

PRAISE FOR THE WHITE CITY

“A delightful debut! Bursting with intrigue, romance, and historical tidbits that bring Chicago during the Gilded Age to vivid life, *The White City* is a story that’s certainly destined for the keeper shelf.”

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“From the first sentence until the last, Hitchcock has crafted a tale that weaves in and out and all around, keeping me guessing until the final page was turned. *The White City* is a story I won’t soon forget!”

–Kathleen Y’Barbo, author of *The Alamo Bride*, *The Pirate Bride*,
and *My Heart Belongs in Galveston, Texas*

the
**WHITE
CITY**

GRACE HITCHCOCK

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Our mission is to inspire the world with the life-changing message of the Bible.



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Dedication

To the one who holds my heart.

The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell.

PSALM 27:1-2 KJV

Chapter One

"If adventures will not befall a young lady in her own village, she must seek them abroad."

~Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*

Chicago, July 1893

Winnifred Wylde concentrated on his forehead, nodding, trying to respond appropriately, but it was so difficult with his nose hair escaping and retreating into his left nostril with every breath. Clutching the gold-rimmed china teacup, she averted her gaze to the front entrance of the Ceylon Teahouse, envying the rest of the fairgoers passing by, free from listening to Mr. Saunders drone on and on.

I cannot believe Aunt Lillian made me set aside my novel for this. She promised me a day at the world's fair, not a never-ending monologue. Winnifred thought of the poor heroine that she had left in the clutches of danger and longed to return to her chapter. *Rowena might not even get to marry her love, Lord Francis! She may end up with the villain!* She swallowed, trying not to resent Mr. Saunders for keeping her from her reading. *Why does Aunt Lillian insist on bringing me suitors? I keep telling her I don't want a man "brought."* *I want him to ride through the meadows and sweep me off my feet. I want adventure. I want—*Mr. Saunders snorted at his own joke, sending the dreaded nose hair twirling in the air as he chomped down on his scone, strawberry jam smearing on his pale chin.

Not him, that's for sure. She pasted on a smile. *You must endure as Rowena did when she was captured by her father's evil business partner, Aloysius. Endure.*

A flake of scone caught in his thick mustache.

But I am no heroine. I cannot endure this any longer. "I can't."

"Pardon me, Miss Wylde?" His thick brows rose at her interruption.

Her eyes grew wide as she barely refrained from slapping her hand over her mouth. *Did I say that out loud?* "I am so sorry. I meant to say—" A flash of green drew her gaze to behind her suitor's shoulder and into the shadows of an exhibit where a lean man with a thick mustache seized the wrist of a woman in an emerald day dress as he reached for her dangling reticule. The woman's mouth twisted in pain, and she attempted to wrench herself from his grasp, but she stilled when the man pulled what appeared to be a small revolver from his pocket and pressed it to her corseted waist.

Thinking of the numerous disappearances of young women lately and the countless stories she had read of ruffians ransoming young women, Winnifred dropped her napkin and in her haste to rise, jarred the table, setting the teapot to rattling. She picked up her white skirt and rushed out, leaving Mr. Saunders calling out for her as she ducked under and around the booths in the Woman's Building, knocking loose her pink chapeau as she raced to the main entrance in pursuit of the couple. But the sea of fairgoers outside had already swallowed them. Her gaze flew from white building to blinding white building, her stomach churning at the thought that she was this woman's only hope if this man was indeed the devil behind the White City disappearances.

"Miss Wylde! There you are." Mr. Saunders's cheeks puffed with the effort it took him to follow her. "Whatever drew you away?"

Righting her hat, Winnifred turned to him with her hands on her hips. "Would you be so kind as to take me to the police station? I need to report a kidnapping."

His eyes widened as he clutched his brocade-embroidered waistcoat. "Wh—whatever do you mean?"

"I witnessed a man forcing some poor woman to comply with his will under threat of death." Winnifred twisted around, searching

for an exit sign. In the event of a kidnapping, every second counted. “We need to leave *now*.”

