

I loved *Bluebonnet Bride* by Molly Noble Bull. I've loved all her books I've read. This novel is set in two states, and Molly painted the setting with broad strokes of authenticity. And her characters drew me into their lives, making me love them through the end of the story. The story had enough twists and turns to keep me turning pages. You won't want to miss this wonderful contemporary tale.

— LENA NELSON DOOLEY - AWARD-WINNING,  
BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *FOUR SEASONS OF  
LOVE*

Bluebonnet  
*Bride*

MOLLY NOBLE BULL



*Scrivenings*  
PRESS

Quench your thirst for story.

[www.ScriveningsPress.com](http://www.ScriveningsPress.com)

Copyright © 2021 by Molly Noble Bull

Published by Scrivenings Press LLC  
15 Lucky Lane  
Morrilton, Arkansas 72110  
<https://ScriveningsPress.com>

Edited by Kathi Macias.

Printed in the United States of America.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy and recording— without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotation in printed reviews.

Paperback ISBN 978-1-64917-088-0

eBook ISBN 978-1-64917-089-7

Library of Congress Control Number: 2020949284

Cover by [www.bookmarketinggraphics.com](http://www.bookmarketinggraphics.com).

All scriptures are taken from the KING JAMES VERSION (KJV): KING JAMES VERSION, public domain.

All characters are fictional, and any resemblance to real people, either fictional or historical, is purely coincidental.

Published in association with Joyce Hart, agent, Hartline Literary Agency

*This book is dedicated to Charlie, Bret, Burt, Bren,  
Jana, Linda, Angela,  
Bethanny, Dillard, Hailey, Bryson, Grant, Grace,  
Kathryn, and Jeanette*

*But to God give the glory.*

## SCRIPTURE

*If you forgive others the wrongs they have done you,  
your Father in Heaven will forgive you.  
But if you do not forgive others,  
then your Father will not forgive the wrongs you have done.*

— MATTHEW 6:14-15, KJV

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Jeanette Pierce, Katherine King Brocato,  
Mona Christensen,  
and  
Bethanny Bull  
For their help during the writing of this novel.



She'd had another of those horrible flashbacks straight from her teenage years.

Gina Hollister sucked in her breath, releasing it slowly. The words, *You're incredibly stupid*, continued to play in her mind. Incredible. She hadn't known the meaning of the word when she heard it for the first time. But she knew *stupid*—even back then.

She stepped out of her car and stood there for a moment with her purse on the top of her ten-year-old white Buick. Why did this happen now? It was Friday morning, and she had an important meeting with the father of one of her students, a man she'd never met. Would the flashbacks ever end?

Her purse strap slid toward her, with the brown loop hanging over the car window. She reached for it—one second too late. Her handbag turned upside down, landing on the concrete parking lot. She'd forgotten to zip it up—again. Everything inside spilled out with a cacophony of tinkling and jingling.

Gina counted to ten. She was a PhD now and an intelligent person, not an accident-prone airhead. She merely had a problem with depth perception and dyslexia. *Merely?*

Dyslexia had colored her entire life with a black marker.

She'd studied hard for years. Would she ever be normal? Was there such a thing?

*Lord*, she prayed, *make me like everyone else*.

Her tube of lipstick rolled beneath her car. *Oh, no!* Her jaw and both fists tightened simultaneously. She leaned forward and bent down, careful to keep the hem of her long white dress from brushing the pavement. Slowly she gathered every item she'd dropped.

Except the lipstick.

It rolled beyond her reach. If she wanted it, she must kneel on her hands and knees. Her dress could become a disaster.

She wanted it. The lipstick was the last tube in existence in her favorite shade of peach. She set her handbag on the pavement beside her, folded her skirt up, and bent forward. *Derriere* elevated, she reached for the tube. Her fingers touched its smooth, slick surface; gripping the lipstick, she rocked back on her heels, preparing to rise.

"What have we here?" somebody said from behind her.

She recognized the man's voice. She'd heard it the previous night when she listened to messages left on her cell phone.

"Need any help?" he asked.

