

Better She Lie

Chapter One

Atlanta, Georgia 1869

“Murderer,” screamed the constable, standing on the edge of the station platform. With a nasty grimace, he raised his fist at the skinny framed scamp jumping the railcar at the moment the steam engine gathered speed. He shook his fist. “You come back in this town, Seven McGuire, you’ll hang—”

Seven hauled herself on board, narrowed her eyes at the angry uniformed man as his words were lost in the steam spewing locomotive’s whistle. She flashed a wide grin back at him. The sound of screeching metal wheels on metal rails rotating into a clickety-click rhythm compelled her to release a heavy sigh. She jerked up the oversized trousers cinched around her waist with a rope and tried to still her shaky hands. She straightened the heavy gun belt around her hips, rubbed her hand over the smooth holster secured to her side, and fingered the revolver handle with its four-inch barrel. Sucking in an uncertain breath, she tugged the filthy cowboy hat lower on her brow and strolled from the cargo railcar through the door and into another passenger car.

She made a swift scan as her fingers curled tightly around her pistol handle. Eying a few unsavory men, she stiffened her back, squared her shoulders, and ignored the barefaced gawps and the empty wooden seats, to make her way to the next passenger car. When her hand touched the doorknob, she glanced over her shoulder, but the men with their sinister glares chose to ignore her.

A blast of wind whipped the hat from her head the second she stepped out onto the narrow passage between cars. If not for her quick reflexes she might have lost it. She grasped hold of the rail, jammed the hat on her head, and jumped over the slight gap between railcar connections. One long stride brought her to the next door. Wrapping her fingers around the rail handle, she paused, closed her eyes and felt the cool wind blow through the passageway. It smelled fresh and clean, nothing like the stuffy air in the city she had lived in for the past two years. The train wheels whined, clunked, and creaked, taking her further from Atlanta and her wretched life.

Her body lurched to the sway of the locomotive, forcing a queasy sickness to bubble up from the pit of her stomach. She swallowed. It didn't help. Rushing to the edge of the narrow platform, she clung to the handrail, leaned out into a blast of air, and...threw up.

Several seconds later, she opened her eyes to the iron tracks below, wiped her mouth on the sleeve of the old tattered dirty coat, and took several deep breaths before hurling herself back against the door.

Where was the train headed? Did it matter? No. All towns were the same. She'd find work. Dressed like a man, she had been able to find work for the last two years. Saloon owners didn't care as long as they had someone to scrub floors, wash dishes, and handle all the other filthy chores. She hated it, but at least she'd eat. Now, what? What lay ahead?

Breathing through her nose, she clenched her jaws and shifted her gaze to the door she had just exited. The conductor made his way through the car, announcing, "Tickets. Tickets, please." One by one he punched tickets, nearing the end, and soon, out the door.

With no time to spare, she slipped inside the next railcar to discover a long narrow hallway with doors on one side and windows on the other. A sigh of relief slipped from her mouth. Sleeper coach. Good. With an urgent need to hide, she hurried along, pausing to glance into each

compartment. Most had two or more passengers...all dressed prim and proper in their business suits and travel attire. She hesitated in front of a curtain covered window. Her stomach quivered. She bit down on her bottom lip, curled her fingers around the doorknob, then jerked back. She'd learned to listen to her gut long ago. She hurried to the last cabin and peeked in. A woman sat alone, staring out the window.

A gust of cool air touched her cheek. Her gaze swung to the door at the far-end of the hall. Time had run out. She slipped inside. Quietly closing the door, she flipped around, and leaned back against it. The passenger woman shifted her gaze from the view outside the window to her.

Seven waited for her to scream. All the while the stranger's hollowed gaze inspected her from the hat on her head to her muddy-toed curling boots.

Staring at the sickly woman, Seven chewed her bottom lip.

Their eyes locked.

Suddenly, next door, the conductor's voice shot another quiver through her queasy stomach. To keep from retching, she covered her mouth with her shaky hand. Without a word, the pale-faced woman tipped her head toward the corner of the coach.

Seven swallowed hard and hurried to a skinny door. Snatching it open, she squeezed into the small closet and closed the door. Sucking in a deep breath, she held it for a moment, to try and calm her body. The conductor knocked.

"Tickets," he announced and opened the door.

"Ticket please. Pardon me, ma'am, but you appear mighty poorly. Would you like me to get a doctor? There's one on the train."

Seven's knees tried to buckle beneath her, only the space didn't allow it. The woman's weak muffled voice sounded through the door.