He swept off his hat and fanned his face. “I can hardly believe it. We were only feet from a crime. I mean, you read about these things in the paper, but you never imagine that they could happen to y—”

Spying a sign for the nearest grip car station, Winnifred dug into her reticule for fare. “Mr. Saunders, I’m afraid we have no time to waste. We must be off at once.”

“But our luncheon?” he protested.

“Will have to end prematurely.” *Thank the Lord*. Winnifred set off at a brisk walk, attempting to keep an obtainable pace for Mr. Saunders, but he soon flagged behind, collapsing into a chair at one of the many outdoor restaurants as he muttered for her to wait. But time was of the essence. She wove through the crowds, desperately trying to reach the line before the next grip car departed. Paying for a ticket, she slipped inside the car only moments before the copper bell rang and the car lurched forward. Gripping the pole, she sat perched on the wooden seat, her knee bouncing as she counted the stops until she reached her father’s station.

The woman next to Winnifred looked her up and down with a pinched expression before turning to her companion, whispering away.

Let them gossip. She lifted her head, knowing that her hair must look a fright after her chase, but she didn’t have time to stop at home for a comb and an escort. This was an emergency.

The car jerked to a halt a block from the police station, and without even a departing glance at the women, Winnifred strode down the sidewalk, her skirt slapping against her calves in a raucous manner that would have appalled her Aunt Lillian. Taking the steps two at a time, she let herself into the police station and, with a wave to the front desk officer, she hurried through to the stairs, climbing them to the second floor. She marched toward her father’s office, but before she could reach for the door, one of the officers called out to her.

“Miss Wylde, good to see you. Inspector Wylde stepped out for a cup of coffee, but he should be back any minute.” Officer Baxter grinned, crossing the room to greet her. “Found any more criminals for us to lock up today?”

She laughed without mirth. “Very funny. As a matter of fact, I did.” She crossed her arms, waiting for him to exclaim over her declaration, but much to her chagrin, he merely laughed at her, shaking his head as if her announcement was the most amusing thing he’d heard in a while.

“Never a dull day when you brighten our doors, Miss Wylde.” The gangly officer sat on the corner of a nearby desk, crossing his arms as if to further mock her. “Can you tell me about this criminal? Was he tall, dark, and handsome, with a knife? I believe it was a knife last time, wasn’t it? So maybe today he should be wielding, perhaps, a revolver?” He stroked his auburn mustache with two fingers.

Winnifred pressed her lips into a firm line as she turned her back to him. *Father will listen to me.* Letting herself into his office, she left the door open and sank into his large, worn leather chair behind his desk and ran her finger over the silver frame that rested on top. She lifted the picture and gazed into the face of the woman of whom she was told she was an exact replica. She traced the faint dimple in her mother’s wide smile before traveling over the curled locks that, had the picture captured her coloring, would have been the same golden hue as her own. Winnifred tucked an escaped wisp of hair behind her ear and sighed. Never a day went by that she didn’t long for another moment with her mother. She was only ten years of age when Mother fell ill, but Father spoke of her as if she were still living, though it had been nearly a decade since her passing. It was through his vivid memories Winnifred grew to know her mother more, but it was in Mother’s library where she felt as though they would have been fast friends.

“And to what do I owe this pleasure, Daughter?” Her strapping

father filled the doorway, his presence commanding every officer in the precinct. "I thought you would still be on your outing to the exposition? Is Saunders waiting for you in the carriage?"

"Saunders was nothing like Aunt Lillian's description." She hopped up from the chair, giving her father a peck on the cheek. If she hadn't known that he was almost fifty, she would have guessed his age was nearer to the late thirties. She would have to try to match her father again, though he always dismissed her selections in favor of her mother's memory. If her selections were anything like Aunt Lillian's choices, she now understood his determination to remain single. "I left him behind because I have some time-sensitive news."

He removed his navy coat, hanging it on the back of his chair. He shook his head as if he knew what was coming. "Winnie. . ."

