

Will the fiery Jordan Shaw stand in the way of Diana Morrow
becoming Knight Colburn's bride?



A Measure of Grace



AL & JOANNA LACY

*A Measure
of Grace*

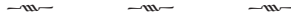
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AL & JOANNA LACY



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Special Acknowledgment
Congratulations to Brittney Ann Hinson of Ashford, Alabama,
for submitting the winning entries in the Mail Order Bride contest.
These letters and newspaper ad are found in this book as if written by the
hopeful groom and his potential mail order bride.



This is a work of fiction. The characters, incidents, and dialogues are products of the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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*With great pleasure, we affectionately dedicate this book
to our author representative
Chad Hicks.*

*You are one of the reasons we find so much joy in writing
for Multnomah Publishers!*

*We love you, Chad.
Al and JoAnna*

1 THESSALONIANS 5:28



Prologue

THE *ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA* REPORTS that the mail order business, also called direct mail marketing, “is a method of merchandising in which the seller’s offer is made through mass mailing of a circular or catalog, or advertisement placed in a newspaper or magazine, in which the buyer places his order by mail.”

Britannica goes on to say that “mail order operations have been known in the United States in one form or another since colonial days but not until the latter half of the nineteenth century did they assume a significant role in domestic trade.”

Thus the mail order market was known when the big gold rush took place in this country in the 1840s and 1850s. At that time prospectors, merchants, and adventurers raced from the east to the newly discovered goldfields in the west. One of the most famous was the California Gold Rush in 1848-49, when discovery of gold at Sutter’s Mill, near Sacramento, brought more than 40,000 men to California. Though few struck it rich, their presence stimulated economic growth, the lure of which brought even more men to the west.

The married men who had come to seek their fortunes sent for their wives and children, desiring to stay and make their home there. Most of the gold rush men were single and also desired to stay in the west, but there were about two hundred men for every single woman. Being familiar with the mail order concept, they began advertising in eastern newspapers for women to come west and marry them. Thus was born the “mail order bride.”

Women by the hundreds began answering the ads. Often when

men and their prospective brides corresponded, they agreed to send no photographs; they would accept each other by the spirit of the letters rather than on a physical basis. Others, of course, did exchange photographs.

The mail order bride movement accelerated after the Civil War ended in April 1865, when men went west by the thousands to make their fortunes on the frontier. Many of the marriages turned out well, while others were disappointing and ended in desertion by one or the other of the mates, or by divorce.

In the Mail Order Bride fiction series, we tell stories intended to grip the heart of the reader, bring some smiles, and maybe wring out a few tears. As always, we weave in the gospel of Jesus Christ and run threads of Bible truth that apply to our lives today.



DARK THUNDERHEADS WERE PROWLING like beasts of prey over the jagged Sawtooth Mountains of central Idaho, driven southward by a stiff wind on a late spring morning in 1864.

Residents of the small town called Elkton—which was located just two miles from the southern Sawtooth foothills—were moving about the town, keeping their wary eyes on the approaching storm.

Lydia Carpenter stepped out the door of her modest white clapboard house, noting the unmistakable smell of rain in the air. When she felt a blast of wind buffet her, she realized it was blowing harder than she had thought. Pausing on the front porch, Lydia reached up, grasped the ribbons of her straw hat, and secured it more tightly under her chin.

Taking a deep breath of the moist air, she stepped off the porch, bent her head into the wind, and headed for Main Street. In less than five minutes, Lydia reached Main, turned right, and headed toward the center of Elkton's business district, which was four blocks in length.

On the northeast corner of Main and Second Streets stood the Elkton General Store, which Lydia and her husband, Art, had owned for just over ten years.

Lydia always enjoyed her walk to the store, and though she found herself wishing the wind was not quite so strong, she was fond of rainy days and springtime. She wore a contented smile as she moved briskly along the boardwalk, greeting people as she went.

Upon entering the store, she found Art was busy behind the counter, taking care of customers.

“Uh-oh!” said Art Carpenter, chuckling. “Here’s the boss. I’d better get busy!”

The customers laughed, and one man said, “She’s liable to fire you, Art, if you don’t work faster!”

