

LORI WICK

Sabrina



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§ Chapter One §



Denver, Colorado
1880

THE SUN WAS SETTING fast as a crowd gathered around the dead body that lay in the street. Morbid curiosity drove most of them as it was too cold to be out. And considering the neighborhood, whispers and speculations abounded.

It was easy to assume that the man had recently frequented one of the many bordellos that lined the street. Some of the crowd worked in the seamy establishments, and some had run from other streets, having heard shots, shouting, and general mayhem.

Coming into the midst of the scene was Officer Danny Barshaw. He was a big man, with great patience for those in need of help and little for those who did not share his uncompromising respect for the law.

“Step aside, folks,” he said, clearing a path with his voice and presence. People stepped out of the way, but kept close.

“Who is this man?” This would be just the first of Danny’s many questions.

Folks had much to share, and for nearly 30 minutes he checked the body and gathered information from the spectators and the scene. He was writing out details and facts on a small scrap of paper when he spotted a face in the crowd marked by youth and too much makeup.

The prostitute's eyes and mouth were sad as she looked down at the dead man. Danny was running out of light, and some other officers had just come with a wagon to take the body away. Weighing his options, Danny took the woman by the arm.

"Do you know anything about this?" he asked, his voice and face stern.

"No," she answered, looking afraid. "Nothing."

"Did you see anything?"

"No." The fear was still there. "I just got here."

The eyes got to him. They were too young and clear for the woman to have been in this line of work for long. He finished playing with the idea and made his decision.

"What's your name?"

"Raven."

"Your *real* name."

The woman hesitated before saying, "Bri." When she saw the officer's brows rise, she elaborated. "Sabrina."

"Sabrina what?"

"Matthews."

"Come with me," Danny ordered, not giving her time to say no.

"Where? Where are you taking me?" the woman asked, but Danny was done talking.

Now under almost complete cover of darkness, the big police officer nearly dragged the young woman away from the scene. She continued to ask where they were headed and tell him she'd done nothing wrong but learned it did no good. Sabrina eventually grew quiet and started to plan. He'd not let go of her forearm, but the moment he did, she would run. She was fast and would be gone before he could grab her again.

Amid these plans Sabrina suddenly realized she did not know where they were. He had walked them into a nice neighborhood, one not familiar to her.

Still gripping her arm, Danny arrived at a charming, small house, went up the walk, up the steps, and straight in the front door.

“Danny?” a voice called from the back. They went that way.

“Yes, and I have a guest.”

Sabrina had no idea what to think when the officer walked to the rear of the home and into a kitchen, where he began to talk to a woman.

“Who’s this?” the woman asked. Sabrina noticed she was attractive and smiling.

Before Danny answered he turned back to Sabrina. “Which do you prefer to be called, Bri or Sabrina?”

“Either is fine,” the young woman answered honestly, although she still felt completely mystified.

“This is Bri Matthews,” Danny said. “Bri, meet my wife, Callie. I’m Danny, by the way.”

“Hello, Bri,” Callie said, smiling at her.

Before Sabrina could respond, Danny had turned her to face him, gripping her by both upper arms.

“Now listen to me, Bri. I can give you a chance at a new life. It’s up to you.”

Sabrina thought he must be out of his mind, but she didn’t mention this. She stared up at the intensity of the police officer’s face, hoping she was dreaming.

“Callie is going to show you where you can clean up and change your clothes. Go with her now. No one will harm you.”

Sabrina found herself at a doorway right off the kitchen. She was given no chance to escape but was ushered inside. The door was shut behind Callie and her.

“You can take a bath and wash your hair in here,” Callie was saying, placing the kettle she grabbed from the stove onto the washboard. “Put this dress on when you’re done. It won’t be long enough,” Callie added, having to look up to Sabrina, “but come back out when you’re ready, and I’ll have some supper for you.”

Callie, still smiling kindly, reached out and gently touched Sabrina’s arm.

“I hope Danny didn’t hurt you at all. That would be the last thing

he would wish to do. I also hope you'll come out and listen to what he has to say."

Sabrina had not spoken a word. She stood stock-still until the door shut, her mind unable to take in what had just happened to her.

There was no window in the room, only a single lantern that burned brightly, but she knew it was dark out. She was usually working by now.

Looking around the room, trying to figure out what she should do, Sabrina spotted the dress that had been left on a small table for her, a hairbrush beside it. She lifted it, and to her amazement, found undergarments with it, clean and neatly folded.

