



*Wooing  
Gertrude*

**JODIE WOLFE**

THE SEAMSTRESS WITH A KNACK FOR TROUBLE  
WASN'T WHO THE DEPUTY ENVISIONED



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Gertrude

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*Other Burrton Springs Brides Books*

**Taming Julia**  
**Protecting Annie**

## *Dedication*

To Joshua, Jeremiah, and David with many happy memories of 'Aunt Gertrude' and her love of guinea pigs.

To Janice – thank you for being my first reader. You encourage me along the way.

To David who always supports me in my writing. You're my hero! I wouldn't be on this journey without your continual faith, love, and encouragement. Thank you, my love!

To my Lord and Savior – who provides peace in the middle of our storms.



# 1

*Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. John 14:27*

*Burrton Springs, Kansas*

*August 4, 1877*

Gertrude Miller's life couldn't get any better. She grinned, patting her pocket. Her fingers traced the two skeleton keys. After months of planning and preparing she finally had moved into her own place a week ago, away from the overbearing reach of her mother. In two days, she'd be opening the clothing shop beneath her apartment.

She studied the trail leading into town hoping for a wisp of dust indicating the stagecoach was on its way, but saw none. Smoothing the light blue flowered fabric of her skirt, Gertrude's hand settled against her churning stomach. What would George Witt think of her when he arrived? Would he see past her faults and still find her loveable? Would he like the place she picked for them to live?

The many letters he'd written to her crinkled in her reticule, as she clutched it close to her heart. His last missive declared he planned to marry her shortly after arriving. Mama would have a conniption, which

was why Gertrude hadn't breathed a word to her mother that she'd marry tomorrow after the church service. Mama would try to do everything in her power to prevent it. Gertrude didn't plan to say anything to her until they were sitting side by side in the church. No use creating a stir ahead of time.

Her dress hung from a hook in her new place waiting for the blessed event. She'd spent hours sewing it and adding yards of intricate lace she'd crocheted.

A group of women had stopped in front of the mercantile down the street, but they seemed more interested in the wares in the window than in who might be arriving on the stagecoach.

"Howdy, Gertrude."

She turned. "Hello, Sheriff. Although I guess I can't call you that much longer. I hear Doc Adams is retiring soon, and you'll be taking over for him. Annie must be pleased, especially with..."

Joshua Walker chuckled and hitched his Stetson high on his forehead. "With Annie increasing more and more each day, she can't wait for me to take over for Doc, so I'll be available when the baby makes an appearance. She's not too excited about me still being the sheriff."

"Are there any prospects of someone taking your place soon?" Gertrude glanced toward the outskirts of town again but still no sign of the late stagecoach.

The sheriff leaned against the hitching post and crossed his arms over his chest. "Not a fulltime replacement, but one of the cowboys from the



Williams's ranch stopped by interested in a part-time job. I guess things aren't going so well for Ellie Lou. She's had to sell off some of her herd."

"Oh, no, I'm sorry to hear it. I'll have to stop by and see her when I get a free moment. I can't imagine what it would be like to lose a spouse."

He cleared his throat, his Adam's apple bobbing. "I can't either. Hope I never have to..."

She reached over, giving his shoulder a light squeeze before withdrawing her hand.

The tall man shifted his Stetson and glanced toward the edge of town.

Gertrude didn't think she'd hear a more welcoming sound as that of the rumble of the approaching stagecoach. Her heart hitched in her chest as the vehicle come to a halt. She stood a little taller. *Here we go, Lord. By this time tomorrow, I'll be Mrs. George Witt.*

The door creaked open. The local banker stepped down, turning to help his wife.

Sheriff Walker edged closer.

Gertrude resisted the urge to stand on tiptoes as an immaculately dressed young woman stood in the doorway.

The woman waved aside the driver's hand. "You don't expect little me to jump, do you?"

"No, miss." The driver instead gripped the woman's trim waist and swung her to the ground.

Color stained the woman's cheeks. She withdrew a fan and snapped it open.

The driver shifted toward the door and helped an

elderly lady from the stagecoach. Gray streaked her hair making it difficult to tell what color her hair used to be. The woman went to stand beside the younger lady. A relative perhaps?

Gertrude refrained from elbowing past the driver. Goodness. How many people were on the stage? Most days not a single soul traveled to their little town. A few seconds passed before a dashing young man with a silk top hat and black cane stepped into the doorway.