Art laughed. “No need to worry about getting fired. Slave labor doesn’t get fired. They just feel the lash of the whip!”

“And don’t you forget it, Arthur!” Lydia said as she moved behind the counter and removed the straw hat.

Smiling at the first customer behind the one Art was waiting on, Lydia said, “Bessie, may I help you?”

A portly Bessie Higgins laid her groceries on the counter, smiled, and said, “Thank you, Lydia.”

As she began totaling the purchase, Lydia said, “Looks like we’re going to get a good rain. Those clouds are pretty dark.”

“Yes,” said Bessie. “I wish it hadn’t come today. My son, Harold, is one of the ranch hands who’s making the Bar-S cattle drive to Ketcham this morning.”

Lydia frowned. “Oh, that could be dangerous if lightning strikes while the cattle are being driven over there. Can’t Mr. Shaw wait and drive his cattle to Ketcham tomorrow or the next day?”

“Not from what Harold told me last night,” said Bessie. “Mr. Shaw has already promised those eastern beef buyers he would have a hundred and fifty head of cattle delivered to the Chicago stockyards on the hoof next Tuesday. In order to keep his promise, he has to put them on that train today.”

“Well,” said Lydia, “at least it’s only a seven-mile drive from the Bar-S to Ketcham. Maybe they can get them there before the worst part of the storm hits.”

“I sure hope so,” Bessie said, worry evident in her eyes.

At the 10,000-acre Bar-S Ranch some five miles west of Elkton, foreman Buck Colburn was standing on the front porch of the small log house which was home to him, his wife Annie, and their sixteen-year-old son, Knight. His son stood beside him as they watched some of the cowhands near the corral, separating steers to be driven to the railhead from the rest of the huge herd. The bawl

of the cattle and the clatter of their sharp-pointed horns as they jostled one another could be heard above the wind's howl and the shouting of the cowhands.

Knight Colburn, who like his father was tall and lanky, said, "Dad, it wouldn't hurt for me to miss school today so I could go with you on the drive. As you well know, my grades are good and it wouldn't be too hard for me to catch up on a day's schoolwork."

"I'm glad your grades are good, son," said Buck, "but there's really no need for you to go on the drive and miss school. We're only taking a hundred and fifty head. I'm taking seven men with me, and Mr. Shaw is coming, too. Nine men is all that's needed to do the job."

Knight glanced at his father with a puzzled look in his eyes. "Isn't Jordan going?"

Buck shook his head. "Not this time."

Jordan Shaw was Knight's best friend. Knight knew that the ranch owner had often let his son miss school to go on cattle drives—some which took as much as a week.

"How come Jordan isn't going, Dad?" asked Knight.

"The boss is still very upset at Jordan for losing his temper last week and throwing that rock through the hardware store window. He told Jordan there was no call for him to throw a temper tantrum just because Ben Slayton wouldn't sell him that new revolver without his father's permission. Jordan may think he's twenty-one, but he's only sixteen."

Knight nodded slowly. "Jordan has admitted to me several times that he has trouble controlling his temper, Dad. I've told him over and over, if he would open his heart to Jesus like I did, not only would the Lord save his lost soul, but He would give him the power to get that temper under control."

Buck watched his cowhands as they worked to separate out the full number of steers for the drive. Shaking his head, he said, "You and your ol' dad both had temper control problems before we got saved, son. And mine was much worse than yours. But thank the Lord, we're both doing a whole lot better."

"Yeah," said Knight, chuckling. "And Mom's plenty glad of that."

“Oh! Speaking of Mom...here she comes.”

At that moment, Annie Colburn, the ranch cook, was crossing the yard toward the Colburn house from the bunkhouse, where she had just fed the last of the ranch hands a hearty breakfast. As she drew near the porch, she took a long look at the approaching storm, then stepped up on the porch and brushed some wind-blown hair from her eyes. “Buck, I wish you didn’t have to make the drive today. I don’t like the looks of those clouds.”

“I don’t either, honey,” said Buck, “but we have to get the steers to the railhead today.”