"Now, I know what you're going to say, but hear me out." She lifted her hand to stay his protests. Her past mistakes had done little to earn the respect from her father that she so desperately craved, but this was more important than her pride. A woman's life was at stake. "I'm sure I'm right this time. This kidnapper had a firearm! I've found the devil who has been stealing women at the fair and ransoming them!"

"You were certain last time, and you remember what happened with that poor fruit vendor." He rubbed the back of his neck. "I'm sure you *think* you have stronger evidence, but your overactive imagination has sent my men on more rabbit trails than I'd care to admit. And now that I've been promoted to inspector, I can't be responsible for such a waste of resources. I'm sorry, but I cannot jeopardize my career and reputation for another of your suspected crimes." He reached out and stroked her cheek in a rare show of affection. "Your mother had a fondness for those novels as well. Now, tell me, which one are you reading now?"

Her cheeks flamed at the thought of the stack of penny novels on the cane-back chair beside her bed. Winnifred had long since blazed through her mother's more refined novels of Austen,

Dickens, and Alcott before devouring her collection of romantic poetry by Tennyson, Browning, and Dickinson. Atop the current pile on the chair was *His Secret Wife*, the latest work of Winnifred's favorite author, Percival Valentine. "That is of little consequence."

He laughed and shifted through the stack of files on his oversized desk. "I'm sorry, Winnie, but I have to get back to work. I have several cases I need to tend to personally, and I'm afraid I don't have any time to spare. I'll see you at dinner?"

Rather than saying something puerile that would confirm his analysis that she was just an overgrown schoolgirl spinning wild tales for the sake of garnering her father's attention, she nodded, gave him a kiss on the cheek, and slipped out of his office and shut the door before he could ask one of the policemen to escort her home. Feeling her hat was about to tumble, she paused and pinned her chapeau into place, her focus drifting to the corner of the room to a towering detective with thick, wavy brown hair whom she had never seen before. He leaned over his desk, supporting his weight on his knuckles, his shirt pulling against his broad chest and accentuating his muscular arms. Mesmerized, she watched as he raked his hands through his hair.

"Noticing our latest addition from New York, are you?" Officer Baxter chuckled from behind her. "I would have introduced you sooner, but he was digging around in the archive room when you arrived. That's Detective Jude Thorpe."

At his name, Detective Thorpe glanced up from his disorganized desk, his gaze meeting hers, sending her cheeks into flames. Winnifred gripped her gloves in her fist, muttered her goodbye to the officer, and hurried for the stairs, desperate to escape the new detective's amber eyes. His desk was so close to her father's office, she was sure that he'd overheard her father's reaction to her request. Her feet dragged the pavement as her cheeks tinted with the shame of being humiliated in front of not only Officer Baxter, but also the handsome new detective.

And yet, Winnifred couldn't get the image of that revolver out of her mind. At least, she thought it was a revolver. *I know I'm right. My instincts can't be that far off, can they?* She allowed her fingers to trail the black fence rails surrounding the red-brick prison on the first floor of her father's precinct, not caring that she was soiling her fingertips. *I could be that woman's only hope. What if I give up and her family is forced to pay an outrageous ransom? They would become destitute, and their ruin would be on my hands.*

She leaned against a brick column, keeping her gaze on the second floor of the station as determination to prove her father wrong grew within her. Like Rowena, she felt destined not to be the damsel in distress, waiting on a man to save her, but the heroine. She would find the evidence her father needed, with or without his help.



"Thorpe! Get in here." The inspector's voice cracked over the din of the precinct, sending the officers by the water station scattering to their desks.

Dropping his paperwork, Jude tugged on his coat and adjusted his cuffs and collar, eager to impress his new captain. He stood in front of Inspector Wylde's desk and clasped his hands behind his back. "Sir?"

The inspector lifted the open file in his left hand as he tapped it with his right. "Judging from your records, you were one of the best in New York. Says here that you single-handedly captured one of the leading criminals in the city." His brows rose as his lips pressed into a line. "Pretty impressive for an officer only twenty-four years old."

