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DOROTHY GARLOCK

Train from Marietta



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*Train from
Marietta*



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With Hope
With Song
Yesteryear

This book is lovingly dedicated to my dear friends
Michelle and Doug Klein.
Also to Matt and Kelli.

*Train from
Marietta*

KIDNAPPED!

"Stay aboard! This stop's for water!"
Katherine Tyler hears the shout.
As the train from Marietta stops,
She quietly slips out.

She is tall and blond and weary.
Just wants a breath of air.
An independent woman,
Unaware of danger there.

Unaware there is another
Who has followed in her wake,
Who will seize upon the moment,
Who will use this lucky break.

Abducted! In this nowhere place
She is hidden far from sight
As the train from Marietta
Goes on, hurtling through the night.

—F.S.I.

Prologue

New York City, 1933

THE DOOR OPENED SUDDENLY. Startled, Eddy reared up out of the chair, a glass of brandy in his hand. "Oh, it's you. Come in, Uncle William."

"Drinking alone?" The portly silver-haired man was dressed all in gray from his ten-dollar hat to the custom-made shoes on his feet. Light from the streetlamp on the corner penetrated the blinds that covered the large windows. It was a man's room: heavy furniture, unadorned tabletops, everything in brown and tan tones. The lingering smell of cigarette smoke filled the air.

"Occasionally I drink alone, don't you?" Eddy took another swallow from his glass as he settled back into his seat. "What brings you out this time of night?"

William Jacobs closed the door, then carefully removed his hat and hung it on the hat rack. "I wanted to catch you when you didn't have a woman here."

Eddy set his glass down on the table by the chair. "I'm not the womanizer you think I am. I spend an evening alone once in a while," he said with indignation in his voice.

"You're an easy mark for the little gold-digging flappers who hang out at your favorite speakeasy."

"You know a thing or two about flappers, don't you, Uncle?"

"You'd do well to remember, Edwin, which side of the bread your butter is on," William said menacingly, one thick finger pointed at his nephew.

"Why don't you remind me, dear Uncle?" Eddy said, his voice dripping with sarcasm.

"Don't get smart with me, you little bastard!"

"Don't call me that!"

"You are one, you know."

"How could I forget when you remind me day in and day out?" Eddy glared at his uncle.

"Well, I know that my sister slept with every Tom, Dick, and Harry that came along. You could be nothing else."

"And don't talk about my mother like that either."

"I took care of her all her life. I'll talk about her any way I want to."

At this, the two men glared at one another in silence. They'd had this argument many times before, neither one willing to back down.

"What's on your mind?" Eddy finally growled. "I'm sure it's something, or you'd be with your lady love."

"You'll know soon enough what's on my mind, and you'd better listen. If you know what's good for you, you'll forget about my lady love." William paused and then went to stand beside his nephew's chair. "We're in deep trouble. I've got to get some cash, and soon."

"I'll do what I can, short of robbing a bank." Eddy chuckled.

"What I've got in mind is easier than that and carries no risk to you—"

"What you mean is, no risk to *you*. Who do you want me to kill?"

"I wouldn't trust you to kill a grasshopper. You'd be sure to mess it up."

"Then what do you want me to do?"

"I want you to help me get some money out of John Tyler. He's got plenty of it. John's daughter, Kate, is leaving to go to California in a few days. The train will pass through some pretty rough country. If she was abducted from the train, my dear partner would fork over any amount to get her back."

"You mean kidnap her?"

"I mean hold her until John pays the ransom."

"Why do you want me involved in this?"

"I need you because you have a cool head. I don't want her hurt. She needs you to protect her." William did not look at him when he made the statement.

For the next several minutes, Eddy listened with increasing

shock as his uncle laid out his plan. He could scarcely believe what he was hearing! Finally he shot to his feet. "I will not do it!"

"You will do it, or you'll be out of this fancy apartment on your ass, and not get another dime from me. Look at the easy life you've had all these years. You owe me. Don't forget that I'm the one who makes it possible for you to pay for this apartment and the clothes on your back. I'm responsible for you being accepted by the Tylers to court their daughter Susie. If you had half the sense you were born with, you'd get her pregnant, marry her, and you'd have it made, even if she's not her father's favorite daughter. If I don't get one hundred thousand dollars soon, we could both land in prison. If I go, I've got enough on you to take you with me."