Gina looked up, and her breath froze in her throat. Steve Bryson looked down at her. She'd never seen him until that instant but knew him immediately. That low, slightly raspy voice couldn't belong to anyone else. Yet there was something besides his voice that seemed familiar. She frowned. What could it be?

He reached out as if to help her up. She took his hand, and a tingle shot through her. *Wow!* Gina stood up beside him. She'd expected him to be handsome, but nobody told her he was so tall, so young-looking, so electrifying. Like his daughter, Steve had thick, dark-brown hair and brown eyes. But that didn't begin to describe him.

He would have no difficulty describing her, she realized. She probably looked like an extra on the set of a historical western



movie. If the laughter she heard in his voice and saw in his eyes were any indication, he'd been watching her for a while.

In a white ankle-length gown and matching cowboy boots, Gina was dressed as a character in a western novel, set in 1881 Texas, for the end of the school year costume party. Should she try to explain why she was wearing a costume to their first meeting? Or would a billionaire like Steve Bryson even be able to comprehend a situation like hers?

The party was originally scheduled for next week. Gina was about to walk out the door of her apartment when she remembered. Nicole had changed the date of the event to later this morning, and she expected Gina to help with the party decorations. No time for that now.

At the last possible moment, Gina had changed from her navy-blue business suit to this outfit. She must look out of place, to say the least. If only she could climb into her car and vanish before Mr. Bryson learned the identity of the lady he'd helped to her feet.

A man as rich and sophisticated as Mr. Bryson would expect a PhD to dress in keeping with her position at the university, not to mention the fact she hadn't answered any of his questions. *In the words of my grandmother, I must seem as strange as what Grandma would call a mad scientist.* She forced a smile.

He returned her smile, studying her carefully.

She ran her fingers across the embroidered design in blue wool thread on the front of her dress. Why did she keep feeling they met a long time ago? *He reminds me of someone. But who?* If only she could remember how she knew this guy, if in fact she did.

"Are you Sacagawea?" he asked, a teasing glint in his deep, dark eyes. "The historical Native-American girl we read about?"

*Sacagawea?* "I'm Cheyenne," she said, dragging out each syllable. "But how could you possibly know my family history?"

His grin highlighted dimples, one on each cheek. "Glad to meet you, *shy Ann*. I'm *shy Steve*."

*Bold Steve suited him better.*

“What brings you to Austin, Texas?” he asked.

“I live here, and I’m wearing a costume, sir, taken from a character in a story. This dress has nothing to do with Native-Americans. However my great-grandmother *was* Cheyenne.”

Why was she revealing information to a man she barely knew? She should relax, calm down.

Steve pressed his lips together. His mouth turned up at the edges. “May I direct you somewhere, ma’am?”

“As a matter of fact, I’m on my way to your office. I’m Dr. Gina Hollister.”

He blinked, a look of astonishment on his face. “You? I would never have guessed.” A glint of humor danced in his eyes before he peered down at his watch. “As pleasant as it is out here in the sunshine, we might be more comfortable in my office.”

His office would be cool and, perhaps, luxurious. She decided her explanation could wait, at least until they went inside.

Steve set the palm of his hand against the small of Gina’s back, guiding her across the parking lot as if he thought she couldn’t find the way on her own. Well, she knew where his office was and didn’t need any help getting there, but she had no intention of pulling away and drawing more attention to herself.

They strolled toward the modern high-rise, then entered Steve’s glass-and-brick reception area on the third floor. Gina waited while he opened the door to his private office.



AS SOON AS she stepped onto the marble tile floor, she sensed Steve’s presence all around her. She watched him go over and stand behind a large oak desk.

“Please sit down.” He motioned toward an empty chair.

“If you don’t mind, I’d rather stand.” Gina wore a costume, while he wore a navy suit and a royal blue tie. Her hands shook.

What might she feel if she sat down and attempted to answer more of his questions? She had to pull herself together.

She took a big breath of air, then released it slowly. “And again, Mr. Bryson, excuse the way I’m dressed. I’m on my way to a party my business partner and I are giving for our students later this morning.” She shrugged because she couldn’t think of anything else to do. “I promised the children I’d wear a costume.”

