
Chapter 1

1877 PERCY, *Nevada*

Big Jim Newton tipped back in his office chair, propped his booted feet on an open desk drawer, and closed his weary eyes. Maybe he could catch a few hours of sleep before somebody banged on his door. Being the only law in Percy, Nevada, wasn't a full-time job, but juggling priorities as sheriff, lawyer, and parent was difficult. He thanked God every day that he'd had help in raising his daughter.

As the sheriff, he had to catch the occasional rustler or thieves, hence the three sharing a single jail cell. Percy wasn't a wealthy town. One jail cell was all they could afford when the jail was built. The three men were still handcuffed with their hands behind their backs to three of the four sides of the cell. When Big Jim had tracked them, the idiots had been trying to kill each other in a fistfight.

The robbers were arguing over the split of the money they'd stolen. His prisoners looked rough but deserved it, and their injuries were mostly self-inflicted. Jim didn't suspect any

lasting damage. One was complaining his arm was broken, but it didn't matter.

Two innocent travelers had been killed in the robbery. Most likely, his prisoners would hang, although it wouldn't be Big Jim's decision. Judge Hershey was a hanging judge who believed in an *eye for an eye* justice.

It had taken six days to catch the robbers and bring them back for justice. It was time Jim couldn't spare. Realizing that time was something he couldn't control, Big Jim had been intent on quickly catching the thieves. His beautiful Helena, his only child, was leaving in a week. She wouldn't be back for two years except during the university breaks of a month in December and mid-June through August before a new term began.

Dr. Lillian Richmond was in her backyard, hanging boiled and bleached surgical cloths on a clothesline. They would dry as soon as the desert sun was high enough to cast aside the last vestiges of nightfall. She had to get her chores done before most people were awake. Although she didn't open her office until eight in the morning, family members of the sick tended to pound on her door at all hours of the night.

She'd seen Big Jim Newton ride through town at a distance. He was leading three tied and gagged men on horses behind him. He'd been gone nearly a week, although she didn't purposely try to keep track of him. He was a friend but had shown more interest in her lately, and she hadn't decided how to handle it yet.

Lillian heard the worries from her young assistant about her father and his dangerous job. Big Jim Newton, a man with no wife, had arrived in Percy with a baby in his arms. Helena had only been a few months old. She'd been raised

by her father and his neighbor Jean Haggarty, a widow ten years his senior. Jean had been Big Jim's childcare for years when he'd needed to track down outlaws and do his job.

More recently, Helena had occupied the little spare bedroom in Dr. Lillian's house when her father left town to perform his duties. Helena had taken an interest in medicine at an early age. A bright girl, she had finished her schooling in Percy to the eighth-grade level by the time she was thirteen. Lillian had encouraged the young girl to continue her studies through correspondence courses. Over the years, Helena had become Lillian's shadow, studying and training as a part-time nurse and assistant. She was skilled at minor injuries and stitching cuts.

Barely seventeen, Helena was leaving Percy to live with Roberta Sinclair, a friend of Lillian's. She would study medicine at the University of California, one of the few universities that allowed women to study for degrees in traditionally male fields.

Lillian hung the wet cloths on the clothesline and returned to the kitchen.

"You should have awakened me!" Helena exclaimed, running into the room.

"You can take them off the line and fold them when they dry," Lillian smiled. "Once you start college, you'll miss a lot of sleep to study."

"So you keep telling me," Helena said, her eyes sparkling enthusiastically. "I can't wait!"

"Just don't forget what we've talked about," Lillian said. "I know it sounds exciting, but it's a lot of work, and you can't be average. You must be at the top of your class, and your professors will probably still grade you unfairly. You're a young woman breaking into a man's profession. It's not going to be easy. Roberta can help you with anything you're having trouble with. The male teachers and fellow students will

ridicule, tease, and harass you. The teachers will try to talk you out of taking certain classes or refuse to allow you entrance because you are a girl. You must take them because...”

“My first question has to be, Will I get my certification if I don’t take the classes?” Helena interrupted, quoting a warning she’d heard many times. “If I’m still not allowed, my second reaction will be to write a formal complaint letter to the instructor, the Dean of Medicine, and the University President. I will demand to know why I can’t attend classes when my father has already paid the tuition. I will also inform them that my father, an attorney, will be suing the college for refusing me those classes.”

