

An Appalachian Summer

CHAPTER 1

May 20, 1933

Piper Danson's cheeks hurt from smiling for what seemed like hours with no relief in sight. More people waited in line to take their turn in front of her and pretend happiness over her debut into society. Then again, their smiles might be sincere. Piper was the one feigning excitement as she repeated socially appropriate words of welcome.

Her ridiculous gauzy white dress looked made for a sixteen-year-old instead of a woman with two years of advanced studies at Brawner Women's College. If only she could fiddle with the neckline where it chafed her skin, but a debutante didn't adjust her clothing in public. She pretended everything was wonderful and that she loved all the flowers presented to her in celebration of her coming out party. But the cloying odor of so many flower arrangements made her feel as if she were at a wake. Perhaps she was. The funeral of her freedom. Time to pick a man and marry.

That wasn't exactly right. More like time to accept the man her parents had chosen for her and settle down into a proper life, the way her sister Leona had done after her debutante season four years prior.

Where was Jamie Russell when she needed him? She quickly scanned the room before the next person stepped in front of her. Jamie was nowhere to be seen. His absence was disappointing, but hardly surprising. Not now. Not after his family had lost everything in the stock market crash. While debutante balls had surely waned in

importance for him in the face of such misfortune, she still expected him to come to hers.

CHAPTER 2

A balcony door opened and music floated out to where Jamie Russell leaned against the brick wall around the Grand Hotel's prized rose garden. The hotel's brochures spoke glowingly of the beauty and peace it afforded all their guests.

Jamie felt none of that peace. He shouldn't be here. He had told himself not to come. Better to stay in Danville where his mother had found refuge on her brother's estate.

Uncle Wyatt was a physician. While well respected in his town, he was not rich. He claimed any doctor worth his salt could never get rich. Too many needed his services without the coin to pay. Especially now. But he was thrifty and had preserved his inheritance from his much more ambitious father. Part of that inheritance was the family house and acreage in Danville. Jamie's mother had inherited a like amount of money, along with a second house in Louisville.

All was lost when Jamie's father's loans were called in after the crash. He had so wanted to be rich. None of them knew how deeply he went into debt to buy stocks. It seemed a failsafe prospect, with how the market kept booming. For a while it had worked. Profits mushroomed. His father bragged about doubling his money. He repaid the loans but turned around and borrowed more. The gains were there to be grabbed by those brave enough to play the market or foolhardy enough to think stocks would continue rising instead of the bottom dropping out. The crash took it all.

Not only from his father. Others ended up in the same sorrowful position after the ticking of the stock market tape on Black Tuesday.

Jamie had never cared much for numbers. He liked words. Hated the hours he spent in the family business, figuring supply and demand. Supply had overwhelmed demand and now nothing was worth anything. Certainly not Jamie himself, if money were the measure of worth.

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