“No explanation necessary. You look great.”

“As I said earlier, some of my ancestors were Native-Americans.”

“I thought most Native-Americans had dark hair,” he said, “not long auburn hair like yours. And your eyes are blue.”

“I’m only one-eighth Native-American. But my mother was one-fourth. Mom came from Oklahoma originally. That’s significant up there.”

“So I’ve heard.”

*I sound pathetic, telling him my family history.* Annoyed with herself and still trembling inside, she knew she was talking too fast. Her heart raced as if it were about to jump out of her chest, and her forehead and the palms of her hands were moist.

“You look a little overheated,” Steve said. “Would you care for something cool to drink? We have iced tea, or I might be able to come up with a soda or two.”

“Nothing for me, thanks.”

Gina dropped down onto the cushioned armchair he offered her earlier because she no longer trusted her shaky knees to support her. He settled into the oversized armchair across the desk from hers.

Every movement Steve made from the moment she first saw him was executed with the grace of a professional athlete. She’d always admired people who handled their bodies well, wondering what he thought of her little fiasco in the parking lot. A professional attitude was required if she hoped to keep his daughter as a tutoring student until Amanda and her father left

for Colorado. Presently such a goal appeared to be drifting from her grasp.

Without taking his eyes from hers, he picked up a yellow pencil and tapped it lightly on the desk. His penetrating appraisal made her self-conscious. Still she met his gaze head-on.

“My assistant has been coaxing you to take the job I’m offering,” he said. “I want to thank you for agreeing to discuss it with me.”

“I’m doing it for Amanda, Mr. Bryson.”

“I gathered that. I know my daughter is grateful. You see, I need your help, Doctor.”

Despite his self-assured persona, he sounded a bit desperate, and sort of kind as well. “I appreciate your show of respect, sir, but you don’t have to call me Doctor. It’s not as if I’m a medical doctor.”

“Thanks for the clarification, *Doctor*.” He grinned. “But I must go to Colorado this summer on business. I own a home there about thirty miles from Durango, and I plan to take my daughter with me.”

“Yes, I know, and a rather large home I understand.”

“Then you might also know my mother-in-law thinks Amanda must continue her tutoring sessions this summer or risk slipping farther behind in her studies next fall.”

“That was my recommendation.”

“Could you find it in your heart to go to Colorado this summer and tutor her?” His voice held a sense of urgency, tempting her to give in.

“I’m sorry,” she said, gathering her thoughts. “You’re wasting your time if you’re trying to persuade me to change my mind. But I’d be glad to provide you with the names of several people with the same credentials as mine.”

“I thought of that, but Amanda wants you.” Steve grew silent for a moment. “I’m sure you’re aware of Amanda’s reading and spelling problems.”

“I’ve been her private tutor since before I entered graduate school.”

“Amanda’s only fourteen, Doctor. I believe she’s smart as well as beautiful. I would think her so-called problem would be hard to deal with.”

Gina’s blink ended in a nod.

He hesitated. “In your opinion wouldn’t Amanda’s so-called problem be especially difficult for someone at her age?”

“Reading and spelling problems are always difficult to deal with regardless of I.Q., physical appearance, or age.”

“I suppose that’s true.” He cleared his throat. “As you must know, Amanda lost her mother recently in a boating accident.” His eyes held a trace of sorrow. “I always knew Myra wasn’t much of a sailor, but ...”

“I thought a lot of Mrs. Bryson, sir, and it was tragic she had to die so young.”

“Amanda knows you liked her mother.” He paused again.

Gina drummed her fingers on the arm of her chair, waiting for him to continue. His pause seemed to last forever.

“Myra was my ex-wife before she was my late wife,” he said at last. “I’m Amanda’s only parent now. Myra and I divorced when she was seven, so Amanda doesn’t know me very well. Myra and her mother wanted it that way, and I didn’t want my only child to go through a custody fight.”

Mr. Bryson sounded gentle, kind, and nothing like the horrible womanizer Myra had described. Gina wanted to believe him, but it was out of the question. Myra had made it clear. Steve Bryson was good at pretending to be one person, while being another.