“That’s kind of you sir, but it’s just a little fatigued from traveling. I’ll be fine.”

Seven waited, hardly breathing, until she heard the door shut. After a couple of seconds, she stepped from the closet and pressed her back against the swaying wall. A frail hand pointed to the seat across from her.

Seven moved to the velvet seat, sat down, clasped her hands together and rested them on her grimy trousers. The woman’s gaze trailed over her, and in turn, her own lingered on the refined woman with her hair pulled back into a bun at the nape of her neck. Despite the ashy complexion and dark circles around her eyes, she could tell the woman was about her age, or maybe younger than her own twenty-one years. Her pricey blue dress reeked of wealth. Golden brown eyes matched her hair, at least what showed beneath the charming little hat situated on the side of her head. The woman appeared to struggle with each breath, but her straight back and hands delicately placed on her lap showed nothing but a polished elegance one had to admire.

Seven glanced at the door. Did she have a companion? If not, why did she travel alone?

After a moment of silence, Seven tried to smile her thanks, and whispered, “Why did you do that?”

The woman tipped her head to the side. Then in a soft voice, stronger than her weak appearance, she said, “My name’s Lenora Whitfield.” Her eyes shifted to stare out the window. “You’re on the run. From what?”

“How—”

“If you weren’t...” the corner of the woman’s mouth lifted. “... you wouldn’t be dressed like a man.” Contrary to her pleasant voice, a cold glare captured her. “That hat and tattered coat – all too big, as are the boots. Do you think I’m too sick to notice your smooth skin beneath the dirt smudges, and the long string of dark-brown hair hanging down your back? Not to mention the six

shooter around your skinny hips.” Once again, she turned her head and stared out the window, and without looking at her, asked, “What’s your name?”

Stunned by Lenora Whitfield’s straightforward talk and the authoritative voice, Seven’s memory slipped back to the orphanage when threatened by the headmaster’s reprimands. She swallowed and forced the words from her dry throat. “Seven.”

The woman lifted an eyebrow. “Why a number?”

Seven shrugged. “I’ve always been called Seven. I supposed it had to do with being the seventh kid in the home.”

Her expression softened.

Seven scowled. “I don’t need your pity. I need to get to a town without a ticket.”

“Where’s your family?”

“I lived with people. Not my family. I’ll never go back.”

The woman stared at her for the longest time, so long that Seven nearly jumped up.

“Tell me why you’re running?”

“Why?”

“Before you stepped into my coach, I prayed God would send me an angel. For whatever reason, He sent *you*. Are you the angel God sent?”

Seven released an amused chuckle. “I’m not an angel. I’m not even a good person. Besides, God didn’t send me. I did something bad, murder, so I escaped by jumping the train...”

Lenora Whitfield glanced down at a blanket bundled up beside her on the seat. A deep sigh pushed from her chest when her hand gently laid on the bundle. An anxious wrinkle formed above her watering eyes when she looked up.

“God sent *you*.”

Bewildered, Seven stared at the bundle. It moved. The lady spoke crazy words. “Lady, I...I appreciate you letting me hide, but maybe I should—”

“You need a ticket.” Holding a handkerchief to her mouth, she mumbled, “You need my help too.”

“Are you sick?”

“I’ll be fine.” She rested her head back against the wall. “I need to rest.” She closed her eyes.

Seven leaned back, rolled her eyes to look out the window. The desolate wasteland rolled past with each click-a-de-clack of the wheels on tracks. She had no idea the train’s destination, only that it was taking her far away from Atlanta. She’d been on the run for days. By pure luck, she had jumped the train when it pulled out of the station. With God’s help, she’d never return to the hell hole she had fled.

Exhaustion took over her body and mind. For the first time in days, she closed her eyes, took a relaxed breath and let her mind drift into a peaceful sleep.

Screeching metal on metal jarred Seven awake. Her eyes flew open. The locomotive had come to a slow stop. Whipping her head around, she took a hurried glance out the window. Where were they? Her gaze swung to the lady’s deathly white face. With a peaceful, sad expression, she stared down at her baby as she nursed. As weak as the woman appeared, it amazed Seven to watch her feed her baby. The baby had been awfully quiet. Maybe she was sick too. She glanced out the window. “We’ve stopped at a station?” Seven stood. “It’s best I get off here.”

“No. Please sit. You can’t get off here.”

“Why? I don’t understand.”

“You have to get off at the next station. It isn’t far now.”

