

LUCY AND THE LAWMAN

MOLLY NOBLE BULL



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Molly Noble Bull has crafted a good, light romantic western, with a solid faith content. It pulled me in and kept me turning pages until the end. I recommend it to lovers of Christian westerns.

— TERRY BURNS, RETIRED LITERARY
AGENT AND AUTHOR, HARTLINE LITERARY
AGENCY

This is the first novella I've read written by Molly Noble Bull, and I loved it. The storyline is unique and the characters well-developed for a novella. There were enough plot twists and surprises to keep me turning pages. You won't want to miss this story.

— LENA NELSON DOOLEY - MULTI-
PUBLISHED, AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR OF
THE LOVE'S ROAD HOME SERIES

*Charlie, Bret, Burt, Bren, Jana, Linda, Angela, Bethanny, Hailey,
Dillard, Bryson. Grant, Grace, Kameron, Jared, Jeanette, Kathi,
Kathleen, Kathrine, Teresa, Mary Kaye, Joyce, Marie, Dee, Alice,
Dana.*

But to God give the glory.

THEME SCRIPTURE

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

Matthew 6:14-16
(Good News Bible Version)

1



Juniper, Texas
Spring 1890

A man staying at a hotel said he saw Daisy. Maybe it *was* Daisy. Maybe not.

Caleb Caldwell had to find out, and not because he was the county sheriff. It was personal. He left his office at the county jail and crossed the street. Shorty, one of his deputies, could handle whatever came up. Caleb headed for the hotel.

He intended to really talk to this man—dig for details. His search would continue until he found Daisy—no matter how long it took.

A sign in the barbershop window caught his attention.

Fielding Grimes for Governor

That crook? Caleb shook his head in disbelief. A man like Grimes should be running for the Mexican border, not for the highest office in the state of Texas.

Caleb entered the hotel, glancing through the archway into the dining room. A skinny little man with white hair and a white mustache sat hunched at a table, reading a small book. In a starched shirt, black tie, and dark suit, he looked as if he belonged back East somewhere, not Juniper, Texas.

Caleb hoped the small man was the witness he'd been searching for. He would have prayed, if he still did things like that.

The stranger looked up from his reading. Their gazes connected. The man put down the book and reached for his cup. Caleb moved closer to the table, and the scent of coffee reached out to him. The man didn't smile.

Caleb forced one. "Are you Stanley Kipple?"

The man nodded over his coffee.

"I'm Sheriff Caldwell." Caleb offered him his hand. The man shook it. "Glad to know you, Mr. Kipple. May I sit down, sir?"

"Of course."

Caleb slid into a chair. "My deputy said you stopped by the office and wanted to talk to me about Daisy. Reckon it means you saw her somewhere."

"I *might* have seen her," Mr. Kipple corrected.

"Where?"

"San Antonio. I live there, but I travel a lot with my business. I sell books and Bibles to churches."

"San Antonio?" Caleb repeated.

Caleb's cousins, Jake and Boyd, mentioned before they moved away that maybe Daisy was living in San Antonio now. She had raved about how much she loved that town. He'd wondered if maybe his cousins were right. Now the book salesman confirmed it. *Maybe*.

The man held up the small book he was reading when he came in. Caleb studied the book's title, *New Testament*.

“Interesting title, Mr. Kipple. What’s the book about?”

The man sent him a look that said Caleb might be a little slow in the head. “Are you saying you never heard of the New Testament?”

Caleb grinned. “Of course I have. I was fooling you a little.”

“Fools could be headed for the bad place. So here, consider this book as my gift to you. Be *sure* to read it,” he warned, “all of it.” Mr. Kipple handed the small book to Caleb.

Though he had no intentions in reading it, Caleb took the New Testament, tacking on another fake smile. Then he tucked the small book inside his vest pocket.

Enough small talk. Caleb needed to get back to the reason he was sitting there. “Thanks, sir. But I need you to tell me all you know about Daisy.”

The stranger hesitated. “I saw a young woman the last time I was home,” he said. “She might be the one you’re looking for.”

“How long ago did you see her?” Caleb asked.

Mr. Kipple shrugged. “Two weeks, maybe three.”

“How did you know I was looking for a young woman?”

“Sheriff Brown told me. He’s the sheriff over in Kasperton County. I visited with him some when I made a trip to his part of Texas. He bought a copy of one of the books I’m selling.” Mr. Kipple was looking down, but he turned, glancing over at Caleb. “Did you know he was saved?”

Caleb shook his head because he didn’t know what else to do. What he did know was he had to get Mr. Kipple back on the right track. “I know Sheriff Brown. What did you tell him?”

“About a woman I saw there in San Antonio. Beat up. Face bruised. All black around one eye. He said I should tell you all this. Since I’m here in town anyway, I stopped by your office.”

“Besides the bruises, what did she look like?” Caleb asked.