Lillian smiled. “I know you think I’m ancient, but it wasn’t so long ago for me, and I had it easier because I went to the Women’s College of Medicine in Philadelphia. I would like you to come home from this experience unscathed, but I doubt it will happen. Even though our classes were separate, every woman attending medical school was still sneered at and ridiculed. Because you are studying anatomy, those young college idiots will think you will be free with your favors. Don’t allow yourself to be sweet-talked into anything, and stay within groups of women around campus.”

“Papa has been warning me for weeks,” Helena said.

“As he should, and by the way, Big Jim is back. I saw him go by earlier with his prisoners. He looked exhausted.”

Lillian and Helena turned their heads when they heard the front bell ring.

“Go ahead,” Helena said. “I’ll make fresh coffee and join you.”

“It’s probably the Jensens with little Gracie. Earl came by last night,” Lillian said.

Helena turned around with her hands on her hips. “You’re not supposed to go out at night by yourself!”

“I know Earl. He’s local, and I wasn’t in any danger,” Lillian said.

“Papa’s not going to like it!” Helena insisted.

“Your papa can tell you what to do,” Lillian said with a slight shake of her head. “You are his child. He can’t tell me what to do.”

“He’s not going to see it that way,” Helena predicted, and Lillian knew she was right.

The Jenson parents, Earl and Rena, were at the door with their daughter, four-year-old Gracie. “Bring her into the examining room,” Lillian said. “How was her breathing after I left last night?”

“She had another bout of coughing,” Rena Jenson exclaimed anxiously. “We did what you showed us, keeping a hot kettle on the stove, pouring it in a pan, and leaning over the pan with a towel over our heads. I think that medicine you said to put in the water helped.”

“It wasn’t medicine. It was dried eucalyptus leaves,” Lillian said. “It helps open her clogged airways. Weak ginger tea or tea with a pinch of cayenne pepper might help, but she might fight you over drinking it at her age. You can add honey to it to make it sweeter. Plenty of chicken soup and broth wouldn’t go amiss, either. Although we doctors don’t know why it works, it’s been used for centuries.”

“Doris Geffeny said she got a cough syrup at Drysdale’s store. It’s called *One Night Cough Syrup*, and it cured her cough,” Earl said.

“Please, please, do not give it to Gracie,” Lillian implored the parents of her young patient. “I’ve asked Mr. Drysdale to remove it from his shelves, but he refuses. It’s dangerous, especially for small children. It contains alcohol, cannabis,

chloroform, and morphine. Those ingredients can be habit forming and kill if not monitored properly.”

“If it’s dangerous, why is he allowed to sell it?” Rena asked.

“There are no laws against selling anything labeled as medicine,” Lillian said. “Unless a doctor or a chemist has recommended a medicine, please don’t use it. There are no medical cures in elixirs or bottled snake oil remedies. The salesmen promoting them are charlatans. Anyone can make claims of a medical cure. If it’s sold for fifty cents a bottle, chances are it’s not good for anything except filling the pockets of whoever is selling it. A person might feel better after a dose, but it’s not curing the problem. It’s probably causing more harm than good.

“You haven’t been in Percy that long, but the best cure for Gracie is the sunshine and the heat of summer. I know we’re at the end of summer, but don’t keep her cooped up inside on good days. Let her run and play outside. Sometimes, children outgrow afflictions of the lungs. Some don’t. Don’t hesitate to bring her back!”

Earl looked at his wife, and Lillian saw the worry in the young man’s eyes. “Earl, could I ask a favor of you?”

“Of course, ma’am,” he answered.

“Don’t agree so quickly,” Lillian teased with a smile. “Can you excuse us, Rena?”

“Of course, Dr. Richmond.”

Lillian led Earl to her backdoor and stepped out to a large side and backyard. It was overgrown, and the side fence that belonged to her neighbors was falling apart. “I need a new fence, Earl,” Lillian said. “And, the chicken coop could use some fixing. I can afford the lumber and the nails, but I’m a bit tight on cash money right now to pay for the labor. I was wondering if you’d swap me building skills for doctoring skills?”