As she continued to touch the gingham fabric, all thoughts of escape deserted the young prostitute. The kind way Callie had touched her arm would not leave her mind. She couldn't remember the last time a woman had touched her in kindness.

Sabrina stared at the door back to the kitchen and then at the tub. Thinking she might have taken leave of her senses, she began to slip out of her dark red dress. Figuring she had little to lose, she was going to bathe, dress in the things she'd been given, go back out that door, and find out who these people were.



"Do you think she'll do it?" Danny asked Callie. Both sat at the kitchen table, not ten feet outside the room Sabrina was in, drinking coffee.

"I don't know. She's certainly young," Callie said, thinking of the large blue eyes that had stared at her, framed by an abundance of wavy black hair.

"I'm guessing she's 18 or so."

Callie had to smile. "She was certainly quiet. She looked at you as though you were mad."

Danny smiled back. "Well, we both know how true that is."

Callie smiled with very real love for her husband, never sorry a day that she'd married him, but also never knowing what life with

him would bring. They both heard water in the other room and exchanged another look. They had no idea if Sabrina Matthews would listen to a word they had to say, but that didn't change what they'd started. At the very least, they had one more person they could pray for, and they knew that God could work in ways they never saw or understood.



“Do you want more?” Callie offered when Sabrina had finished one plate of chicken and dumplings.

“No,” Sabrina said. Callie had not skimped on the portion, and Sabrina thought she was going to burst.

“How about some pie?” Danny offered.

Sabrina looked at him. “How about telling me why I’m here.”

“I can do that,” Danny said with complete ease, reaching for the pie Callie had put on the table and cutting himself a slice. “It’s like this, Bri,” Danny began, taking his time and talking in plain terms.

“I don’t know why you’re a prostitute—that’s not the most important issue here—but I do know it’s not a life that will be satisfying to you. No matter what the reason you got involved, it’s wrong to sell your body. God has better for you.”

Sabrina’s heart began to pound at the mention of God. Part of her wanted to run for her life, and part of her couldn’t move.

“I don’t know what you know about God,” Danny continued quietly, “but I can tell you that the Bible calls what you’re doing sin. The Bible also says that Christ died for that sin, and if you’ll trust in Him to save you, He will.”

“Why are you telling me this?” Sabrina whispered. It was all she could manage.

“I looked across the crowd and saw your face. It hurt my heart to see how young you were, but even if you were older, I would say the same thing. Was I high-handed to grab you that way? I was. Do you have the option of leaving here and forgetting this ever happened?”

Of course you do. But I took a chance that you might want to hear what I have to say.”

Sabrina licked her lips. She did want to hear what he had to say, but a part of her felt he didn’t understand. She had to say as much.

“I’m sure you’ve seen a lot in your line of work, but I don’t know if you understand how many men there have been.”

“It doesn’t matter if I do or not,” Danny said, seeing she was listening to every word. “God understands how many, and He’s the One offering forgiveness.”

“I don’t think He would if He truly knew.”

“Look right here,” Danny said, reaching for the Bible that sat on the table. “In Psalm 31:7 it says, ‘I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy: for thou hast considered my trouble; thou hast known my soul in adversities.’ And then in Psalm 69:19: ‘Thou hast known my reproach, and my shame, and my dishonor: mine adversaries are all before thee.’

“Both of these verses were written by a man named David, who had done some terrible things. David was a king, and he used his power as king to have a man killed so he could have that man’s wife. The sins David committed against God were serious, but he knew that God knew all about those sins.

“But there’s more. David also speaks in Psalm 51 when he’s broken and wanting God’s forgiveness: ‘Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.’”

Danny stopped reading and looked at Sabrina. She looked pale and sober. He watched as she reached and shut the book, studying the words *Holy Bible* on the front and then opening it again to Psalms. She licked her lips but didn’t speak.

Danny’s eyes flicked to his wife, who had not joined them at the

table. Tears had filled Callie's eyes as she watched Sabrina, and the slight movement of her lips told Danny she was praying.

"Are you all right?" Danny asked Sabrina after a few moments.

"I don't know. I never considered," she said, but then stopped.

"What? That God would know all the details and still be forgiving?"

Sabrina nodded and said, "I didn't think God could look on sin."

"God the Father sees everything, as does His Son, who died for our sins."

Danny and Callie watched her shiver. The room was warm, but Callie wasted no time in fetching a blanket from the living room and placing it around their guest.

"Thanks," Sabrina said absently, her eyes on Danny.

"Here is what you need to understand, Bri," Danny continued quietly. "You don't have to make a decision right now, but neither do you have to return to your old life. You can stay here with us for a while and think about this."