"What will happen to me and Kate when we come back?" Eddy looked at his uncle as if he had never seen him before. "I just can't do what you're asking. I like her."

"If you like her, you'll go and see to it that she's not harmed. Besides, you don't have to do it alone. When Kate gets back, she won't want it known that she spent a week alone in the wild with three men, so she won't say anything."

"Three men? Who's going beside me?"

"Squirrely."

"You can't be serious!" Eddy yelled in disbelief.

"He's going. He's loyal and I can trust him."

"You can't trust me?"

"Keep your voice down, you fool. I've contacted a man in Texas who's put me in touch with someone who knows every stick and stone in the territory. He'll be a big help."

"You know that Squirrely has about as many brains as a bed-bug."

"I'll give him his orders. Besides, I owe his father, old Felerri, a favor."

"That crook!"

"I'll use whoever I need to. Preacher or crook, it doesn't matter to me. With Squirrely along, Kate will be convinced that you are there to protect her and bring her home."

Eddy looked down at the floor as he pushed a hand through his curly blond hair. "I haven't said I was going to do it. I've got to think about it." *You old son of a bitch! You don't know it, but you're giving me a way to get out from under your thumb and to protect Kate at the same*

time. I've been wondering how I could manage to get away from you, and your selfish plan falls right into my lap.

His anger boiling over, William snatched the brandy glass from the table and hurled it against the wall behind Eddy. Broken glass and brandy flew in all directions.

"Here's something for you to think about, you ungrateful little pup. Neither one of us will go to prison if we pay the money back. Which do you prefer? Who do you think will take the brunt of an investigation? A young whippersnapper like you or a respected businessman like me?"

"But—"

"Don't be stupid! This is as much for your benefit as it is for mine. I know that you're fond of the girl. I also know the type of man Squirrelly is. If you don't go, what do you think he'll do with Kate while they're all alone in the wilderness? Yes or no?"

Eddy's shoulders slumped before he quietly said, "I'll do it."

"I thought you would."

Eddy hated the gloating look on his uncle's face. "Does your lady love know about this scheme?"

"She knows."

William walked to the door, picked up his hat, and slammed it down on his head. He took a cigar from his coat pocket, bit off the end, and spat it out on the Oriental carpet.

"I'll be back tomorrow night to give you all the details. Get ready to leave by Sunday."

William went out and slammed the door.

All was quiet in the room. Eddy went to the sideboard for a bottle of brandy and poured himself another drink. He carried it across the room and dropped back into his chair.

Confusion mixed with hope in Eddy's mind. This could be his big chance. He had to play his cards right. He'd saved up money, tucking it here and there so no one would notice. It would be easy to slip across the border into Mexico from Texas. He'd be able to live like a king on the money he'd saved. He would make sure that Kate was on her way home before he left her. If Squirrelly was in on this, he was probably hired to kill both him and Kate after his uncle got the money. Eddy couldn't let that happen. When it was all over, he would take off for Mexico and not look back. He had faith that, once back in New York, Kate would expose his uncle's plan to the authorities.

TRAIN FROM MARIETTA

One thought filled Eddy's mind. His big chance had come at last. He would foil the hit man, cover his tracks, and be far away by the time his uncle realized he had escaped his would-be killers. Then let old William worry that someday, some way, he might be coming back . . .

Chapter 1

TATE DIDN'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT STYLE, but he knew that the woman standing beside the rough board wall of the small depot was fashionably dressed. He had glanced at her when he left the ticket counter and had wondered what she was doing in this rugged Texas town. She was obviously a city woman and as out of place as a rose in a cactus patch. Light blond hair fell to her shoulders. She wore a small blue felt hat that matched her princess-style coat, which came down over slim hips. The flared blue skirt that floated down around her calves was edged with a blue satin ribbon. Her matching shoes, with slender heels, were planted firmly beside an expensive leather valise.

What a silly hat, Tate thought, chuckling to himself. It'd offer no shade at all. Within ten minutes, her face would be cooked in the West Texas sun.