"Thank you, sir." Jude tipped his head, pleased that he was being recognized on his first day.

"So, I want you to follow my daughter." He dropped the file on the desk and, setting his elbows on it, pressed his fingers together into a steeple point.

"Your *daughter*?" Jude repeated tentatively, unsure if he had heard the inspector correctly.

“My daughter has a tendency to exaggerate because she reads too many of those penny novels by that Valentine author, but she is observant. If she did indeed happen to see a man out there with a revolver kidnapping a woman for ransom, I want her protected.”

“Pardon my asking, but if she is so observant, won’t she notice me trailing her?”

Inspector Wylde chuckled. “That’s why I’ve chosen you to do the job. If you are as good as your records indicate, it shouldn’t be a problem.”

Is this some sort of test? “No sir, it is not. I’ll keep an eye on her.”

“I want you to protect her privacy. I trust my daughter and only need to hear a report from you if you find her in a potentially dangerous situation. I only wish for her to be safe and distracted until I have the real devil of the White City behind bars.” He set aside Jude’s file and reached for another, effectively dismissing him without another word.

With a bow, Jude retrieved his hat and headed for the street, the sticky, warm breeze greeting him. He scowled as he pulled his hat over his brows. It was far too hot to be running around Chicago playing nanny, but if this was what it took to get on Inspector Wylde’s good side, he would do it.

Spying Miss Wylde down the sidewalk, he stepped behind a street vendor who was selling baked potatoes. *How does the man expect to make a living in this heat?* He watched as she slapped her gloves in her palm before marching down the walkway with determination in her strides.

Here we go. He ducked his head and strode after her, vigilant to keep an inconspicuous distance between them as he observed her hail a carriage and direct the driver to take her back to the fair.

He lifted his arm, silently signaling to a nearby cab and, climbing in, instructed the driver to follow Miss Wylde’s carriage. When her carriage halted at the fair entrance on 59th Street, he waited in his cab for a moment as Winnifred followed the path to one of the

ticket booths, presented what seemed to be a season pass, and hurried along before he stepped out and purchased a general admission ticket for a half dollar.

Tucking the decorative ticket into his pocket, Jude made his way through the energetic crowds, scanning his surroundings. He had heard tales of the grandeur of the world's exposition from passengers on the train bound for Chicago, but seeing it for himself was quite another thing entirely. Following the flash of Miss Wylde's white gown that practically glowed in a sea of navy skirts and suits, he wove through the maze of exhibits.

She walked with such purpose that he knew she must be retracing her steps from this morning, possibly attempting to recreate the scene as she searched the ground for any clues. All he could see were the thousands of footprints, with little to no hope of finding anything useful. Miss Wylde paused by a building where he could see couples enjoying some refreshments through the window. Crossing her arms, she tapped her finger to her lips much like he had seen her father do.

Miss Wylde seemed so engrossed in thought that she fairly jumped when a man approached her. She pressed her hand to her chest, her eyes wide, as if she were afraid. Jude reached for his holster hidden under his civilian's coat and tried to resist the urge to rush in without cause. He didn't want to expose himself if the man was not the suspect. But the man had a thick mustache and was rather skinny, much like the man she described to Baxter. Grasping his revolver, Jude approached the couple from behind.

Chapter Two

"Facts are such horrid things!"

~ Jane Austen, Lady Susan

Winnifred had been so distracted keeping an eye on the tall man following her that she did not even realize who was in her path until it was too late. "Mr. Saunders!" She gasped, stepping backward into a brawny man who bumped her shoulder, crushing one of the perfectly puffed sleeves of her gown. Sidestepping her, the man gruffly bid her to mind where she was walking. Winnifred righted her sleeve and turned her attention back to her would-be suitor. "You are still here."

"Well, since I took today off from work and you abandoned me without so much as a by-your-leave, I figured I might as well return to my tea and scones and see a bit of the fair," he replied, the evidence of said tea clumping the ends of his bushy mustache into two moist peaks as he held out her lace-trimmed parasol to her. "You left this at the restaurant."