Her heart skipped a beat. *George*. It had to be him. His actual appearance far outshone the small tintype he'd sent in his last letter. Lord knew looks weren't everything, but it would be pure pleasure to be married to such a handsome man. She smiled and waved. Should she wait for him to come to her? What was the proper response? After all, he was her fiancé.

A smile spread across George's face as he hopped to the ground.

Gertrude rushed forward along with Sheriff Walker.

"George Witt?" Joshua fished a pair of handcuffs from a pocket. "Or is it Allen Peterson? Or perhaps Joel Abernathy? Or then again, it could be Jeffrey Fordham."

What was he talking about, and why had George's face turned gray?

"You're under arrest." The sheriff clapped the iron bracelets on her fiancé.

"W...what? I'm Gertrude Miller's fiancé," the man said. "You have the wrong man."

"No, I don't," Sheriff Walker's tone was final.

This couldn't be happening, not on the eve before their wedding. *Please, Lord.* "T-there must be some mistake..." She fidgeted with her handbag, waiting for George to somehow explain away the situation.

"Do you know this swindler?" The sheriff's brow rose as he studied her.

She couldn't stop her face from heating. "I...that is..."

"This is an outrage!" George struggled against the constraints on his wrists. "Is this how you treat all your newcomers? I demand you release me at once."

"That won't be happening anytime soon." Joshua tugged her fiancé's arm. "I have a jail cell waiting for you. There's been word sent all along your trail here about the women you've swindled a vast amount of money from." He glanced at Gertrude. "He hasn't taken any money from you, has he?"

Her gaze darted toward George who took a sudden interest in his fancy shoes. "Women? I uh, well, you see..."

Josh ran a hand along the back of his neck. "I guess you'd better come with me too, Gertrude."

"But..." She hung her head. She'd never live this down if word got back to her mother.

~\*~

Enoch Valentine patted his mare's neck. "What do you think, Fee? How can we convince Sheriff Walker to take me on full time when I've never had any experience with the law before? Question is, do I really

want to be a lawman?"

His horse snorted and tossed her head.

"We need to find a way to make some more money to send home... and to help the boss's wife." Maybe one day he'd do enough to feel worthy again. He shoved the thought aside.

Fee snorted again. The horse had taken to answering in her own way when Enoch was puzzling a problem...or at least he liked to think the mare understood him. Of course, he'd deny it if someone asked him about talking to his horse.

Mrs. Williams hadn't said anything about funds being tight, but ever since her husband had died, she'd slowly been selling off the horses. If things didn't turn around soon, she wouldn't have any left. He wouldn't have a job on the ranch either. Who'd have thought he enjoyed working with horses when all his life he'd been around cattle? He shook his head and shifted his worn Stetson.

Fee's pace quickened as they reached the edge of town. The stagecoach driver was on the carriage tossing baggage to the ground. Enoch pulled back on the reins. "Howdy. You haven't seen Sheriff Walker, have you?"

The burly man shielded his eyes from the sun. "Help me with this, will you?" He handed over a small cage.

Enoch shifted the reins to one hand and reached for the cage. Two small fuzzy creatures stared back at him. "What are they?"

The driver jumped to the ground. "Don't know

what the fella called 'em before the sheriff carted him off to jail. I reckon you can find 'em over there still. I'd appreciate you toting the critters with you if you're planning on heading in that direction. The fella said something about 'em being a gift for his fiancée. Course she may not be that much longer. Not after what he pulled." The man tipped his beat-up Stetson before climbing on the high seat of the stagecoach. "You might want to mention to the sheriff the fella's baggage is all there." He nodded, and the vehicle pulled away followed by a cloud of dust.

Enoch stared at the pile of crates, cases, and satchels. All that was from one man traveling? What did the fella need with so many things? "Come on, Fee. Guess these critters need to get to their owner...or at least to the sheriff."

He clicked and Fee trotted toward the center of town. The critters scuttled around their tiny cage. He tried to keep them level as he dismounted and set them on the ground before tying off Fee to the hitching post. He debated about knocking on the door to the jail or just walking in. With a quick rap, he pushed the door open.

A beautiful brown-haired woman with eyes the color of bluebonnets in springtime stood beside the sheriff. A tear glistened on her cheek. She twisted her hands and bit her lip. "T-there has to be a mistake...I would know if he was a...scoundrel."

