

Chapter One

From Country Town to California



Steam Engine

The clickety-clacking of the train on the track made Cordelia feel sleepy. She stared out of the window, her eyes moving back and forth over the endless grassy plains, searching for something other than just flat land. She pondered, *If only there were some hills or mountains, or at least more houses and trees, then it wouldn't be so boring.* The year was 1904 and this was Cordelia's first train trip across the country.

There was smoke in the air, and the engine came within view as the train pulled around a curve. Cordelia could see the initials of

the train on the side — CCC & SL. She knew that one of the C's stood for Chicago and the SL meant St. Louis, where they would be changing trains to head even further west. Every so often, they passed a wooden platform, but the train kept chugging along, just slowing long enough to drop a mail bag and grab the one hanging on an extended pole, ready to be delivered further down the line.

Just as Cordelia wondered if they were ever going to stop, the train brakes suddenly screeched and brought them to a halt in the middle of nowhere. Cordelia and her younger sister Rachel watched as local farmers loaded bushels of corn and potatoes, and sacks of wheat and hay grown and harvested on their plots, to be sold in the bigger towns up the way. Chickens cackled as their wooden crates were jostled onto the boxcar platforms. *Those poor hens don't know what's ahead for them! They'll be sold at the local farmer's markets just like the ones I've seen in our own hometown.* Cordelia cringed as she pictured the town butchers chopping off their heads. Just as quickly as the train had stopped, it suddenly lurched forward and picked up speed.

Rachel had nodded off and was leaning her head on Cordelia's shoulder. Her father John's face was hidden behind his newspaper across from her. She tried to keep from thinking about the events of the past three years — her mother Martha's death at the young age of 44, her father's attempts to cook and cope with her sister's bouts of sobbing at the oddest times. Cordelia had grown up fast. She really was a substitute mother, as her mother was no longer with them. She now had to do the things pioneer women had to do — bake bread, make soap, do the laundry by hand, and do all the things like sewing and making clothes for her sister and herself. She had learned skills like needlework, ironing with a flatiron, and making a pie from her mother Martha. She couldn't have imagined how handy these skills would later become to her as her future life unfolded.