"Thank you." She fought back a grimace as she grasped it by the carved handle. "I'm so sorry for running off, but—"

"But you've returned, and so, all is forgiven." Mr. Saunders grinned, reaching for her elbow. "However, I think you at least owe me a stroll around the exposition. Now, since we've already seen the Woman's Building, let's go to the States exhibits."

Winnifred withdrew her arm and licked her dry lips, trying to find the words to politely inform him that she wished never to spend one more second in his company. But, glancing over her shoulder, she found that the man following her had paused by a vendor, perusing the chocolate-covered fruit. She inwardly groaned as she forced herself to admit that it would be much safer to roam

the fair with Mr. Saunders at her side to defend her if the man trailing her decided to make a move. Opening her parasol, she gave Mr. Saunders a demure smile and a stiff nod.

Mr. Saunders slid his hand under her elbow again and gave her a guiding tug. "I saw the most astounding thing on the way in to meet you. There is a display of a tower of oranges. Oranges! Can you believe it? One would think the fruit would have rotted in the process of assembling the exhibit, but there they are, as lovely as the day they were picked!"

"Oranges?" She bit her lip at his overwhelming enthusiasm. *Hold it together, Winnifred Rose Wylde. You can do this. Politely refuse, and guide him to where the man was last seen with the woman in green.* "While that does sound tempting, I—"

"If that doesn't strike your fancy, I heard there is a lovely exhibit of roses by the Horticultural Building that I think you would find most—"

She jerked away as the man who had been following her tackled Mr. Saunders to the ground. The nearby fairgoers paused and watched the spectacle unfold as if the grappling men were merely part of an exhibit. It was up to her to save Saunders. Dropping her open parasol, she used her reticule as a mace, whacking the man over the head again and again as he wrestled Mr. Saunders into submission, which didn't take much effort.

The offender lifted his arm to block her whirling purse, but her next blow knocked off his black hat, revealing him as the dark-haired man from her father's precinct. "Miss Wylde, stop! I'm with the police."

She halted her pummeling, the bag swinging in her iron grip. "Detective Thorpe? Why were you following me?"

"You saw me?" His brow wrinkled as he adjusted his hold on his prey.

She rolled her eyes, lifting a hand skyward. "You've been following me since I left the station. A child could have picked you out of

a crowd with all of your veiled glances.” Realizing that Mr. Saunders was still under the detective’s grasp, she flicked her wrist, motioning for him to let go. “And Detective, please release Mr. Saunders at once. He is a friend of the family.” Winnifred fluffed her reticule, attempting to return it to its former glory before retrieving her parasol, which was dangerously close to blowing into a mud puddle. Aunt Lillian was not going to be pleased, since she had purchased the ensemble especially for Winnifred’s outing with Saunders.

Mr. Saunders brushed off his coat, straightening his shoulders as he gave Detective Thorpe a well-deserved sneer. “I say. First Miss Wylde sees a man pull a revolver on a woman. Then, I’m tackled to the ground by a—a nincompoop! Your superior will hear of this, Thorpe.” He jabbed his finger into Thorpe’s chest, his finger crumpling against the sturdiness of the broad surface.

Unmoved, Detective Thorpe retrieved his bowler hat and whacked it against his thigh, shaking loose the dust. “My apologies, sir, but it was my superior who asked me to look after Miss Wylde.”

“Father sent you?” She rubbed her hand over her eyes and laughed. “While he might dismiss my claims, I should have known he would send somebody to watch me until he was certain I was safe. He may be too busy to listen to me, but not too busy to protect me.” She dipped into a shallow curtsy. “I’m Miss Winnifred Wylde, which you already knew.”

He returned her greeting with a stiff bow of his own, as if he was not used to such formality. “The pleasure is mine, Miss Wylde.”

Mr. Saunders cleared his throat and stepped between them. “Miss Wylde, shall we continue as we were before we were so rudely interrupted?”