“Dr. Richmond, I wouldn’t charge you anything to build a fence,” Earl exclaimed.

“I’m sure you wouldn’t. I’m sure you’d do it because you’re a decent young man, but it wouldn’t be a fair exchange,” Lillian insisted. “As I said, I’m a bit short on cash, and you would be doing me a favor if you would exchange your labor for my doctoring skills. Two years of my taking care of your family for you building me a fence? I’m not in a hurry, and building a new fence for a large yard is a big job. You could work on the fence when you have time. I won’t be short-changing you, as Rena will need my mid-wife services sometime in February, and I’m always here for Gracie.”

“Are you sure, Ma’am?” Earl asked.

Lillian almost smiled at the relief and hope on the young man’s face. She knew as homesteaders, there was no spare money to pay for doctoring services, and the Jensons already owed her for several home and office visits. “Yes, really. I would greatly appreciate this, Earl, and I would also ask that you keep this private between us. I don’t want everyone in Elko County wanting to exchange services for my doctoring skills. I have to make a living, too.”

“That’s no problem, ma’am,” Earl said with a smile. “Will it be all right to get my brothers to help? We could get the fence built a lot faster.”

“I’ll leave that to you,” Lillian said. “I’ll need you to measure and figure out what you need in lumber and whatever else you need, and I’ll talk to Mr. Hollison at the lumber mill about paying for it,” Lillian said. “I’d like a tall fence, at least your height, with no spaces between the boards. At your convenience, of course. There’s no hurry, but I would appreciate it if you could be finished by next spring so I can plant a garden.”

“I’ll be back just as soon as I take Rena and Gracie

home, ma'am," Earl said. He stuck out his hand and then nervously withdrew it.

Lillian offered her hand, knowing some men weren't comfortable treating women the same as men. "We have a deal, and I thank you, but all you'll be able to do today is measure and decide what materials are needed."

"Yes, ma'am, but the sooner we get the order for lumber in, the sooner you'll get your fence. I can start by ripping down that old fence and digging the post holes."

"You'll have to build the side fence up against the Geffeny fence. I'll leave that to your expertise," Lillian agreed.

The morning hours at Lillian's practice were the same as most. A lot of her patients were older people, women, and children. She diagnosed rashes, lanced boils, and had to remove a toenail from an eight-year-old boy's big toe. There were a lot of foot and ankle injuries to children in the summer months. Parents allowed their children to run barefoot to spare the shoe leather.

Most of her patients were women and children. She'd opened her practice five years earlier, but the men in town were still reluctant to go to a woman doctor. They bellowed and complained that a woman couldn't be a doctor, but they came if they were bleeding or hurting bad enough. She was the only doctor within a hundred miles.

As the daughter of a physician, Lillian hadn't gone into medicine to make a fortune. She charged fifty cents to a dollar for a consultation. If she had to stay the night at a patient's home, she might charge a dollar and a half, depending on her patient's financial circumstances. More often than not, her payment was made in trade for goods or promises to pay later that rarely materialized in cash. Her larder was always full of canned goods that she appreciated. She had a full chicken coop and a rooster that never failed to

wake her at daybreak, and she had never killed a live chicken... never. Offers of other livestock were turned down as she had no idea what to do with them. When she'd decided to settle in Percy, she had transferred her inheritances to the local bank. Mr. Boatwright, the banker, was the only one in town who knew of her finances. A single man he had asked to court her several times, but she had rejected his advances firmly. Lillian would never allow a man to try to control her finances again.

Most of her patients were homesteaders, ranchers, or miners. The only time she held firm on a price for services was when she knew it was someone who could afford her services but was too tightfisted with their money to pay the bill. She could have taken a position in an eastern hospital if she had wanted a steady salary. However, most hospitals hired women with her qualifications because they thought they could pay a woman less for doing the same job as a male counterpart.

Lillian was the sole recipient of her parents' family inheritances. Dr. Leon Richmond, her father, had married *up*, as most people would say. Lillian's mother, Justina, had been a Philadelphia socialite who defied her family's wishes and married a lowly doctor. Justina had died from yellow fever when Lillian was eight years old and her brother Andrew fourteen. The marriage had been a good one. Lillian had never heard her parents argue... never.