Worried about her trunk, Kate had stepped down from the train to make sure it was in the baggage car. When the railroad agent told her it had been left at the last stop and was being picked up by the train from Marietta, she had decided to wait and go on to California on the same train as her belongings. She wondered now at the wisdom of her decision. Shortly after she'd spoken with him, the agent had locked up and left. Now all who remained on the platform with her were a lone cowboy and the button salesman who had been on the train since New Orleans.

The sun was setting in the western sky. Purple shadows were sliding down from the hills. It would be dark soon. A slight chill had entered the air with the disappearance of the hot summer sun. The

depot was far from town; only a sprinkling of lights shone from the houses. The train from Marietta wasn't due for another hour. It would be pitch-dark by then.

She was glad for the presence of the cowboy at the end of the platform. She'd first glanced at him when he left the ticket counter; her eyes had met his even though she knew that she shouldn't make eye contact with the strange man in dusty boots and well-worn jeans. His hair was black, and he wore a battered, wide-brimmed hat. His mouth was set in a thin line as if he somehow disapproved of her. What was he doing here at this time of night? Regardless of his appearance, she was glad he was here; she didn't want to be alone with the other man.

The salesman, dressed in a striped suit and a derby hat, paced back and forth near his sample case. She'd had the misfortune to take the same route to California that he had chosen. When they first boarded the train in New Orleans, he'd prattled on and on about buttons and snaps for hours. His twitchy, talkative nature and the way he looked at her gave her the creeps.

As the three stood waiting for the train, it seemed to her that they were the only people in all this vast and desolate land.

A door in the side of the depot opened on squeaky hinges. An old man pushed a trolley down to the end of the platform and left it so that its bundles could be loaded into the baggage car when the train arrived. Then he disappeared around the corner of the depot.

The button salesman coughed and took a step toward her. She turned to see that the cowboy was looking in their direction, but she wasn't sure who he was looking at. She pushed herself away from the wall and walked over to him.

"Is this train usually on time?"

"Sometimes," he said. "This isn't Grand Central Station, you know."

"Well, what do you know? I thought it was." She smiled up at him. But he didn't smile back.

What did she expect? He couldn't take a joke. He'd probably only heard of Grand Central Station and had never been there.

"Thanks for that valuable information." She turned and walked back to take her place against the rough boards. At least the salesman had taken the hint and moved back to his case. She looked at her watch but couldn't see the time in the dim light. She nudged the

leather valise at her feet; if her trunk never arrived, at least she had clean underwear and her cosmetics.

Then, in the distance, she heard the familiar sounds of a train approaching. Could the thing be earlier than the agent predicted, or had an hour passed already? She looked at the cowboy and saw that he was peering down the track toward the east. She looked in that direction too, and soon she saw the billows of smoke rising up above the huge engine. The piercing whistle was loud enough to wake everybody for miles. The engineer was making a grand entrance into the station. Too bad only she, the cowboy, and the button salesman were there to appreciate the effort.

The train rolled slowly past her before coming to a stop. Two cars were brightly lit and filled with passengers, most of whom appeared to be sleeping. Katherine picked up her valise, walked to the edge of the platform, and waited for the conductor to step down from the train. He smiled, took her ticket, and helped her up the steps and into the car.

The cowboy was right behind her and edged past the conductor. Katherine turned to the right and entered the car. Most of the seats were filled, but halfway down she saw what she thought was an empty seat. Carrying her valise, she made her way down the aisle and set it on the floor.

When she turned, the cowboy was still right behind her. With a grunt, she attempted to lift the heavy bag up and put it in the rack above the seat. Quick as a whistle, the cowboy snatched it out of her hand, and as he slung it upward, the latch opened and her personal belongings spilled out over the seat and onto the floor. She looked down in horror to see a pair of her lace panties covering a pair of dusty cowboy boots.

"Sorry," he said.

Katherine was more embarrassed than she'd ever been in her entire life. All she could do was grunt in reply, "I bet you are."

The cowboy pulled her valise from the rack and set it on the seat beside her. He reached down and grabbed a handful of lavender lace panties, silk slips, and lacy bras and stuffed them back into the case. As he did, a jar of face cream fell onto his foot and opened. Katherine looked down to see the white cream running down over the cowboy's boot. The smell of gardenias filled the air in the passenger car. All around the car, people were stretching their necks to look.