With the danger subsided, she grimaced at the task before her. If she did not turn Mr. Saunders away now, he would come calling again. Winnifred took his arm, gently pulling him away from Detective Thorpe’s side to afford them a bit of privacy.

“Ah, I take it from our direction that you wish to see the tower

of oranges.” He lifted his finger. “Interesting fact about oranges—”

Enough with the oranges! She gritted her teeth and halted. “Mr. Saunders. I do apologize for the physical trauma you have experienced today from the hand of one of my father’s own detectives, but I’m afraid this isn’t going to work out.”

“Pardon me?” Mr. Saunders scowled, his mustache dipping to his chin as his Adam’s apple bobbed.

“I don’t think we are well suited to one another,” she whispered, in an attempt to maintain discretion.

“Any woman would be happy for me to pursue her.” His nasally voice rose an octave. “I don’t need to put up with being manhandled for a mere inspector’s daughter, no matter how pretty she is.”

Detective Thorpe placed a hand on Mr. Saunders’s arm. “The fault was mine. There is no need to be rude, sir. Report me to Inspector Wylde if you will, but take care what you say about Miss Wylde. She is a gentlewoman’s daughter and is to be treated as such.”

Winnifred could have handled Mr. Saunders on her own, but she quite enjoyed the authority in Detective Thorpe’s voice and had to admit to herself that it was nice to have someone handle the awkwardness of dismissing a suitor for her.

With a sneer, Mr. Saunders picked up his straw boater hat, swiped the grosgrain band with his wrist, and muttered something about incompetence as he strode away.

Winnifred looked up to her would-be-rescuer and smiled. “I guess that is one way to rid oneself of a suitor.”

The detective shoved his hands into his pockets, his ears turning red. “I sincerely apologize for the confusion, Miss Wylde.”

She waved her hand. “Please, don’t think anything of it. Now, my father doesn’t believe what I saw today, but I do, and I must keep searching for any clues to help us in finding the woman in green. I’m afraid we don’t have much time.”

“Please, carry on as if I am not here.” Detective Thorpe nodded,

falling behind her by several paces.

Winnifred smothered her laughter and waved him to her side. "It would be silly for you to follow me since I know you are there. Come on, you can help me look."



Jude walked beside her in silent mortification. Thankfully, Miss Wylde seemed so caught up in her search that she didn't appear to notice his discomfort. Here he was priding himself on his stealth and practically boasting to the inspector over his file, and this spritely young woman discovered his presence in a matter of minutes. If he didn't feel so chastened, he would laugh at the memory of her pummeling him. He straightened his shoulders and focused on his task at hand, protecting Miss Wylde. "So, where are we heading?" he asked as they paused under a directional sign.

"I don't think our suspect would return to the scene of his crime right away, so I'm not sure where to begin searching for him." She planted her hands on her hips. "He could be anywhere by now. He may not even be on the fairgrounds, but I have to start somewhere. I last spotted him leaving the Woman's Building, heading toward"—she turned, pointing down the Midway—"that direction."

I just need to keep her busy and away from this man, if he is indeed dangerous, until she loses interest. "How about the Ferris wheel? It's on the Midway and could give us a good layout of the whole fair." *And far above any threat lingering on the ground.*

Her countenance brightened. "Oh, that's true. I have been wanting to ride on it. The sign says it's this way." She lifted her impractical ruffled skirt to avoid a well-trodden muddy patch and stepped lightly around puddles until they reached a dry path.

Spying a gathering crowd to their left, Jude read a sign for lions on horseback and tigers on velocipedes featured in Hagenbeck's Arena. His jaw dropped as he stopped in his tracks at the ridiculous notion. "A tiger on a velocipede. Are they serious?"

"I haven't watched the show yet, but my friend Danielle, I mean,

Miss Montgomery, said it was positively thrilling. But I'm afraid we cannot linger," she said, tilting her head for him to continue down the Midway.