*He has to be lying.*



STEVE WATCHED HER FOR A MOMENT. “You’ve helped Amanda with her studies—a lot. You’ve helped her cope with the death of

her mother, too, and all the other changes in her life. For that I thank you. Again, I sure hope you change your mind and take the job.”

Gina opened her mouth to reply.

“I’d also like you to help my daughter and me bridge the gap at this critical time in her life.”

“Perhaps you should have tried bridging the gap a long time ago, Mr. Bryson.”

“I wanted to,” he admitted. “Believe me. I won’t go into all the reasons, but until recently seeing my daughter was almost impossible.”

Impossible? According to Myra Bryson, Steve rarely tried to see Amanda after the divorce.

“I’ll have to be gone at least part of the time while we’re in Colorado,” he said. “So of course Amanda will need to be with someone I can trust.”

“Are you saying you want to hire me as Amanda’s nanny?”

“Not at all. I know you have a doctorate in educational psychology. I’m willing to pay you well for your services during the time you’re working for me. More in fact than you’d make teaching at the university.”

“As I told your assistant and your lawyer, my partner and I are planning to start a business this summer near Hill River, Texas, so I can’t very well do that and tutor Amanda in Colorado at the same time.”

He lifted his eyebrows. “Sounds interesting. What kind of business are we talking about?”

“We plan to build a center for children with learning problems as soon as our loan goes through.”

“If you don’t mind me asking, has financing been a problem?”

“I do mind you asking.”

“Sorry. But I might be able to help you in that area.”

“Oh?”

“I sometimes buy property for my employees and allow them

to pay me back slowly, without any kind of down payment and at a fair interest rate.”

“You mean a sort of rent-to-own agreement?”

“Exactly.”

Her partner, Nicole Danton, didn't know it yet, but their loan application had been turned down by yet another local bank. The loan officer Gina visited on Wednesday said neither of them had established enough credit to make such a loan feasible. Nicole would be shattered by the news. Now all Gina had to do was find the right time to tell her.

They were counting on building the center. When the dream seemed beyond their reach, here was Steve Bryson, offering them risk-free credit.

Well, almost.

Steve was watching her from his side of the oak desk. He'd done a great sales job on her; she was beginning to weaken. Could he possibly know she was considering his offer seriously?

The rent-to-own agreement appeared to be the only real chance she and Nicole had. Nevertheless the two should probably discuss the matter before Gina accepted a whole summer of work. On the other hand it would be nice to have the issue settled before informing Nicole they had a serious problem. But Steve's daughter was the main cause of her concern. For Amanda's sake, maybe she should go on and accept his offer.

Amanda was motherless now. Soon she would be moving in with a father she barely knew. The young teenager would need to be with someone she could trust as she struggled with all the problems her new life was sure to bring. Amanda needed a stabilizing influence in her life, now more than ever.

For weeks Amanda had begged Gina to accept the employment opportunity her father offered. The teenager would be pleased if Gina accepted.

If the sudden look of excitement on Steve's face reflected his thoughts and feelings, he must sense Gina was seriously

considering his offer after all. As the head of a multibillion-dollar corporation like Bricot, he was probably accustomed to having his own way in business as well as with women. But it would be a snowy day in Austin before Gina fell under his spell.

“You’re taking the job,” he said, cutting into her thoughts, “aren’t you?”

“I think so.”

His smile lit up his handsome face. “Welcome aboard.” His dimpled grin became a heartfelt chuckle.

In spite of her misgivings about Steve, Gina found the rich, unrestrained sound of his laughter almost as comforting as his voice. “I’ll want some ground rules,” she said, “before I sign a contract to go to Colorado with you and Amanda.”

“What kind of ground rules?”

“I don’t know yet. I know what I want to say, but I haven’t written anything down. When I do I’ll let you know.”

He appeared to hold in a smile or maybe a belly-stretching laugh. His eyes twinkled as if he found her amusing. “I can hardly wait to see those rules of yours, Dr. Hollister.”