Although Justina's family hadn't approved of her choice of a husband, their grandchildren hadn't been penalized by their daughter's choice. While her husband had been tolerated, their grandchildren had been loved and pampered, as was their daughter.

Dr. Leon Richmond had a thriving medical practice until the first shots were fired in the War of Rebellion. Doctors of all ages were conscripted into the Union Army Corp of

Physicians. Leon wasn't exempt and was sent to Penn Park Union Army Hospital in York, Pennsylvania. He uprooted his children to go with him, and two months later, brother Andrew joined the Northern Cause.

Lillian had been cloistered in a private girls' school, and except for seeing men in uniforms occasionally at a distance, she and the other young girls had been shielded from the atrocities of war. That was until her father visited and informed his daughter of her brother's death. Lillian had quickly passed her graduation tests and insisted on training and working at the York Hospital as a volunteer.

Her father had reluctantly agreed. As the administrative head of the hospital, Leon knew his daughter would be carefully supervised by the head nurses. All hell would rain down on anyone daring to harm or disrespect his daughter. Lillian had worked as a volunteer in the hospital for the duration of the war.

When the conflict was finally over, exhausted and disillusioned, Leon Richmond relocated to the small town of New Oxford in southern Pennsylvania. He opened a new practice but spent most of his time teaching at the New Oxford College and Medical Institute.

Lillian left the hospital where she had volunteered her time, determined to be a doctor, not a nurse. She enrolled at the Women's Medical College in Philadelphia and lived with her grandmother for the two years of required medical training. When her studies were completed, she worked under her father's guidance for the next two years, as needed, before receiving her Doctorate of Medicine certification. Only then was she allowed to add her name to the plaque on her father's medical practice declaring Lillian Richmond, Doctress.

Helena knocked on the door and entered the examining

room to find Lillian cleaning the instruments she'd used earlier that morning.

"Another patient?" Lillian asked.

"No, and that's my job," Helena exclaimed.

"I'd better get used to checking the waiting room and cleaning my instruments again," Lillian said with a smile. "You'll be gone in a couple of days."

"I know," Helena said. "Part of me can't wait, but another part is terrified."

"You'll do fine as long as you stay focused," Lillian promised. "Going several weeks early will help you learn your way around."

"I know," the young girl exclaimed, and she bit down on her lower lip.

"What is it?"

"Would you go to the jail and see if Papa is okay. Please?"

"He still won't allow you to go there?" Lillian asked.

"No, and I got in awful trouble the last time," Helena said, unconsciously putting her hands behind her back to rest on her bottom.

Lillian smiled. "All he can do to me is yell, so I think I'm safe. I'll run down there. If any patients come in, or there is an emergency..."

"I know, ring the bell," Helena said.

Lillian walked the sidewalk as far as it went and stepped off into the dirt road. Her medical practice and living quarters were in a small two-story house. The structure had been the original Percy church, then a schoolhouse. The church and the school were now located in a more central section of town. When Lillian decided to stay in Percy, the house she'd purchased was the only one available. The church/schoolhouse/house was small and quirky, but it suited her. The bell tower had been

removed from the roof and relocated to the side of the front yard. She'd been told that when the new church was built, it was destined to be used, but a new, bigger, louder bell had been donated. The old bell had remained in her front yard.

The old bell remained functional because if Lillian was asleep or elsewhere in town, patients could ring the bell for attention. The bell had aroused her from sleep many times. During the day, it could be used if Lillian wasn't in her office and hadn't left a note on the slate by the front door. The large bell could be heard all over town.

Lillian entered the jail to find Big Jim Newton sprawled back in a chair, sound asleep, and there were muffled snores from the three men locked in the jail cell. Even in his sleep, Big Jim looked dust-covered and exhausted. He was somewhat precarious in his tilted back chair. She moved around the desk and stood behind him so that if he startled, she could keep him upright so he wouldn't crash to the floor.

"Big Jim! Jim!"