"Of course." He clasped his hands behind his back and walked beside her, stealing glances at her out of the corner of his eye. When he had first seen her enter the precinct, her ethereal beauty disarmed him. Even though he didn't wish to admit it, Jude was glad to have the opportunity to be near her and soon found himself captivated by her lilting voice as she told him which exhibits to avoid and which were to be seen at once.

She paused and turned to him, expectance in her brilliant blue-green eyes. "Detective Thorpe?"

He blinked and leaned toward her, brows rising as he chastened himself for growing distracted yet again. He would have to work on paying closer attention, lest she inadvertently give him a poor report to her father. Jude already had one mark against him, with her spotting him following her, and he could not afford another. "I'm sorry, did you ask a question?"

"I asked why you started working at my father's precinct," she replied, continuing down the wide path.

Jude knew that question was bound to come up, but he couldn't rightly tell the truth, that he had moved to investigate the so-called "accidental" death of his brother-in-law, Victor. Victor had been too alert to have stepped out in front of that grip car, and while the autopsy had uncovered a blow to the head, it had been ruled as the car striking him and not manslaughter.

Jude was one of the few people outside of Victor's department who knew that Victor had been working undercover on a fraud case. No, he would keep the secret close to his chest. He could not risk the murderer being warned and having any trail left behind growing cold, so he settled on telling only half of his reasoning. "I moved here from New York to be with my mother and sister Mary after my brother-in-law passed in the spring. I wanted to be here

for them and my nephew should they need anything.”

“I’m so very sorry to hear of your family’s loss.” She gently touched his coat sleeve, genuine sadness in her every feature. “A life taken too soon is too great a sorrow to bear on our own.”

Jude nodded, knowing that she was speaking from experience. He had heard from the officers of the untimely, unexpected death of her lovely mother. “And I am thankful that we are not left alone to bear it. It was only by the hand of the Lord that I was able to be offered a position so quickly here in Chicago at your father’s precinct.” He grinned, hoping to distill the sadness settling about them like a cloud. “I’m eager to prove my worth to your father and show him that hiring me was not a mistake.”

“Well, my father was excited to hire a seasoned detective with such an impressive record from New York, but it seems that since I found you out, *I* must be the best detective New York has seen.” She turned sparkling eyes on him, a teasing light in her smile and voice.

Despite the twinge her words brought, Jude enjoyed her banter. “It would seem that way, yes. So shall you be going by Detective Wylde, or are you aiming for your father’s position as inspector?”

“Of course. We Wylde only want the best. I will answer to Inspector Wylde or Captain Wylde.” She laughed. “But if I’m honest, I think you were only sloppy because you didn’t think that playing nanny to the inspector’s silly daughter warranted much stealth.”

Jude dropped his gaze to the ground. The inspector had been right. She was very observant. He would have to be careful. “Miss Wylde, I would never call you silly.” *Beautiful, disarming. But never silly.*

“So how long did Father assign you to my post?” She looked toward the bustling crowd that was gathering in front of the Street in Cairo exhibit as a vendor exclaimed in Jude’s ear the marvel of his wares, nearly deafening him.

He pressed his hand over his ear and sent the man a glare before taking her arm, pulling her away from the screaming vendor. “Until

your father feels that it is safe for you to wander about the city alone,” he replied, studying her reaction as they continued down the Midway.

She sucked in her breath through her teeth and sidestepped a freshly dropped ice cream cone, sending the wailing boy a sympathetic glance. “With all the crime that the exposition has brought to our city, that could take *months*. If you want to get back to what you’ve been trained to do, help me solve this case. Let’s find the proof we need together and capture this rogue before it’s too late.”

Only hours ago, her proposal would have sounded appealing, but now that he’d met her, Jude wasn’t so sure that he wished to expedite his time with the charming Miss Wylde after all. “I don’t know. Your father assigned me to keep you out of danger, not intentionally place you in harm’s way by tracking a potentially violent criminal.”