“No. You need a doctor. I’ll find one for you. We should get off here.”

The woman’s strained expression lifted. “I can’t...only you and my baby will be getting off the train at Silver Sage Creek.”

Seven blew out a breath in defeat.

Lenora Whitfield’s strong, insistent voice flowed from her weak body, “Do you want a chance to begin a new life?”

“I...I don’t understand.”

“I have a bag on the bed above your head. Take it down and open it. Now.”

The demanding tone moved Seven into action. Inside, she found a dress and a few baby clothes. “Now what?”

Lenora’s dull eyes looked at her. “I have two large trunks and the two bags in here. When you get to the station, the porter will help you retrieve the heavy trunks.”

“Why, if you’re not getting off?”

“Because you’re going to be me. At Silver Sage Creek, you’ll meet a man named Jonathan Montgomery. You’ll take my place as their new schoolteacher. Since God sent you, I assume you know how to read, write, and your numbers – you do, don’t you?”

“Yes, but...”

“Good. All the books you’ll need are in one of the trunks.” She squirmed to the side, wrapped the baby in a blanket, then laid it down. “Now, help me undress.”

“What?”

“Hurry, get your clothes off and help me with mine. We have to exchange them.”

Seven jerked her head back. “No...I can’t...no, lady...Lenora, I can’t do this...you...you have to see a doctor.”

Lenora's shoulders slumped. "It will do no good. I'm dying. I doubt if I'll live to reach the town." Her eyes begged her. Yet, her weakness didn't keep her from giving forceful, compelling demands. "You're the only hope I have for my baby. God sent you for a reason. You have to do this. This is your second chance to make things right. Trust me. Trust God."

Seven didn't understand why she listened to the crazy lady, why she felt swayed and bound by Lenora's words. Why her words sank deep into her soul. She couldn't do this thing she asked. Could she?

Like a puppet, Seven stripped down to nothing and dressed her in her old men's clothes. When done, she stared at the elegant lady dressed in the old dirty garbs. Still unable to understand, she protested, "Lenora, please, I can't..."

"Shush. You will, trust me. Now, put the holster around my middle."

When Seven handed her the six-shooter, Lenora pushed it away. "Not the gun. You keep it. Put it in the bag. You might need it for protection."

With the dying woman's eyes on her, Seven dressed in the beautiful white and blue dress, took a brush from the bag as ordered, and brushed the tangles out of her hair. When done, Lenora pulled a fashionable gold comb from the back of her head and handed it to Seven. "Twist your hair around in a bun and use this to hold it in place."

Once Seven had done as she was told, Lenora took off her hat and handed it to her. Placing the bonnet on her head, she stood while Lenora looked her over from head to toe. Everything fit, even the shoes.

"You're too skinny, but soon you'll have food on the table every night."

Seven dropped to her side. "Please, Lenora, I can't be you. We can get help for you at the station."

Lenora's thin lips quivered. "Yes you can do this. Now, hand me my baby."

Seven picked up the weightless little human being and handed her to her mother. The woman kissed her baby and indicated for Seven to take her. She did. "You, from this day on, will have the name, Lenora Whitfield and you have a baby girl."

Seven backed up and dropped into the seat across from Lenora. Looking down to the baby, she mumbled, "A girl." She asked, "What's her name?"

"Grace...I call her Gracee."

Overwhelmed, Seven, whispered, "Gracee, what a beautiful name."

"Now, promise to take care of my baby. You're the angel God sent for her. You will be her mother and protect her...promise. Promise me."

"I promise." Seven didn't realize she spoke the words until she heard them flow from her mouth. Did the woman have a spell over her? She forced her gaze from the baby to the woman. "Lenora, please. I can't..."

"Here's what will happen. You're to become Lenora Whitfield. You're to be the schoolmarm in the town of Silver Sage Creek. I've signed the contract. You will have a place to live and teach ten children. This is a chance to make a good life for my child. You'll give her a home and food on the table – you'll do this for me. Promise."

"I don't know how to be a mother."

Lenora shifted until she lay down on the short couch, blinked her eyelids, and with a sadness about her, said, "Don't worry, God will show you."

"I don't know anything about you Lenora. How can I be you if I don't–"

"You'll find a journal in my trunk. Read it, then you'll know...everything, even about the death of my husband."

Seven laid the baby down and hurried to lift Lenora's legs up onto the coach seat and cover her with the old tattered coat she'd worn for years.