"What!" Big Jim's eyes flew open, and he smiled as he saw an upside-down Lillian Richmond looking down at him. He dropped his feet to the floor and turned to face her. "That was a nice wake-up call."

Lillian moved around to the front of his desk. "You look tired."

"I am, but I'll be okay after a few more hours of sleep. Do you need me?"

"No. Helena asked me to check on you. You usually check in with her when you've been gone a couple of days, and she's not allowed to enter the jail. You made that quite clear the last time."

Big Jim frowned and pulled out his pocket watch. "She deserved that spanking! She's never been allowed in the jail when I have prisoners. The man I had in the cell that day was a depraved creature. You're not supposed to be here

either.” His eyebrows came together, and he gave her a stern look. “You’re right, though. I shouldn’t have worried Helena. This is my last roundup as sheriff. Grover Higgins officially became the sheriff yesterday. I’ll have his hide for not being here on duty! I promised my daughter, and I intend to honor it.”

“Turning in the badge will ease her worries,” Lillian said. “I’ll tell her you’re okay. Do these men need medical attention?”

“Not from you, and I wouldn’t waste your time,” Big Jim said firmly. “They killed two innocent men before they did that damage to each other. They can live with it until the Judge decides what to do with them. If you could, go by Mack’s livery. Tell Mack I need him to watch these guys while I give Grover a swift kick where it will hurt. He should have been here by now!”

“I can do that. I’ll send Helena home early to cook you a good meal.” Lillian turned, but Big Jim caught her hand.

“Thanks for watching after my Baby Girl.”

“She’s not a baby or so little anymore,” Lillian said gently. “And you know she doesn’t like your old nickname for her. Helena has outgrown being called Baby Girl.”

“Yeah, I know, but she’s not fully grown either,” Big Jim said, sounding sad. “It’s killing me to let her go, but I can’t keep her from fulfilling her dreams. You gave her that dream.”

“You trusted me when Dr. Remus told everyone in town that, as a woman, I wasn’t qualified as a doctor. I really shouldn’t call him a doctor. He was an impostor.”

“Floyd Remus was an idiot and a fraud,” Big Jim growled. “And, it turned out he didn’t have any of the certifications of training he claimed to have. It took a while to receive answers to my letters to the colleges Remus claimed to have attended, but I finally got the proof that he

was a liar. I reckon anyone can have diplomas printed and signed fraudulently. He's probably killed a lot of people in his time. And, true to his nature, he took off in the middle of the night, and no one has heard from him since."

"He has probably set up a practice somewhere else," Lillian agreed. "Men like that do. You trusted me to remove Helena's appendix when he said I would kill her if I cut her open."

"You give me more credit than I'm due," Big Jim said. "Remus said she was going to die. You said she had a chance if I would allow you to operate. I was caught between two devils. I trusted my daughter to you, but I never prayed so hard my whole life."

"You stayed with her while I was operating and gave her more ether when needed," Lillian said. "I've seen men faint from seeing less, but you stayed with her and me. You even helped when I needed an extra hand."

"I've seen worse, but it wasn't my daughter, my Baby Girl. I was sick when you left the room. When Helena woke up, I sobbed like a baby. She opened her eyes and said, 'Don't cry, Papa. I knew Dr. Lillian would fix me.'"

"If I hadn't operated, she would have died," Lillian said.

"You were cutting into my daughter," Big Jim said. "What you do is far braver than anything I could ever accomplish. I almost passed out when you cut the piece out of her, and it burst open in the pan."

"It was close," Lillian admitted. "If the appendix had burst inside her, Helena would have probably died from the infection. You trusted me."

"Helena trusted you," Big Jim corrected. "After you gave your diagnosis, she said, '*Papa, I don't want to die. I want to grow up and be just like Dr. Lillian. If what Dr. Remus says is true, I will die anyway. Let Dr. Lillian try to fix me.*' It seems like only

Big Jim and the Doctress

yesterday. My Baby Girl was so brave and trusting. Now she's going off to school to be a doctor."

"Go home, Big Jim," Lillian suggested gently. "You're exhausted, and you need rest. Spend as much time with Helena as you can before she leaves. It's her choice to leave, but she's still scared. She needs you to believe in her and be strong for her."