Kipple cocked his head to one side. “Short but thin. Brown

eyes. Long golden hair. I bet she'd be pretty if she wasn't all bruised up. Sheriff Brown told me you sent him a letter—that you were on the lookout for a pretty woman with long blond hair.”

“I sent out a lot of letters,” Caleb said. “Go on.”

“Sheriff Brown said the woman I saw fit the description you sent in your letter. I have a layover here in Juniper anyway. So I stopped by the jailhouse. You weren't there.” Kipple looked around the all-but-empty room as if he feared someone might be listening. “I don't want any trouble.” He peered down at his coffee cup. “I'm a law-abiding citizen. I've already visited all the churches here in town and have a stagecoach to catch in less than an hour. If I miss it, the man at the depot said another one might not come by again for days.”

“Juniper is off the main stage route,” Caleb said. “And I won't detain you. But I do have a few more questions.” Caleb pulled a small photograph from the inside pocket of his leather vest. The little New Testament came out with it. He handed Kipple the photo, putting the New Testament back. “Is this her?” Caleb asked. “The woman you saw?”

Kipple studied the photograph for a moment. “Well, I don't rightly know, sheriff.” He handed the picture back to Caleb and shook his head. “It looks like her. But it would be hard to say for sure.”

Caleb leaned forward in his chair. “Do you remember where you saw her? Where in San Antonio?”

Kipple shrugged. “Sorry, Sheriff. I can't remember anything more for sure. If I remember anything else, I'll let you know.”

“I'd appreciate it.”

Instead of going right back to his office, Caleb headed for the general store for a cup of coffee. He didn't care for the hard stuff, but there was a time when he did.

The bell over the doorway chimed when Caleb entered the store. He paid his respects to Mr. Gregg, the storeowner, drinking his coffee he looked out the window. He kept thinking about what Mr. Kipple had said. Did the salesman really see Daisy in San Antonio? Regardless of his preachy talk, Kipple was a nice fellow, giving him the New Testament and all.

Back in the days when Caleb read the Bible, he also prayed. Now he knew the truth. God answered prayers—just not his.

Maybe he should send the New Testament to one of his cousins, Jake or Boyd. He hadn't seen either of them since they moved away. At least, *they* wrote to him. Caleb was slow answering. He owed both of them letters, but with all the business he had to attend to as the county sheriff, he had little time for letter writing—especially to family members.

Still, good memories came when he thought about Boyd and Jake. They grew up together right here in Juniper County. *We played together all the time when we were kids.* Now, Jake and Boyd lived hundreds of miles away.

He thought of Daisy again. The book and Bible salesman hadn't given him much to go on. What encouraged him the most was the fact that Kipple thought he saw Daisy in San Antonio.

Mr. Kipple mentioned selling books in Colorado. He'd heard a Mrs. Gordan and her daughter lived in Searten, a small town about fifty miles from Denver. Caleb was obligated to go to Colorado next week to identify an outlaw in the Denver jail, and he had a desire to help the women, especially after he learned Mrs. Gordan was blind. He'd promised to go to Colorado as a favor to the local sheriff there, and the trip would take several weeks. Ordinarily, he'd never stay away

from Juniper County so long, but the trip seemed like the perfect opportunity to give his deputies the chance to be the boss for a while, learn the ropes, before he left for good. He planned to quit sherifing after his return and run cattle full time.

Maybe I'll stop by Searten on my way to Denver—tell Mrs. Gordan and her daughter the news. He could tell them about the recent death in Juniper of the elderly Mrs. Gordan, about the property they now owned, and about the danger they might be in. Fielding Grimes, *the scoundrel*, and his brothers were after their land. Somebody had to tell them. They might already know about the death and the land they now own, but they couldn't know what Grimes might be up to. But for a slip of the tongue, Caleb wouldn't know either.

As he headed back to his office at the county jail, he glanced off beyond the greening pasture to the Texas hills, but his thoughts focused on San Antonio. He'd be there for a day or two before taking the train to Denver, and if Daisy was in San Antonio, he'd find her.



Searten, Colorado

One Week Later

Lucy noticed the tall, young-looking cowboy as soon as he turned the corner. He was easy to describe—thin, strong, dark hair, and straight as a toy soldier. The stranger strolled down the stone walk in front of her house beyond the picket fence, wearing a wide-brimmed, tan hat, a blue shirt, light-brown jacket and tan trousers tucked in his boots.

"I'm looking for a Mrs. Annette Gordan or a Miss Lucy Gordan," he said. "Could Miss Lucy be you?"

She'd moved to the yard gate but didn't try to open it. She didn't respond, yet she was drawn to the stranger with the sapphire-blue eyes.

At last she said, "I'm Miss Gordan." She leaned toward the gate. "Can I help you, sir?"

"I'm Sheriff Caleb Caldwell—from Texas."

His deep baritone voice sounded smooth—warm.

"Reckon you're wondering why I'm here," he went on.

She nodded.

"I have an important message for you and your mother."

"I see," she said. But she didn't.

Lucy wanted to believe the sheriff was exactly who he appeared to be—a warm and friendly person. But she was hesitant.