Ethan Langdon leaned against the wall by the ticket window, crossed his ankles and folded his arms over his chest. "Sit, Remy," he commanded his dog.

"Who you lookin' for now, Ethan?"

Darting a glance at the clerk, he mumbled more to himself, than to the clerk. "A female dressed like a man." His focus aimed toward the steam engine's slow approach to the station. Its stack bellowed out gray smoke while its brakes screeched the train to a stop.

He scanned the small crowd of people, chattering away with each other, waiting for the travelers to step off the train. Within seconds a small group emerged onto the platform. He studied them, none appeared to be feminine or dressed according to the description in the telegram.

The clunking sound of trunks being dragged across the platform boards drew his attention. A porter hauled two heavy trunks to the train steps and waited. A movement from the railcar door lifted his gaze.

A woman exited the car, accepted the porter's hand, and with a slight, shy look, descended the steps. She caught him off guard. Lost in her exquisite features, he forgot his purpose for being at the station. Her dark eyes and hair, her creamy skin, her beauty stunned him. She held a bundle in her arms. Married. With a baby. He felt a surprising twinge of regret. He rubbed his beard and glanced around the station. Where was her husband? Why would a young mother travel alone?

"Mrs. Whitfield." The voice drew Ethan's attention to Jonathan Montgomery, the mayor, who was making a fast trek toward the woman. Montgomery held out his hand to her.

She shifted her baby to accept the welcome hand. Apprehension hovered over her wrinkled brow, as he ordered the porter to carry the trunks to the carriage near the edge of the station platform.

Ethan pushed away from the wall, strode across the platform, almost crashing into a scruffy cowboy on his way to board the train. Just as the mayor took the woman by the elbow to lead her away, Ethan lifted his voice above the hectic noise of passengers meeting family, friends, and business associates. “Montgomery.”

Montgomery shot a glance over his shoulder at Ethan. “Langdon, you’re back in town?”

“I’ve been home for a few days.”

“You working here?”

“Yup. On the lookout for a woman disguised as a man on this train.”

“Really? What’s she wanted for?”

“Murder.”

Montgomery chuckled. “Good luck with that.”

Ethan dared to shift his gaze back to the woman. Up close, her delicious brown eyes didn’t reach his, instead, she stared at his bearded face, then down at his dog, wagging his tail. Conscious of her disgusted glare, he rubbed his hand down the side of his beard.

Jonathan took Mrs. Whitfield by the elbow, and said, “Excuse my rudeness, ma’am. Mrs. Whitfield, this is Ethan Langdon, a bounty hunter. Ethan, this is Silver Sage Creek’s new schoolteacher, Lenora Whitfield.”

Ethan tipped his head toward her. “Mrs. Whitfield.” His gaze drifted up to the small blue and white bonnet situated on her dark-brown hair.

“Mr. Langdon.” This time her unreadable expression connected with his. A frown formed on her brow. A tiny sound came from the small bundle in her arms. “Mr. Montgomery, I fear my...my baby is ailing and needs to be fed soon.”

“Yes, yes, of course. If you’ll excuse us Langdon, I’ll see Mrs. Whitfield to the carriage.”

For a moment, Ethan couldn’t take his eyes from the slender woman strolling along side of the mayor. Still, no husband.

“Ethan,” hollered the ticket clerk, beckoning him to return. The clerk hurried to grip his arm and waved his other hand toward the train.

A slight line formed between Ethan’s brows. “What is it, Joe?”

“There...” He took a deep breath, his words rushing out, “...There’s a body on the train.”

Ethan’s long strides carried him to the railcar where the conductor stood on the steps waving at him to hurry. He paused long enough to lay eyes on Mr. McGregory’s young son. “Tommy, wait here. You might have to fetch Doc.”

“Yes sir,” hollered the boy, taking off.

Seven accepted Jonathan’s hand, stepped from the carriage and followed him to the front door of a small apothecary office. Inside, she scanned the long wall of shelves with many bottles of medicine behind small glass doors. She assumed the crude short table on one side of the room was meant for patient examinations, noting a chair and desk on the other side. A picture of a young man was displayed on the wall next to a framed certificate. “Graduate of Medical College of Georgia.” Atlanta? Her hands quavered. The baby whimpered.

“Doc, you here? It’s Jonathan.”

A short, white haired man with a tailored black jacket stepped from the curtained door. “What’s wrong, Jonathan?” asked the doctor in a kind gentle voice.

