

# MURDER UNDER A NEW MOON

A MONA MOON MYSTERY

BOOK EIGHT

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"I must keep my family name," Mona declared.

"You will, miss. Madeline Mona Moon Farley, Duchess of Brynelleth," the English solicitor replied.

Mona tapped a finger on the conference table. "Mr. Dankworth, I don't think you understand. According to my uncle's will, I and my children must keep our last name legally Moon or we lose everything. We will be cast aside."

The chief solicitor looked aghast. "But Miss Moon, you will be a duchess. Your children will be in line to the English throne."

"That is such poppycock. I care nothing about being a duchess, and my children becoming king or queen of Great Britain is about as likely as me living on the moon. What I care about is being in control of Moon Enterprises. Moon Enterprises is worth twenty times that of the Brynelleth estate."

The main solicitor tore off his pince-nez in frustration. A whiff of his cologne drifted across the room. Some of it must have spilled on his waistcoat in which a pocket watch was tucked away. This was not the type of man to wear a Jaeger-LeCoultre Reverso wristwatch or believe in central heating. "Miss Moon, I don't think you understand the gravity of becoming the wife of His Grace, Duke of Brynelleth. By doing what you propose, you will make His Grace the laughing stock of England. You will not even be in the United States to tend to Moon Enterprises. You'll be residing in England."

"Sir, I don't think you understand the gravity of running Moon Enterprises. I have thousands of employees working for me, not to mention thousands of acres of land to manage. Moon Enterprises brings in millions of dollars every year to be dispensed to these workers and invested back into the company. How much does Brynelleth bring in? How many workers does Brynelleth have? Maybe a hundred at its height, not to mention that Brynelleth is in debt up to its neck. While Moon Enterprises is mining copper and other ores for the industrial might of the United States, Brynelleth is planting turnips."

Mr. Dankworth slammed shut his file and stood up. Motioning to his staff of two, he stormed out of the Moon conference room in Dexter Deatherage's office located in the new Moon office building on Main Street in Lexington, Kentucky.

Dexter shot a glaring look at Mona. "That went well."

"I noticed you didn't run after them to smooth things out."

"I can't stand those upper class English snobs. They make my teeth ache."

Mona laughed. "You must remember we are going against a thousand years of tradition with those chaps. They still refer to us as those rebellious colonists and expect me to curtsy when they enter a room."

"Egads. Do you really want to marry into that life?"

Mona looked serious. "I love Robert. I really do. We must find a compromise to make this marriage work, but I will not relinquish Moon Enterprises. I know my duty."

"Robert also has a duty, Mona. Brynelleth is the center of the economy for Robert's part of the world. He can't let his people down either."

Mona threw her hands up. "I know. I know. A lot of people are counting on the two of us." Mona stood up and went to the window, looking out at the bustling street. "I love Robert, but I can live without him, though my life will be dull and dreary. With Robert, my life is filled with joy. I want my life filled with joy, Dexter. Please find a way to make this marriage work."

Dexter took out his pipe and tobacco pouch. "Here is what I recommend. You keep your family moniker as your legal name. In return, you throw money at Brynelleth to bring it up to twentieth century standards such as modern plumbing and electricity."

"Oh, Dexter, you're teasing now. I'm sure Brynelleth has indoor bathrooms and electricity."

"Are you sure? In either case, the roof will be shot. Roofs on all those old estate houses are always in need of replacing. That alone will cost thousands."

"I knew that Brynelleth was in serious debt, but I thought Robert handled that when he went over to visit his father."

"Robert got the debt under control, but he still owes the bank a considerable note."

Mona's brow furrowed. "How much money are we talking about to pay off the debt and refurbish the estate?"

Dexter wrote a figure on a piece of paper and handed it to Mona.

She looked at it and whistled. "That much, eh? Goodness. That's a lot of bananas."

"We can take the money out of the workers' pension fund."

"No. This is a personal matter. Moon Enterprises money is not going to pay a dime for Robert's ancestral home. I will have to shell out from my personal accounts."

"It will leave you broke, Mona."

"Doesn't Brynelleth bring in any income?"

"Pittance."

Mona said, "Okay. Let's throw some money at this and make Robert's lawyers more apt to compromise. For the next ten years, we will give thirty-five percent of my income after taxes and expenses to pay for repairs and upkeep on Brynelleth, but Brynelleth has to make changes. They can't keep doing things like they have done

since the 1700s. They must embrace modern farming and housekeeping techniques. Robert will be thrilled at the chance to bring the estate up to new standards. I know that he has been trying to get his leasees to change their farming methods.”

“I’ll have our new legal eagles take Robert’s henchmen around and show them the sights. Ply them with burgoo and bourbon. Maybe then they will listen to reason.”

Mona grinned. “Keep them away from the brothels.”

“Shame on you for even knowing that houses of ill repute exist in our quaint little hamlet.”

Mona was tired of talking about Brynelleth. She pulled back a wisp of her platinum hair. “How is Wilhelmina?”

“Doing better. Much better.”

“I feel as though I have neglected her. I’ve been so busy.” Mona thought back to her visit to Washington D.C. and her lunch with Eleanor Roosevelt, which led to deadly spy intrigue. “Why don’t we invite Robert’s blood hounds plus you and Wilhelmina for brunch on Sunday? Show them real Southern hospitality. Might defrost them a bit.”

“Worth a try.”

“Maybe I can get Wilhelmina alone to myself for a minute or two.”

“She would like that. Thanks.”

“Eleven sound okay?”

“We’ll be there bright-eyed and bushy-tailed.”

Mona gathered her gloves and handbag. “See you on Sunday, Dexter.”

“Let me escort you out. I want to show you our new typewriters.”

“A pleasure.”

Mona and Dexter walked through his executive secretarial office and reception room into the major secretarial pool where six typists were busy. Off to the side of the room were more offices. Dexter had hired two young attorneys—one an expert in business law and the other lawyer worked on mining patents/claims.

Dexter introduced Mona to each worker. She was impressed with the typists’ skills and looked over some of their work—most of it letters to various employees and buyers of copper ore. Smiling, Mona shook their hands and welcomed them to Moon Enterprises. Then Dexter took her to the switchboard room where three telephone operators worked. Everything was state of the art and impressive.

Moon Enterprises occupied the top floor of Mona’s building with a guard and another receptionist stationed at the elevator. Dexter walked Mona to the lift.

“You don’t have to walk me to my car, Dexter. I’ll be fine. Besides, I want to pop into the bank,” Mona said, pulling on her white gloves.

“Very well. See you on Sunday.”

The guard pushed the elevator's button. The door opened to a uniformed operator whose gleaming brass buttons on his maroon jacket matched the highly polished walls of the compartment.

Mona thanked the guard and entered. "First floor, please."

"Yes, ma'am, Miss Moon," he said.

Mona exited on the ground floor and entered the bank she had created to cater to the female patrons. The bank was slowly building up a clientele since many women were working outside the home, and the bank was gaining a reputation for fairness, especially when granting loans at a lower interest rate. More and more farmers sought the Moon Bank's help after so many banks closed their doors in 1933.

Mona conferred briefly with the bank manager and took a copy of the bank's most recent quarterly report, which she stuck in her satchel. Saying goodbye to the bank staff, Mona walked outside to her car. At that moment, Mona spied a chauffeured black Pierce-Arrow sedan with a veiled woman sitting in the back. Mona, along with everyone else, stared as the car drove out of sight.

Mona had just caught a glimpse of Belle Brezing, the most infamous madam in the South.