Enoch removed his Stetson, interrupting the exchange. "Sorry to barge in, Sheriff Walker. The stagecoach driver asked me to bring this to you. Said it

belongs to the man in custody." He glanced toward the jail cell. He'd read about a dandy once before, and the man sure fit the description. His clothes were flawless, without a spot or wrinkle. Although they seemed in opposition compared to the smirk marring the man's face.

"Thanks, Enoch. You're just in time. I can show you the ropes with processing a criminal." The sheriff searched through a stack of paperwork. "Now where did I put that paper?" He appeared to be half listening as he continued to flip through pages.

"Sounds good, although the stagecoach driver also wanted me to tell you that a whole mess of this fella's goods are at the depot." He held up the cage. "I'm not sure what these critters are, but I guess they either belong to him or his fiancée." He studied the young woman who was trying to control her emotions and not doing a good job of it. Enoch fished in his pocket until he found his handkerchief, handing it to her. Thankfully he'd put a clean one in his pocket earlier that morning.

She accepted it without a word, shifted sideways, and swiped her eyes.

"What are you holding there?" Sheriff Walker glanced up from the paper he was filling in. "I'm sorry, did you tell me that already? I've been a bit distracted as of late."

"Those are my two guinea pigs." The fella in the jail cell leaned forward and grasped the bars. "Well, actually they are a gift for my intended." He smiled at the woman.

Sheriff Walker's brow rose as he glanced at the tiny cage. "How do I know they aren't stolen from some other woman?"

The young lady's shoulders quaked as a fresh set of tears streaked her cheeks. Should he try and console her?

"I'll have you know they were a gift given to me when I resided in England." The prisoner huffed. "They are a prestigious present for my intended. In fact, I've been told Queen Elizabeth herself had one as a pet."

"You brought them for me?" The young woman came closer and peered into the little cage. "What are they? I've never seen anything like them."

Sheriff Walker pushed back his chair and came over to take a gander at the critters.

One of the animals let out a high-pitched squeal. Enoch nearly dropped the cage.

"They're called guinea pigs." The man from the cell held the iron bars.

"They sure don't look like any pigs I've ever seen." Enoch poked a finger into the cage and touched the furry body of one of them. "Sure are soft."

"I'll have to check, Gertrude, but if his answer is truthful and they aren't stolen, I guess they're yours to keep." Sheriff Walker smiled. "That is, if you want them."

*Gertrude.* It was a right pretty name. Fit her too.

"You can't just turn them loose." The fella shook the bars. "I'll have you know they are worth a lot of money. They'll die if left to their own defenses."

"I...I'm not sure what to do..." She crumpled the handkerchief Enoch had given her.

"I think I have all the information I need for now, Gertrude. I'll let you know when I require your statement for the full report. For now, you can go on home." The sheriff returned to his desk.

"It'd be my pleasure to see you home, miss. As long as you don't mind my being gone for a few minutes, Sheriff." Enoch glanced at the lawman.

The sheriff nodded.

Enoch prayed she'd say yes. He'd do anything he could to make things easier for her, especially after the scoundrel had lied to her...or at least from what he understood of the situation.



## 2

Gertrude startled when the cowboy touched her elbow as he steered her from the jail. "I'm sorry. I don't think I caught your name. I saw you a while back at Mr. Williams's funeral. Were you close to him?"

The man swept his black Stetson from his head. Dark hair tumbled across his broad forehead. "Name's Enoch Valentine. I'm the foreman at the Williams's spread." His dark eyes glittered.

"Gertrude Miller." She shook his large, calloused hand. "Josh mentioned you worked at the Williams's ranch." Heat sprang to her cheeks. "I would think being foreman at the ranch would demand your whole attention, especially now with Mr. Williams's death."

"Truth be told, there's not much for me to do at the ranch right now. While I don't know much about being a deputy, I figure I can learn." He kept pace with her as they walked along the dirt street. The small cage dangled from his left hand. "If you don't mind me asking—"

Gertrude puffed a breath. "I might as well tell you about it. I'm sure it'll be the talk of the town before long."

His brow furrowed before he hid it with his hat again. "I don't pay attention to what others say, and if

you'd rather not tell me, that's fine too."

She studied him for a moment. There was something about his eyes that put her at ease. Made her feel she could trust him. But then, what did she know about trust when she'd totally misread things with George...or whoever he was. She sighed. Maybe she was becoming as fickle as a teething baby.

"Miss?"