“I know,” she sighed, then looked at her son. “Have you managed to talk your father into letting you skip school and go along on the drive?”

Knight shook his head. “I tried, Mom, but it didn’t work.”

“Good,” she said. “You need to be in school. And you’ll be safe there. I don’t like to see any cowhands driving cattle on a stormy day.”

At that moment, Harold Higgins turned around in his saddle and waved at the foreman. “We’re ready, Buck!” Higgins had Buck’s horse saddled and ready for him.

Buck waved back, then folded Annie in his arms. Kissing her on the forehead, then the cheek, he said, “Now, sweetheart, don’t you fret. We’ll be fine. I’ll see you this afternoon.” He said to Knight, “Have a good day at school, son.”

Knight nodded, forced a smile, and put an arm around his mother.

Since Annie Colburn had come to know the Lord Jesus Christ some three months ago, she had been a happy, cheerful person, always looking on the bright side of life. But on this particular morning, as she watched her husband swing into the saddle, she was feeling a sense of dread deep inside. Over the years, Buck had often run into storms while driving cattle. Why was she feeling a strange fear this time?

Buck waved at his wife and son, and they waved back as he rode away with the herd and the other riders.

Looking heavenward toward the dark, wind-driven clouds, Annie said in her heart, *Dear Lord, I can only commit Buck to You. Please take care of him.*

The riders and their herd swung southward, putting the ranch house and the other buildings between them and the foreman's cabin as they headed into the woods. Annie caught a glimpse of Buck's back as he passed from view and said, "Go with God, darling."

Hearing his mother's words, Knight leaned down, kissed her temple, and gave her a tight squeeze.

Mentally shaking off her feeling of gloom, she looked up at her son, who towered over her, and found a smile for him. "You're so much the picture of your father in so many ways, Knight," she said, placing her small, work-roughened hand on his arm.

The youth gave her a lopsided grin. "That's always music to my ears, Mom. The more I can look and be like Dad, the happier I am. He's my number two hero."

Annie's smile broadened. "I know. Your number one Hero is the one who suffered, bled, and died for you on Calvary's cross."

"Yes, ma'am. He sure is. The Lord Jesus will always be my number one Hero."

"Well, son," said Annie, hugging his arm to herself, "it's time for you to head for school."

Studying her eyes, and not seeing the usual sparkle there, Knight asked, "Mom, are you all right?"

Pressing another smile on her lips, she said, "Of course I am, honey. It's just that I miss your dad already, and he's hardly off the place."

Even as Annie was speaking, Jordan Shaw came out the back door of the big ranch house—which was positioned some sixty yards in front of the foreman's cabin. Jordan, who stood five inches shorter than Knight, was carrying his slicker and book pack. He motioned for Knight to meet him at the corral, and headed that direction.

Knight stepped into the log house, grabbed his slicker and book pack, and kissed his mother's temple one more time. "I'll see you this afternoon, Mom."

Annie flashed him a sunny smile. "Have a nice day at school."

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On the cattle drive, the Bar-S men kept a close watch on the dark, heavy clouds rolling in behind them over the Sawtooth Mountains, pulling their hats down tight to keep the ever-increasing wind from snatching them away.

Foreman Buck Colburn was riding on the right side of the herd with ranch hands Ace Decker and Keith Nolan. William Shaw was at the rear, with two other men, and the other three drovers were on the left side of the nervous, bawling herd.

They were pulling out of the woods where they would cross the rolling open fields all the way to Ketcham, and rain began to fall lightly, becoming a fine spray as the wind currents close to the earth hit it. The riders were slipping into their slickers as horses and cattle kept moving.

Soon the entire sky was a black, swirling mass. The rain came down harder, the wind grew stronger, and the cattle became more restless. The trail ahead of them lay locked in the grip of the storm. The edges of the valley that surrounded them were blotted out as the clouds dropped low and touched the earth. The timberline on the mountains behind them was lost in the driving mists.

The wind, booming across the valley, gusted huge sprays of rainwater against the drovers and their bawling herd like high waves smashing across a stormy sea.

They were almost halfway to Ketcham when lightning cracked high overhead, but the flash of light and the ensuing clap of thunder were enough to startle two steers who broke from the herd on the right side and ran hard.