Sabrina blinked with her surprise. This was the last thing she expected.

"You may not have had choices," Callie said as she joined them at the table, "or felt you had choices about the life you've been living. But you do now. You can walk away from prostitution at this very moment."

"Just like that?" Sabrina voiced her skepticism. "Move in and live here free of charge?"

"Well," Danny said practically, "Cal can always use help around the house, extra hands for cooking and laundry. And when we go to church or the women come here to study with Callie, we hope you'll join in. We're not afraid you're going to eat us out of house and home or take advantage of us."

"But I might," Sabrina argued, a bit defiantly. "You don't even know me."

"That's true," Danny agreed. "You might choose to take advantage, but we're still not worried about it. We hope you'll accept this

chance to change your life. We also hope you'll want the life we have in Jesus Christ."

Sabrina shivered again. Her heart yearned to reach for what he was offering, but the fear that they did not know enough about her life still loomed large in her mind.

"Why don't we do this," Danny suggested. "Why don't you spend the weekend with us? Give us a try. If you want to leave, I'll walk you back on Monday."

"Or at anytime you feel it's not what you want," Callie added.

Sabrina would wonder for hours what came over her, but she heard herself agreeing.



"You can sleep in here," Callie said later, taking Sabrina to a bedroom at the end of the upstairs hallway and lighting a lantern for her. Sabrina saw that it was neat and small with two narrow beds.

"But before you settle in," Callie continued, "I want to show you something."

Sabrina followed the other woman back down the hall to another bedroom.

"This is Danny's and my bedroom." Callie lit a lantern in here as well. "Danny will be back after he checks in at the sheriff's office, and he'll come here to this room. He won't try to get into your room. You might hear him in the hall, but he won't bother you."

"Has he ever cheated on you?" Sabrina asked quietly, taking in the neat room with one wide bed.

"No, never."

"How can you be certain?"

"In order to cheat on your mate, you have to be a liar. Danny can't even lie if he's teasing me about something. It's not who he is."

Her words gave Sabrina pause. She stared at Callie, who looked right back.

"It is just who some men are," Sabrina finally concluded.

“You make it sound as if they have no choice.”

“I don’t know if they do.”

“All men who cheat have choices,” Callie said firmly but without force. “Never forget that. And I didn’t mean to make it sound as if Danny doesn’t have temptations and never has to work on those. But he chooses to come home to me.”

“You’re a lucky woman,” Sabrina said, and was surprised when Callie laughed.

“At the risk of making you think I’m going to disagree with everything you say, luck has nothing to do with it.”

It struck Sabrina suddenly that this woman was remarkably comfortable with her, even knowing what she was. She was not used to that. Prostitutes were comfortable with other prostitutes, but this—Callie Barshaw, a police officer’s wife—was not what she was accustomed to.

“You look tired, Bri,” Callie said next, not sure if she was seeing strain or fatigue in Sabrina’s young eyes. “Feel free to turn in anytime. I’m going to.”

Sabrina nodded and turned to head down the hall. Callie didn’t watch her, not feeling it was her job to see that she stayed. If she was there in the morning, so be it.



“How did you sleep?” Danny asked when Sabrina entered the kitchen on Saturday morning. He and Callie had eaten two hours earlier, but he didn’t mention this.

“Fine,” Sabrina said, still surprised to be there.

“Did it take a while to get to sleep?” Callie asked as she put a cup of coffee in front of the other woman.

“Yes. How did you know that?”

“Your hours are different than ours,” Callie said, her voice matter of fact. Sabrina stared at her.

“What’s the matter?” Danny asked, although he thought he knew.

“Where did you people come from?” Sabrina asked, her mouth hanging open a bit.

Both Danny and Callie laughed, but then Danny surprised Sabrina and turned to his wife. “Do you want to tell her?”

“Or you can,” she said, and Danny knew she wanted him to do the honors this time.

“What am I missing?” Sabrina asked.

“We’re just deciding who’s going to tell you our story.”

Sabrina didn’t realize it, but she leaned a little closer to Danny. Seeing it, he began.

“My father was a police officer, and I grew up with strangers in the kitchen. Some were men in hard times and drinking too much. Some were prostitutes. At other times entire families would come and live with us until they got on their feet.

“One day my father brought home a young prostitute, only 16 years old. She was both frightened and defiant, but the one thing about her that stuck out was her fascination with what my parents told her about Jesus Christ. She hadn’t heard any of what they were saying before, and in time all defiance melted away and she turned her life over to God.

