the benefit or the accommodation of others.

Daniella had wanted to trust herself, not some old-fashioned, 20-year-old book. Surely her husband, a man of art and European culture, would be kind and loving. They were in love. Why wouldn't she want to satisfy his appetites and passions? Would she not feel passion, too? And why did the church ladies act as if the marital duty was not pleasurable? He was a gentleman; his speech refined and peppered with wise bits of philosophy. "Trust thyself," he'd say, "Every heart vibrates to that iron string," and she liked the idea of not turning to the Bible for the answer to every little thing, as her father, a minister, and the young men in his congregation were wont to do. Mr. Post was ambitious for a career in business or the art world rather than the fields or the church and promised the excitement of a bigger life in cities like Chicago and New York, and travel to Europe. She didn't really know what such a life would be like, but that was the point, wasn't it? What an adventure it would be to become Mrs. Post!

Now, finding herself at a Mission just a few blocks from a series of rundown buildings with half-clad women lounging in the windows, Daniella shivered under her bedcovers, but not from cold. The wedding night had been so humiliating, and then he'd left her in Ottawa while he supposedly went to start his career in Chicago and find a suitable place to live.

They'd been married at the end of April, 1864, in a simple ceremony at the Plymouth Congregational Church. Afterward, the ladies of the church had served cakes and coffee on the church lawn. Mr. Post charmed them all, talking with each in turn, and lingering--a few seconds too long, it seemed to her--with a half-dozen girls several years younger who blossomed coquettishly under his spell. She felt a twinge of pride that, despite her flawed complexion, he'd chosen her. In his buggy on the way to Ottawa's finest hotel, the Fox River House, where they were to spend their wedding night, Mr. Post opened a bottle of champagne, and handed her a

small cup. She'd never consumed alcohol of any kind—he should've known better--and she shook her head no, but he insisted.

“It would be very bad form not to toast to our future,” he said.

She hesitated, but she'd just taken a vow to “obey.” “Just this once,” she said, “to celebrate.”

“To us,” he said.

She took a small sip, pursing her lips at the taste of it. “Oh, my.”

Mr. Post took a long swig straight from the bottle. “*Un repas sans vin est comme une journée sans soleil.*” She looked at him quizzically, eager to learn French. “In France,” he explained, people meet in outdoor cafes—artists, musicians, writers, students, everyone. The conversation is so lively, you can spend whole day passing the time with a glass of wine, just discussing important things. And the artists, they also drink absinthe.”

“What is absinthe?” She was feeling very ignorant of the world.

“It is a very strong spirit, with a lovely green color. The artists like it because it feeds their imagination.” He chuckled knowingly. “The artists in Europe,” he continued, “they paint the female figure nude and the model’s eyes look right at you, unashamed. In one painting by Manet that I saw at the Salon des Refuses”—she had no idea what that was— “a woman is lurching nude on the grass in a park with fully clothed men. In the cafes, they talk about utopian societies, where all are free to love as they will. They call it ‘free love.’ Charles Fourier, for instance, says men and women spend too much time and energy suppressing their sexual passions.”

She didn't understand what he was telling her, or why, but was happy her husband was happy, and that he was so worldly. They would soon move from Ottawa to Chicago and to the world of banking and fine art expositions. He would teach her how to be sophisticated like the artists of France, but she didn't think wine or absinthe would ever suit her.

The hotel errand boy brought Daniella's small trunk and Mr. Post's leather satchel into the hotel while Mr. Post signed "Mr. and Mrs." in the guest registry. Her heart raced in anticipation of what was to come. She knew she was ignorant and tried to put aside her fear, mixed as it was with the warm tingle of her own desire.

In the room, Mr. Post drew the curtains against the late afternoon sun, produced another bottle of champagne and lit a cigar. She was relieved he didn't offer her another glass. Vile stuff. He stretched out in the only chair in the room, a large overstuffed one with a matching footstool. Across the room, she bent over her trunk, uncertain how much to unpack.

He chuckled and when she turned, she realized with embarrassment he had been staring at her buttocks.

"Come here," he said, and she went to him, feeling shy.

He cradled the bottle between his legs, reached up and started unbuttoning the pearly white buttons on the front of her dress. She held her breath against her quickening heart. He was making an effort, she thought, not to appear impatient, but he pulled off a button that rattled across the floor. She started after it, but he grabbed her dress. "Later," he said. "Now, let me see you."

Smiling, she faced him, feeling a timid love for the man the Lord had chosen for her.



“Don’t just stand there,” he said curtly. “I said, let me see you.” He moved his right hand across and down his left arm.