Quickly, Buck Colburn jerked the reins and galloped after them with Ace Decker and Keith Nolan looking on as they wiped rain from their eyes. Ramrod William Shaw focused on the scene, wishing the storm would move on.

Colburn was some one hundred fifty yards away when he finally got ahead of the two steers and sharply reined his mount to turn them back toward the herd. As the gelding wheeled about, he stumbled and fell on the slick grass, sending Buck out of the saddle and rolling on the rain-sodden ground.

Lightning split the ebony sky again, this time coming closer to

the earth. As Buck was slipping and sliding in an attempt to gain his feet, his horse got up and galloped away in the opposite direction from the herd.

Gasping for breath, and holding his rib cage which was shooting pain, Buck shouted for his horse to come back, but the frightened animal kept going.

At the same time, five steers split from the mass of cattle on the right side, heading straight toward Buck Colburn. Decker and Nolan spurred their horses quickly to go after them.

Buck stiffened at the sight of the racing steers and prepared to remove himself from their path as they drew closer.

Seconds later, a bolt of lightning shot like a dagger of white fire out of the thunderheads, striking the ground less than thirty yards from the left side of the herd, frightening them. The herd was already turning to the right, and when the deafening thunder boomed like a thousand cannons all around them, they bolted.

Decker and Nolan drew rein as the five steers they were chasing scattered every direction, and wheeled their mounts. They saw the herd stampeding toward them.

With the five steers scattering, Buck Colburn ran toward the herd and his men, but when the frightened cattle turned and charged in his direction, he skidded to a halt and froze in place. He looked to the right, then to the left, but knew it would be impossible to get to safety on foot before the spreading, charging herd reached him.

From where he was sitting on his horse, William Shaw stood up in the stirrups, waved his hat at Decker and Nolan, and pointed at the foreman, who was in the direct path of the charging cattle. "Buck! Buck! Go after Buck!"

Decker and Nolan could not hear their boss's voice, but they saw him waving his hat and pointing at Buck Colburn.

Nolan looked at Decker. "It's Buck! He's trapped! The boss wants us to go after him."

Buck was now frantically waving his hat at them, shouting for help.

He had judged the distance between himself and the two riders, and knew if one of them rode to him at a gallop, he could pick

him up with time enough to get them out of the path of danger.

“What shall we do?” Nolan shouted to Decker. “Shaw is waving at us furiously!”

Shaking his head while both their horses danced about fearfully, Decker said, “I ain’t takin’ no chance on gettin’ killed just to save Buck!”

“Me, neither!” shouted Nolan. “It ain’t worth it!”

“Right! Let’s get outta here!”

William Shaw and his other men looked on, seeing that there was time to save Buck from certain death if Decker and Nolan acted quickly. Their stomachs wrenched when they saw the two cowhands spur their mounts, gallop away from the charging herd, and head for safety in the dense forest to their left.

“Dirty cowards!” cried Harold Higgins, and rode his horse up beside William Shaw. “Boss, I gotta do something! I can’t let Buck—”

“It’s too late, Harold,” Shaw said with a quiver in his voice. “You’d never make it from this far away.”

“But, boss, he—”

Another bolt of lightning lashed out of the sky.

“It’s too late,” said the owner of the Bar-S. “It’s too late.”

Thunder boomed, vibrating the earth.

Out in the open field in the path of the stampeding herd, Buck Colburn’s rain-pelted face was taut, stricken. His breathing was shallow, fast, his chest rising in sharp movements. Though he knew he could never get out of the path of the stampede, he ran to his left, slipping and sliding on the wet grass. All the time, he was keeping his line of sight on the solid wall of wild-eyed cattle as they bore down on him.

William Shaw and his other men looked on in breathless horror.

Buck stumbled and fell, rolling on the rain-soaked earth. Still watching the charging cattle, he jumped to his feet, gasping for air. Terror and panic were stabbing his heart as the front line of steers were drawing so close he could see the whites of their bulging eyes.

He fell again, but this time, he would not make it to his feet.

His last thoughts were of Annie and Knight.