



## ***Lightning and Lace***

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***Kahlerville, Texas 1898***

### **Chapter 1**

In the predawn hours when the darkness of earth stood ready to relinquish its cloak, Bonnie Kahler reached to touch the opposite side of the bed. Empty. Just as it had been for the past two years, nine months, and nineteen days. Every morning she woke to the hope that Ben hadn't been taken from her, and his body didn't lie in a cold grave while she struggled to keep a feeble hold onto sanity.

Some days Bonnie believed she could cast aside her sorrow and raise her children alone. She could be strong, decisive, and not let her widowhood affect her every step. On those days she believed God still cared about her, and He would show her how to fight the blackness engulfing her very soul.

This was not one of those days.

Bonnie drew back her hand and took a deep breath. Her head pounded. Zack and Michael Paul needed breakfast and a smiling mother before they left for school. Lydia Anne needed a mother who played dolls and dressed her sun-kissed hair with ribbons and bows. All three of her children deserved a mother who understood she carried the roles of both

parents. The boys loved to fish, but she hated the thought of handling dirty worms and slimy fish. Far too long she'd expected her brothers and stepfather to fill Ben's shoes.

Help me, Lord. I want to climb out of this selfish hole and live for You. I want only truth in everything I do.

Refusing to wallow in self pity one minute longer, Bonnie swung her legs over the side of the bed and walked to the open window. She pushed aside the curtains and listened to the rooster give his call to morning and the cattle answer in response. This had been Ben's favorite time of the day.

"Bonnie, come watch the sunrise. It's prettier than most," he'd say. And she'd crawl out of bed to join him. Not that she shared his enthusiasm for the day's beginnings, but because she loved him.

Today the sun barely lit the horizon in colors matching the fall leaves carpeting the ground outside her home. Odd, how they glittered like jewels in the pale moonlight when only a half moon illuminated them before the sun pushed it from sight. Autumn ushered in painful memories of Ben's last days—the persistent cough that decimated his body and took his spirit to a place where she could not go.

She slowly turned to the nightstand where Ben's Bible rested. Most days she shrank back from looking at it and exploring the Words that promised to sustain her. But she always thought about reading the familiar passages. Beside the Bible sat an empty wine bottle. She startled. Had she drunk that much last night? A friend had suggested she drink a small glass of wine when she couldn't sleep. Last night the wine tasted as sweet as her life had been with Ben, and today guilt consumed more than an empty flask. Her family would be appalled. Seeking their guidance crossed her mind, but she was too ashamed of her inability to cope after all these months.

"I will not give into this," she whispered. "Dear Jesus, help me."

The day's activities scrolled across her mind. She needed to meet with Thomas in the next few minutes. He was a good foreman who knew her failings, yet he always took the time to review the past week's work and show her where every penny was being spent or earned for the Morning Star Ranch. Soon, maybe today, she'd take more interest in the ranch.

Michael Paul wanted to take piano lessons, and today she'd make the arrangements with her sister-in-law to teach him. Lydia Anne needed more attention from her mother, the kind of attention that didn't result in frustration and tears from both of them.

A twinge of fear took root in Bonnie's heart. She'd been summoned by Zack's teacher. His unruly behavior had caused problems at school, all of which had begun when his father died.

"Don't make excuses for him," her mother had said. "Force him to face up to the consequences of his mistakes. If you don't, he'll continue to torment Michael Paul and Lydia

Anne. The older he gets, the more his tendency will be to bully you. Now is the time for Zack to understand rules and authority.”

How could Bonnie instill those values in her son when she couldn’t bring herself to discipline him? He grieved for his father. All of them did. How could she help her precious children when she shared their misery?

Bonnie lifted her shoulders and swept her finger tips across the Bible, a milestone, for she hadn’t been able to complete that small gesture of respect for months. Her other hand grasped the wine bottle and she set it by the chamber pot.

I’ll drink tea to help me sleep. I’ll listen in church this week, and I’ll try very hard to take Mama’s advice. She nodded to punctuate her thoughts. The Reverend planned to retire soon; perhaps she’d garner the strength to ask him for counseling.

With more determination than she’d felt in months, Bonnie dressed and descended the stairs to begin her duties for the day. She heard Juanita humming a Spanish tune in the kitchen and smelled the nutty aroma of coffee.

“Buenos dias, Miss Bonnie.” Juanita clasped her small hands together and smiled broadly. “Another beautiful day, I think. Si?” She poured Bonnie coffee and added a brilliant smile.

“Thank you.” Bonnie wrapped her fingers around the cup. She envied Juanita’s iridescence—always happy, beautiful, passionate about her faith. “I think the day is as beautiful as you and I choose.”

“Then we choose the best.”

Forcing a smile, Bonnie told herself that soon she’d not force joy. It would return. Life was about to change. It had to. A rap on the door indicated Thomas had arrived to discuss ranch business, and today Bonnie planned to listen.

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