

MURDER UNDER A WESTERN MOON

A MONA MOON MYSTERY

BOOK ELEVEN

Chapter One

Mona Moon and her new husband, Robert Farley, were halfway up the passenger ship's ramp that would whisk them away to Great Britain where they would spend their honeymoon at the Duchy of Brynelleth, Robert's ancestral home, when a messenger frantically flagged them down. "Miss Maplewood! Miss Maplewood! I've got an urgent telegram for you."

Robert touched Mona's elbow as if to guide her forward. "Leave it, Mona. It's nothing more than a congratulatory telegram on our marriage."

"Only Violet knew which ship we were taking to Great Britain and our assumed names. I must read it. It might be important."

"Anybody could have tracked us down. Let's get on board first."

"Wait, Lord Bob," Mona replied, using her nickname for Robert, who was Duke of Brynelleth. She made her way down the ramp. "Excuse me. Pardon me. So sorry," she said, after bumping into passengers on the ramp going in the opposite direction.

Exasperated, Robert followed. "Mona, we have spent the last five days fending off newspaper men by sneaking to New York. Now I want some alone time with you so I can do things that no one mentions in polite society."

"Well, how rude," gasped one matron passing by.

"So sorry, Madame," apologized a red-faced Robert, tipping the brim of his hat. He ran after Mona. "See what you made me do?"

"I never told you to loudly broadcast our personal lives to the public. I think that esteemed lady might need smelling salts," Mona said, grinning and looking over her shoulder at Robert. She finally reached the dock and yelled while waving her arm, "Here, boy. Here."

"Miss Maplewood?" Maplewood was the assumed name the Farleys were traveling under.

"The one and only." She tipped the courier fifty cents.

After he didn't leave but looked expectantly at her, Mona said, "You may go now."

"I'm sorry, Miss, but the telegram requires an answer. I'm not supposed to leave without it."

"It's Mrs.," Mona replied absentmindedly as she tore open the telegram and read.

POTENTIAL RIOT AT MONTANA MINE STOP DEAD MINER STOP POSSIBLE MURDER STOP
COME AT ONCE STOP RUPERT HUNT

"What is it, darling?" Robert asked, noticing Mona's face drain of color.
Mona handed Robert the telegram.

"That's not cricket," Robert said after reading it. "What do you want to do?"

Mona asked the telegram messenger, "Do you have a pencil, young man?"

"Yes, ma'am." The lad handed Mona the pencil tucked in his cap.

Mona scribbled a line on the pad the boy handed to her. "Send this off immediately and tell no one about my reply. Understand?" She gave him a dollar.

He gazed at the silver dollar in surprise. "Thank you, ma'am. I won't tell a soul."

"Get along with you and send that off as soon as you get back to the office."

"To whom do you want this message sent, ma'am?"

"To the sender of this telegram. Hurry and don't lollygag."

The boy tipped his cap and ran off.

"Oh, dear. I forgot to give back his pencil," Mona muttered, realizing it was too late to call him. She didn't want to attract attention and tucked the small pencil in her purse. She turned to face Robert, trying to act nonchalant. "Have the reporters recognized us yet?"

Robert looked about casually, glancing at the knot of reporters and photographers reporting on people of note embarking on the ship to Europe. Well-known passengers were reported in the society columns of the newspapers. "Not yet, but if we linger any longer, they will. The black wig you have on helps, but we need to leave before we are spotted. I see one eyeing us now."

A photographer, chattering to a few of his colleagues, kept glancing at Robert and Mona.

Robert turned away as did Mona. "What do you want to do, my love?"

“Robert, I’ve got to go to Montana. That’s our biggest copper mine. Whatever trouble is brewing there, I’ve got to put an end to it. Too much is at stake.”

Taking a deep dissatisfied breath, Robert hailed a porter and gave him their luggage claim tickets. “Bring them off the boat and onto the dock. I think they are in our stateroom. Please hurry.” Robert handed the porter two dollars. “I’ll give you three more if you can bring our trunks down in six minutes.”

The porter gawked at the two dollars. “Three more dollars?”

Robert nodded.

The porter rushed up the gangplank, pushing passengers out of his way. The usual tip was twenty-five cents.

Hiding his great disappointment that their honeymoon was interrupted, Robert wrapped his arm around Mona, knowing she was let down as well. “It will be all right, darling. We have our entire lives to enjoy our honeymoon.”

Mona pressed her hand on Robert’s arm. “Oh, Robert. I’m so sorry. Our trip is ruined.”

The porter rushed down the ramp with their trunks just as Robert kissed Mona’s hair, causing the wig to shift a bit, exposing her platinum hair.

An alert newspaper reporter, seeing the platinum hair, yelled. “Hey, guys, it’s Mona Moon and the Duke of Brynelleth, her new husband!” The group turned and eyed them suspiciously.

Robert grabbed a fist full of dollar coins from his pants pocket and handed them to the porter. “Our plans have changed. Put these trunks in storage. I’ll have someone call for them. You will be contacted. What’s your name friend?”

“Bill Moses.”

Seeing the contingent of reporters now rushing toward them, Robert began pushing Mona along the wharf and toward the cab stand. “Sorry, darling, but we’ve got to run. No time to wait.”

Both Mona and Robert jumped into a cab before anyone could snap a photograph of them. The cabbie merged into a line of cars and was soon lost in the hustle and bustle of New York traffic.

Looking out the back window to see if they were being followed, Mona ordered, "Take us to Penn Station, please."

The cabbie nodded and sped toward the railroad station.

Mona leaned into Robert and wrapped her coat closer around her.

"Montana, ready or not. Here we come!"