She finally opened the yard gate, motioning for him to come inside. As he walked through, the gate slammed shut behind them. The heavy weights and bells jingled and clanged for several moments, a tinkling echo of their first meeting.

"I like that gate chain of yours." His grin deepened. "Very musical. But in Texas, we don't use bells on our gates. Just weights."

"Most folks don't use bells here either," she explained. "Just me."

He kept looking at her—especially her face. "As I said, I'm here with important news to deliver to your mother. But if this is a bad time for y'all, I'll be glad to come back later." He paused as if he expected her to make a reply. "On the other hand, if you'll invite me inside to meet your mother, I promise to explain everything."

She smiled. "Won't you come in, sir?"

Despite an inner warning, Lucy led the way to the porch, up the steps and into the house. She settled the sheriff onto an overstuffed blue chair in the parlor.

Caleb couldn't keep his eyes off Miss Lucy Gordan. Those spies Fielding Grimes had working for him were right. She was a fine-looking lady, no doubt about it. A bit of white lace edged the ruffle around the collar of her dress. Lucy reached up, straightening her collar as if she sensed his interest in her.

A mental image of Daisy in a pink blouse with ruffles around the collar paraded across his brain. He blinked but was unable to remove the memory from his mind. *Daisy*. Like Daisy, Miss Gordan's blonde curls and brown eyes set off a slender and petite form. There, the similarity ended.

Lucy sat on the blue velvet settee near his chair and sent him a slow smile.

Caleb straightened his shoulders. The two young women were nothing alike. Miss Gordan was a lady and probably a churchgoer. Daisy was—

Laughter and high-pitched, female voices came from elsewhere in the house, interrupting his musings. One of the women let out a girlish giggle. Amused, he glanced toward the sound, holding in a smile.

Lucy blushed. "My mother is entertaining some of her lady friends in another part of the house. I'll give her a minute. Then I'll go and tell her you're here."

"It must be hard for you and your mother—living here without a man in the house."

"Of course we miss my father, but we've managed since he died." She pushed back a golden curl that had escaped the comb, holding her long hair in place. "How did you know there wasn't a man living here?"

"A man I know told me. He has friends who live here in Searten."

Her forehead wrinkled. "I see."

Regardless of the frown on her face, she looked lovely in the blue dress she wore. Its blue-violet color reminded him of the mountain laurels often found on the spring hills in his part of Texas, and her golden hair and brown eyes made him think of—of Daisy. *No!* He bit his lower lip. *I won't think about Daisy now.*

“Sheriff, you haven’t told me why you came here today.”

“I came to Colorado because I have business in Denver. I’m on my way there now. I stopped by Searten on my way to talk to you and your mother about land you own near Juniper, Texas—where I live.”

“Land?”

“Yes. I hope to convince you to come to Texas as soon as possible to look it over. It’s mighty important. I also want to discuss the other reasons I came here today.”

“Do we really own land?” she asked.

He nodded. “I would have thought you knew.”

“I know nothing about any land in Texas or anywhere else. And I doubt my mother does either. We live here in Searten with my young cousin, Bethy Loring. With Bethy in school and Mama in poor health, it would be impossible for us to travel to Texas. But I would love to hear more about the land you claim we own.”

“I hope you’ll change your mind about Texas, ma’am. I plan to buy a team of mules and a covered wagon in San Antonio on my way home. If you, your mother, and the little girl could see your way clear to meet me there, we could travel the rest of the way together. Otherwise, you would have to go by stage. And Juniper is off the main stage routes. Stagecoach connections are not good and often delayed.”

“I’ll keep it in mind if we decide to go.”

Thumping noises came from the hallway. Caleb turned toward the sound.

A petite, middle-aged woman stood in the foyer, gripping a wooden cane for support. She looked like an older version of Miss Lucy, but in place of Lucy's golden curls, her dark hair was streaked with silver and braided in a coil on the top of her head.

"Oh, there you are, Mama," Lucy said. "Where are your guests?"

Mrs. Gordan turned cloudy eyes toward her daughter. "My friends and I heard a man's voice in here. What is going on?" Regardless of her blindness, her penetrating gaze appeared to be aimed at Lucy. "And since they intended to leave anyway, Ada and Nora went out the side door." Mrs. Gordan paused. "Now, who are you, sir? And why are you here?"

"Forgive me for not introducing you to our guest, Mama. This is Sheriff Caleb Caldwell from Texas. He came with important information." She turned to Caleb. "Sheriff Caldwell, may I present my mother, Mrs. Annette Gordan?"

"I'm honored to meet you, ma'am."

"Same here—I hope." Mrs. Gordan selected the rocker near the door and sat. After hooking her cane over the arm of her chair, she turned her blind eyes in Caleb's direction. "So, Sheriff Caldwell. What information have you brought us today?"

He cleared his throat. "I'm afraid I have some bad news to report."

Mrs. Gordan gasped. "Bad news did you say? Oh no!"