“Think of it this way,” she said as he purchased their tickets, and she pulled him into the massive, winding line for the Ferris wheel ride. “If you hadn’t discovered me, or rather if *I* hadn’t discovered you”—she poked at him again—“I would still be doing what I’m doing, so you might as well help me. I’ll be far safer with you by my side.” She looked up to him, her blue-green irises pulling him in as her golden curls caressed a tan face, which told him that, even though she may look the part of a young socialite, she had an adventurous soul.

He bit back his laughter at this breeze of fresh air in the form of the inspector’s daughter. “Come along, Miss Wylde.” He extended his arm to her, escorted her to the front of the line, and flashed his badge to the engineer. “Police business.”

The man gave them a wink. “Looks like mighty pleasant police business to me.”

Jude felt Winnifred stiffen, but he ignored the man and led them inside the overcrowded car.



The air pulsed with the excitement of the fairgoers as Winnifred followed Detective Thorpe onto the crowded Ferris wheel car that carried about fifty other passengers. The doors closed behind them and the odor of warm bodies filled the air, but she refused to give Detective Thorpe the impression that she was a delicate flower and refrained from pressing her handkerchief to her nose as the fine ladies did behind her. As the Ferris wheel jerked to life and began its slow and steady climb, the passengers in the middle pressed toward the windows, jostling her. She grabbed at her hat and bit her lip as a man on her right stood a little too close for comfort. She turned to reprimand him, but caught him grinning at her in a most disconcerting way as he moved even closer.

Detective Thorpe reached for her wrist and guided her between the window and himself, spreading his arms on either side of her shoulders and splaying his fingers against the glass, creating a safe haven for her before narrowing his gaze at the offender. “Step back or you’ll see naught but stars on this trip.”

The man, eyeing Detective Thorpe’s massive build, stepped away without an argument.

Winnifred nearly sagged with relief. Not wanting to reveal how much his action touched her, she kept her back to Detective Thorpe’s chest and gazed out the window, breathless with the sight before her. Facing the east fairgrounds, the dome of the Moorish Palace rose up to her right and, beyond it, the brilliant white of the buildings gleamed in the light of the late afternoon sun. The crowds below didn’t seem as overwhelming from this vantage point, and she felt certain that such a brilliant emerald-green gown would show as a beacon amongst the mostly dark-clad crowd. But the young maid and the man with the revolver were long gone.

“You were right to think we could see for miles up here, Detective Thorpe. I think that between the two of us, we can cover the places he would most likely visit this week to claim more victims.”

She risked a glance at him over her shoulder. His golden-brown eyes met hers and she felt her knees weaken. Never had a man outside her novels affected her so. She returned her gaze to the fairgrounds below and tried to continue as if her heart hadn't just experienced an earthquake. "Now. . ." She paused at the tremor in her voice and, clearing her throat, began again. "Since I first saw the suspect outside the Ceylon Tearoom in the Woman's Building, and judging from the reports that the kidnapper tends to only take women, I think we should visit the places where women would feel comfortable without their husbands or escorts. So maybe we can start with the Rose Garden exhibit?"

His brows rose with what she hoped was approval and not scorn.

Clearing her throat, she pressed onward. "And I think after that, if we still don't find him, we should try looking over at the Fine Arts exhibit and then return to the Woman's Building." She gave a nervous laugh and wished she had a lemonade to cool her nerves. "I'm just trying to think of places where he could have an opportunity to abduct a woman."

"I think those are brilliant suggestions. Have you ever considered becoming a detective, Miss Wylde?" Detective Thorpe asked as the car began its descent, all teasing gone from his tone.

She dipped her head at the unexpected compliment. "There aren't any female detectives at my father's precinct, and besides, my father would never allow me to become one if there were. While I do enjoy the thrill of the chase, I can achieve that thrill safely from a settee, reading, and not on the street, flirting with life-and-death, according to my father."

"So, reading is your favorite pastime? Besides going to the fair to chase after criminals, what else do you enjoy?"

"I enjoy a great many things, but my aunt usually has me quite busy with social events. My family wishes for me to be safely married and tucked away in a nice, neat mansion." She swept her gloved hands together. "Of course, there's nothing wrong with being