Jonathan pulled his hat off. “Doc, this is Mrs. Whitfield, our new schoolteacher. She just arrived on the train and fears her baby’s ill.”

“Oh my, yes, yes.” The doctor held the curtain and motioned for her to enter.

The moment she stepped into the private room, her brows tightened. With each breath she took, an uncertain heartbeat thumped against her chest.

Doc paused. “Jonathan, can you wait outside. We won’t be long?”

“Sure thing, Doc.”

The doctor closed the curtain and gave her a warm smile as he approached her.

She squinted at the old gray-haired man. She’d lived on her own for so long she had developed skills to detect people’s mannerisms, which led her to not trust easily. She studied the doctor’s face but read nothing but kindness. Relieved, she took in a deep breath. Maybe she could trust him.

“You can lay the baby on the table, Mrs. Whitfield.”

Whitfield. She’d have to get used to the name if she intended to carry out this charade. “Please call me Lenora,” her quiet tone welcomed the doctor’s friendship as she moved to lay the baby down. She watched as he unwrapped the tiny body.

“What’s her name?”

“Grace.”

“Grace. That a great name. My ma’s name was Grace.”

“Its...it’s a family name from generations back. I call her Gracee.”

“Did you know the name Grace means, God’s favor?”

“No, I...I didn’t.”

Doc gently touched the baby's cheek. "Hello, baby Gracee. Most people call me Doc. I want to listen to your heart and check you over, then I'll give you to your mommy."

Mommy. Seven bit her bottom lip.

The doctor held the stethoscope against the baby's tiny chest and listened, then he checked her entire little body. Once he was satisfied, his wrinkled old fingers wrapped the baby in her blanket, picked her up and handed her to Seven.

Gracee whimpered.

"Well, young lady, she appears healthy. She's just hungry."

The old doctor's faded eyes studied her. "What about you?"

Seven's brows shot up. "What...what do you mean?"

"My dear, you're pale. Are you unable to lactate—"

"Lactate..."

With a hand on her shoulder, he looked straight into her eyes and encouraged her to confide in him. "Are you unable to produce a sufficient amount of breast milk for your baby girl?"

She scrambled to think of an answer. Her shoulders drooped beneath his hand. She chewed her bottom lip. "Not...not good enough. I've...I've been under a lot of strain since her birth...with...with my husband's death, and...and the move —"

"Oh my, my dear." Doc patted her shoulder. "I understand. One's body reacts emotionally when it come to a disaster in a young mother's life. Your baby's weak from lack of nourishment. You'll need a wet nurse."

Her eyes widened. "But, but, what about artificial feeding. I've been informed it's helpful when a mother has no milk."

His kind eyes said differently. “When there’s no other possible option, then yes. Mothers have soaked bread in cow’s milk and put it in a suckling bottle to keep their baby alive.” Doc took her by the arm. “But, for now, I think there’s a better way to help your baby get healthy.”

He guided her through the curtained door and out into the parlor. “Now, have a seat and I’ll get someone to help.” He shuffled his feet to the door, opened it for Mayor Montgomery. “Come in, please.” He strolled over to his desk, and said, “Jonathan, I need you to take Lenora to her new home and see to it that her house is warm enough for her and the baby. The weather is a might cool in the evening,” he ordered while writing a script.

“Once you see to her, I need you to deliver this letter to Anna Benson. It’s urgent.” He pushed to his feet and strolled to Jonathan, handed him the letter, then gave Seven an encouraging smile. “Both you and your baby will be just fine. But, your tiny one is weak and needs to be fed. Anna’s about your age and just had a baby. She’ll be a big help for you.”

Seven appreciated the kind gentlemen and was thankful he gave her instructions without revealing her situation to Jonathan.

“Doc, Doc.” A young boy burst through the door with an urgent voice. “Doc.” He took a deep breath and came to a sudden halt.

“Well, what is it Tommy?”

“The sheriff, needs you at the station...they...he found a dead woman on board the train.”

Doc picked up his medical bag and paused long enough to pat Seven’s arm. “You come see me if you need anything.”

She watched him disappear through the door with the excited young man behind him. Relief swished through her lungs, thankful the sheriff had found Lenora Whitfield after she and Jonathan had left the train station.

Jonathan shoved his hat on his head, took Seven by the elbow and led her out to the carriage.

Seven fought to settle her nerves. Lenora Whitfield had died before the train left the station. She didn't even make it to the next town. Now, Seven McGuire no longer existed, only Lenora Whitfield. Would she ever get used to a new name and acting like a different woman, or rather a lady?