"Sorry." Gertrude once again swiped away at the moisture pooling in her eyes. "I don't know why I'm shedding tears over that scoundrel." Her lip quivered. "He...he said he cared about me. Promised we'd marry when he arrived. How was I to know he'd swindled other women and went by different names?"

"The fault's not on you."

"Sure seems like it. I was the one who was fool enough to send him money for his trip here." Money she could have used to set up things in her new shop. She shook her head. "I should've known no honorable man would ask such a thing. But he said he was low on funds because he was helping to pay off bills for his parents. That's probably a lie too. Silly me to think any man would desire me. My mother always had to tell possible suitors about why I'd make a good wife. Nobody was ever interested in me..."

"If nobody ever took notice of you, Miss Miller, they're the fools, not you." Enoch squeezed her elbow.

Her pulse sped up at the touch of his hand and her breath caught.

"Just because the man's a scoundrel, doesn't mean you're responsible for his behavior." He gently tugged

her to a halt, turning her to face him. "The best you can do is try to put it behind you and keep moving forward. If others talk about you, don't pay them no heed. Likely there will be another tumbleweed of gossip to draw their attention before long. It's the way these things usually go."

Her heart lightened. Could it be true? Would the town forget about this instance? The better question was, would her mother? The heavy weight returned, dogging her steps.

The small animals in the cage whistled and squealed. Enoch lifted them up and stared between the tiny bars. He chuckled.

It was a deep-throated manly sound. One that brought a smile to her face.

"Wonder what causes the critters to do that." He shifted the cage so she could see them better.

She shrugged. "I have no idea what I'll do with them, let alone feed them." She scraped her teeth across her lower lip as she contemplated it. "I...I guess I'll have to ask..."

Enoch lowered the cage. "Don't you worry about it, Miss Miller. I'll ask the good-for-nothing and let you know what he says. That way you won't have to talk to him again if you don't want to."

A lump clogged her throat preventing her from answering right away. "Y-you'd do that for me?"

"Certainly. Figured it's the least I can do to ease your pain." He stared back toward the center of town. "I know I'm new to the job, but I'll see if I can convince the sheriff to let you make your statement somewhere

other than the jailhouse.”

This time she couldn't stop her lip from quivering. “W-why are you being so kind to me? We've never met before a few minutes ago.”

He shifted the cage and tipped his hat back. A smile pulled the muscles of his tanned face. “I figure everybody deserves a kindness when the world has knocked them in the dirt. The way I see it, you might be in the dust right now, but it only means things will be looking up before long. At least if you're asking God to direct your steps.” He licked his lips.

Her gaze settled there for a few seconds. “Sounds as if you should've been a preacher.”

The cowboy didn't answer right away. “That was my path a long time ago, but then I realized there's other ways to serve the good Lord.”

The man certainly was a conundrum.

He studied her face. “I just realized. We've been walking all this time, and I don't have any idea where to escort you home to.”

Warmth spread to her face. *Relax, Gertrude. The man has no intention of getting to know you better.* She shook her head to rid the thought and sighed. Perhaps her mother was right after all, and she'd never find someone to share her life with.

~\*~

Something had caused Miss Miller to frown and pull away from him. Enoch didn't think he'd done anything to warrant her reaction, but he wasn't sure.

He didn't exactly have experience when it came to women, especially not beautiful women like the one hanging on his arm. Well, to be honest, she barely had her fingers touching the crook of his arm. She was the closest he'd get to escorting a lady any time soon.

He gave her a moment to compose herself. Poor thing. Who wouldn't be upset to find the person they thought loved them and wanted to spend the rest of their life with was no more than a common thief and swindler? No wonder she was floundering like a trout on the bank of a creek.

When she still hadn't directed him toward her home, he cleared his throat. "I'm not trying to pry, Miss Miller. I figured the least I can do is see you get home unharmed..."

Moisture lined the edges of her pretty blue eyes. It went against everything his ma had taught him to leave her in the middle of the street instead of seeing her home. He wouldn't press her though if she didn't tell him. She'd had a hard enough day as it was.

She blinked causing tears to trail down her pale cheeks.

It took all his effort to refrain from brushing them away and cupping her face. He shook his head. What had come over him? If he wasn't careful, he'd work toward intertwining his life with the beauty standing before him. He knew better than to get involved with a woman. Besides, all Miss Miller needed right now was a sympathetic friend. He could do that. He patted her cold hand.

Her gaze drifted toward him. "I'm sorry, did you