

SILVER'S REDEMPTION

CHAPTER ONE

Two ragtag coyotes crouched beyond the sun-bleached wooden fence waiting, ears tilted forward, wary, hungry, poised to take advantage.

Georgiana Fellowes, or Silver as her friends call her, fired a bolt-action rifle into the air to scare the mangy creatures off. The crack of the shot echoed for miles.

“Not this time fellas. Besides, you wouldn’t want Joey to get a hold of you,” she hollered after the fleeing critters. She turned back to the mule. “Time to lock you in for the night, ole friend. Those boys must be awful hungry if they’ve come to prey on *you*.”

She slid from the jagged boulder just in front of the dilapidated cabin deep in the West Texas Mountains. After watching the night sky emerge from the fading light as it did every evening, the sun gave up its abundance of vibrant colors in a final showdown of the most beautiful sunsets in the world, as if to say, ‘top that’!

She usually loved this dusky interim between day and night. For all its beauty and vainglorious efforts, the blue skies of Texas didn't compare with the unpretentious arrival of what is, for lack of a better word, the universe. In the most glorious sunset, the most beautiful blue skies, and the fluffy drifting of a white cloud, you only see as far as the blueness. But, when the night sky makes its graceful entrance, another dimension reveals itself.

Tonight, however, nothing moved her. The mountains didn’t erase the scenes embedded in her mind. The nightly vigil wore thin as she led Joey to the small weather-beaten barn and secured the rusty lock on the door. The barn needs paint. The door needs new hinges. After years of neglect a mountain of work faced her.

She was weary. Tired of the isolation, rationing food, and probably worst of all, the lack of companionship. More than once she kicked herself for making such a knee-jerk decision to give up and come to West Texas to find an abandoned silver mine on the land her father left her.

The most discouraging part was, she hadn't even found it yet. Days of bouncing along in the battered old jeep she procured in town left her discouraged. He didn't leave her a map. Only something scribbled on a piece of paper that suggested the location. To the left of the camel rock. A rock shaped like a camel? What did it mean? *Am I really such a failure, even at finding the mine?*

The humiliation she suffered back East took a toll on an otherwise strong constitution. For a while, she pretended the age-related rebuff didn't happen. Until she couldn't anymore.

Fifty-six years old and they tell me I no longer fit the company image. All the while my replacement simpers beside Steve Walker with her flowing blonde hair, forty-two-inch implants, red stilettos, and a snarky smile on her unwrinkled face. So much for loyalty from my boss.

Silver packed up her office belongings that day and went home. Alone in the pent-house style apartment she purchased ten years ago, the carefully chosen décor did nothing to lift her spirits. If anything, it depressed her even more. Stainless steel kitchen, white cabinets, a hint of red in the flowers and hand towels. The living room was all white. Rugs, desk, sofa. What was she thinking? No personality. All of it suddenly meant nothing considering what she endured on her last day at that office. What had she worked for all these years? How did she arrive at this point in her life, alone and replaced by a younger woman?

Darkness fell, but she didn't turn on the lights, instead, hid under a white blanket on the alabaster sofa.

Until morning.

As the sun came up, she took a long look in the mirror and studied the reflection. Short-cropped silver hair, thus the nickname, fine laugh lines around eyes the color of maple sugar, straight white teeth.

And suddenly, she knew what to do.

She addressed the mirror with a confidence she wasn't sure she possessed. "They say I don't fit anymore. So, I'll go where I do. Father's old cabin is empty. That'll be my home from now on, no mainstream society, no social footprint, not even an address."

The only human contact lay twenty miles away in a small municipality where she gathered supplies. Her only companion—Joey. Three weeks passed since her last visit to the scruffy old town called Diamond Gulch. One more week to go before those supplies ran out.

In the meantime, the search continued for the lost mine. In the evenings she watched the evening sky.

When night fell, she held her breath as each star popped into view. No matter how long it took, she waited until one particular star decided to show. It was small, but it drew her in, held her attention. There was something different about the light pulsating from the blackness of the sky. The twinkling orb always took its sweet time to make an appearance, but once in view, totally worth the wait.

The unusual light captured the imagination and she wondered at its pull on her. *Is someone up there like me? Are they sending a message?*

This night she watched the star, yearning to communicate, willing it to give her a sign, give meaning to her life, and save her from this self-imposed meager existence. A continuous argument played in her head. *I'm still useful, I have more to give.*

Once more resigned to the loneliness of the cabin and the dawn of another pointless day, she heaved a great sigh, as she'd done for countless nights, and stood. One more glance at the 'star' and something came over her. A voice deep in her soul struggled to be heard. *I want my life back.*