She understood he wanted her to take off her dress. There was a privacy screen in the corner of the room, and she started towards it.

“No,” he said. “Face me.”

Slowly, her fingers feeling almost numb, she pushed the bodice of her dress off her shoulders, to her waist, exposing her plain corset and chemise.

He nodded at first, then shook his head in disappointment. Hadn’t she done exactly as he’d asked?

“In France,” he said, “the ladies dance.”

She stepped back, hurt. On her wedding night, he was telling her about other women? Other women who, apparently, had “danced” for him? “I’ve not been to France,” she said, trying to sound civil. He threw his head back, laughing.

She was glad she’d made a joke and that he would forgive her for not knowing what he wanted. He roused himself from the chair and she stood patiently, waiting for his embrace. He stepped by her for another bottle, popped it open and said, again, “Dance for me, sweetheart.” He sounded drunk.

She twirled once, her crinoline petticoat rustling along the floor and then, giggling nervously, curtsied.

He laughed again and sat down, nodding as if her naiveté was to be expected. “Take off your clothes, dearie, one piece at a time,” he instructed. “I want to see what we have here.”

She bit her lip and slid her gown to the floor, then gathered it up and hung it over the screen. Facing the screen, her back to Mr. Post, she started to unlace her corset. He said sternly, "I'm over here."

In her drawers and chemise, she turned, her arms crossed in front of her naked breasts.

"Go on."

She felt cold and was shaking. Nothing in Alcott's *The Young Wife* had declared that a wife's duties included presenting oneself nude for inspection. She was burning in humiliation. She was already bound to the marital duty. What was this order of "inspection" about?

He pounded the arm of his chair with the bottle and she complied, stripping all the way, one hand over her private parts and one over her breasts. She stood in front of him, afraid to meet his eyes. She assumed he would also be naked, and she'd never seen a naked man.

When she dared to look at him, she saw him sprawled in the chair, his head resting on his chest. He snored. Daniella froze in place, feeling an uneasy mix of rejection, relief, and fear. She tiptoed to her trunk, put on her nightdress and slipped into bed, at first uncertain as to what she'd done wrong to cool her husband's ardor, then furious at his cruelty. How dare he treat her like a barmaid or a dancing girl. "Oh my God," she mouthed, "please help me!"

In the morning, having slept only fitfully, she awoke alone in the bed, Mr. Post was still splayed in the chair, the empty bottles on the floor. He'd been so attentive, even eager before their marriage, why would he now hesitate to take what was rightfully his? Disappointment mingled uneasily with her confusion. She pulled the sheet up under her chin and feigned sleep.

In a short time she heard him yawn. She squinted so that she could see him stretch. He yawned again. Finally, he noticed her, sat upright, and shook his head, as if to remind himself where he was. He cleared his throat. “Morning. *Bonjour. Madame* Post, is it?”

“*Bonjour,*” she echoed. Fear and resentment came back to her and she lay very still.

He opened the drapes and the morning light streamed in. “*Oh, mon dieu, mon dieu.*” As if in a terrible hurry, he patted his stomach and picked up his satchel. “Well, my dearest, I must be off.” He said that he was going to Chicago, to assume his banking position and to find a suitable place for them to live.

She was shocked. “So it will be as if we aren’t even married, with you so far away!” she protested. “What am I to do?”

“Go home to your mother until I send for you.”

The embarrassment of it. In Ottawa, her mother and the women of the congregation, enjoined against gossip but drawn to it, would raise their eyebrows, thinking she’d failed in her wifely duties when, indeed, she’d been willing.

“Can’t I go with you?”

“No,” he said, rather gruffly.

“Why not?” she begged. “I’m your wife!”

“Then you should obey,” he said.

She bristled. She wanted to ask him about that philosopher he’d mentioned the night before, the one who wanted equal rights for women, but she didn’t want to incur his wrath if

there was a chance she could sweet-talk him into letting her go with him. “I will miss you so much,” she said. “Will you send for me soon?”

“Of course, *ma chérie*,” he said, this time softly, but she felt at that moment not like a “*chérie*,” but like a parcel or a piece of furniture that could be shipped hither and yon at the owner’s beck and call.

“Who’ll take care of you?” she asked.

“Oh, don’t worry, lovely, I’ll be taken care of,” he said. “Always am.”

“You’ll write?”

“Of course.” She wasn’t sure she could believe him. He’d written weekly the first month he was in Paris, but then hardly ever.

At the door, he turned, and she thought perhaps he’d changed his mind. He came back to her, reached in his pocket and handed her ten dollars. “To tide you over,” he said, and kissed her lightly. As he closed the door, she crumpled the bill in her hand. It was too little. And too much.