"Are you feeling poorly Mrs. Whitfield? You're mighty pale. Should I call the doc back?"

She aimed a weak smile at him. "No." she shrugged. "I'm tired from the long trip and...and, worried about my baby. And, please call me Lenora."

"Of course, Lenora." He poured on the charm, and the way he touched her arm, sent a chill down her spine.

"We're not far from the schoolhouse."

Mayor Montgomery drove the carriage down the main road of Silver Sage Creek and pointed out several establishments. "You'll become more familiar with the town in a few days. There" – he indicated with a tip of his head– "is the Coulson Mercantile, the McGregory Hardware store across from them, and our favorite café toward the end of town. You'll like Ms. Molly. She's a great cook. I believe her daughter will be in your class."

Seven took in the town and made note of the businesses Jonathan mentioned. They rode passed a place called Silver Sage Saloon, but he didn't mention anything about the establishment. But, to her it was the kind of place she was all too familiar with – they were all alike – dirty, foul language people, and filled with despicable menfolk with grabby hands. She intended this new life to be different, one she'd enjoy as Lenora Whitfield. Many of the folks along the boardwalk waved at the Mayor as they rode past.

Jonathan halted the carriage alongside a small white building. “Here’s your schoolhouse. I’ll take you through the front door and out the backdoor to your teacherage.”

With a glance down at little Gracee asleep in her arms, she took the man’s hand and stepped down from the carriage, and climbed the steep stairs to the small covered porch. She waited for him to open it, then followed him into a large room filled with benches, a stage with a desk, for her, she assumed, and a large blackboard.

“Oh my,” she mumbled. “It’s a fine schoolhouse.”

“You’ll be pleased to know the town council ordered a year’s supply of chinks. Should be here any day now by postal. The blackboard arrived yesterday.” His face lit up with pride.

“I’m sure the children will be happy for such an item.” She inspected the board, and said, “As a teacher, I’m grateful.” Her words made her believe she’d been educated to teach.

“I’ll be sure to relay your gratitude to the members. Now, if you’ll follow me, I’ll show you your living quarters.”

When Seven stepped into the small white house behind the school building, her breath hitched. She blinked a couple of times to rid the tears. This had to be a dream.

“I...I know it isn’t much,” Jonathan stammered. “...and...and not up to your standards, but I assure you, the town council has discussed building a more appropriate home for our teacher.”

“No, no, Mr. Montgomery.” She realized she had given him the wrong impression. “I’m truly pleased with the house. It’s adequate and plenty for us. After all, it’s just the two of us.” She gave him a grateful smile.

“Well, if you’re sure.”

“I’m sure, Mr. Montgomery. I didn’t expect living in a place of my own. I...I mean...most teachers have to live with families.”

He hurried to the small hearth, stacked a couple of logs inside and lit a match stick to ignite the small pieces of kindle. When a small blaze flamed up, he straightened, and turned to her. “Actually, the woman who lived here always quartered every teacher we’ve had in Silver Sage Creek and held school in this very room.” With a quick glance around, he said, “This was Mrs. Jewel Coulson’s home. She and her husband founded Silver Sage Creek. They took in our first schoolteacher, and the one after her. After her husband died, she insisted her son build the schoolhouse in memory of him. Before her death, five years ago, she went before the town council and left strict instructions that her house was to be the treacherage.”

“She must have been a saint of a woman to give so much for the town children.”

He stepped near her. “I’m happy you’re here. We’ll be great friends. Whatever you need, I can get it for you.”

Seven forced a friendly smile, feeling uncomfortable with him so close. She stepped back.

With a slight bow, he said, “If you’ll excuse me, I’ll bring in your trunks.”

By the time he reached the top step, he released a stressful grunt at the door. “What on earth have you packed in this trunk?”

She laughed. “Books. I’m sorry. Books are heavy, but necessary.”

Once the two heavy trunks were deposited in the room, he said, “I’ll deliver Doc’s letter to Mrs. Benson,” then he headed out the door to the carriage.

Amazon: https://www.amazon.com/Better-She-Lie-Silver-Creek-ebook/dp/B07HDXKDLQ/ref=sr_1_fkmr2_2?crd=2ZJO65TOVZYK5&keywords=better+she+lie+by+judy+baker&qid=1664553608&qu=eyJxc2MiOiIwLjY5IiwicXNhIjoiMC4wMCIiInFzcC

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