“She was a different person after that. She lived with us for a while but eventually found work in a mill and lived with friends of ours.” Danny couldn’t stop the smile that stretched his mouth before adding, “When she turned 18, I married her.”

Sabrina’s eyes swung to Callie, who smiled gently at her. The younger woman could only stare. Nothing about Callie Barshaw spoke of her former life. To Sabrina’s eyes, she didn’t look capable of such sins, but there was no reason for Danny to lie about this.

“Why were you?” Sabrina eventually found her voice and asked.

“I was born in a brothel. I’d never known any other life. My own mother died when I was only 10, but by then I had about 15 mothers. When my figure developed, I joined that life. I had been at it for more than two years when Danny’s father found me.”

“I tried to stop for a while,” Sabrina admitted after a few moments of silence, wanting to talk about it with this woman. “I got work at a hotel in the kitchen and serving tables. But the owner kept at me. I told him no, but he wouldn’t leave me alone. He touched me or backed me into a corner every day we worked together, and when his wife found out, she fired me. I gave up then and went back. I just assumed it was my destiny.”

“That’s not true. You have a choice, Bri. We’re giving you a choice.”

This had come from Danny, and Sabrina now stared at him. For some reason, his marrying a former prostitute gave her more hope than she had ever dreamed of. Not that she was looking to marry, but what she was seeing in Danny and Callie had never occurred to her. Before today she would not have believed that a woman could walk so completely away from prostitution that a stranger meeting her would never know.

“You don’t have to decide right now,” Callie said, thinking she was about to get up and leave, but Callie had read Sabrina’s look wrong. The younger woman’s look was not a stubborn one but one of concentration. She didn’t love her life, but it did make her independent, something she enjoyed.

“What happens now?” Sabrina asked, realizing she had no idea.

“If you want to continue to discuss Scripture, we can,” Callie informed her. “If not, Danny has to work for a little while this morning, and I have baking to do.”

Sabrina blinked. Once again, this couple had managed to surprise her. Prior to meeting them she would have said she was past surprising, but it just continued to happen.

“Do you have more questions?” Danny asked with no sign of impatience.

It was on the tip of Sabrina’s tongue to ask if these people really believed God cared about what she did, but instead she asked Callie, “What will you be baking today?”

“I’ll probably start with bread and then move on from there,”

Callie answered, as though they'd known each other for years. "Do you want to help?"

Sabrina managed a nod. Danny pushed to his feet, told them to enjoy themselves, kissed Callie goodbye, and went on his way. Sabrina wasn't given time to comment or ask questions about what would happen next. Callie asked her to start working on a muffin recipe, and because it had been years since she'd made muffins, she kept her mouth shut and forced herself to concentrate.



Sabrina was strongly tempted to pinch herself. She had no idea where Saturday had gone. The hours had flown by. Baking, seeing visitors, washing dishes, and preparing meals had left little time for talking about God. And now it was Sunday morning and Sabrina found herself in a church, a man speaking up front, Callie to her right, and Danny on Callie's other side.

Sabrina tried to listen to what the man was saying, but it wasn't working. Her eyes kept sweeping the room, afraid she would see someone who recognized her. A word floated to her here and there, but she wasn't even watching the man up front. Things all over the room distracted her, and when she wasn't watching the other people in the room, she kept glancing down at Callie's open Bible.

She was a little slow to stand up when it was time to sing a closing hymn, but this time she heard some of the words that spoke of God's holiness and gracious love. Sabrina didn't try to sing but noticed that Callie's voice was not perfect. It dipped in places and wobbled a bit, but no one seemed to mind.

Not until she was back at the Barshaws' buggy did she realize the mistake she'd made. By not listening to the sermon, she didn't even have questions to ask Danny and Callie. Not that her hosts seemed to notice. They talked about general topics on the way home and never once asked her what she thought of the sermon.



“I have to head home,” Sabrina said on Sunday afternoon. Dinner was over, and she stood in the living room to tell her host and hostess.

“Will you be returning?” Danny wanted to know.

“Do you want me to?”

“Yes, we do,” Danny answered.

“Why do you want to go back?” Callie asked.

“I need some things from my place.”

“Why don’t we take you?” the older woman suggested. “We can help you carry whatever you need.”

Sabrina hesitated but managed to ask, “Have you forgotten where I live?”

“Not at all,” Callie said. “We’re not worried about it, so you shouldn’t be either.”

“And if you get there and decide you don’t wish to return with us,” Danny put in, “no one will force you.”

Sabrina agreed, although if pressed she could not have said why. The three left a short time later.