

Chapter 3: Clara Brown_Colorado,

1870s

Chapter 3 delves into the incredible journey of Clara Brown, a woman who overcame immense adversity during the 1850s. Clara's life was marked by the constant ache of separation from her daughter, Eliza, whose whereabouts she could never confirm. Living in Missouri and Kansas, Clara's situation was compounded by the stark reality that, under the Dred Scott decision, she was not considered a U.S. citizen, further diminishing her rights. The emotional and legal barriers she faced were compounded by the violent and tumultuous period of Bleeding Kansas, which brought more uncertainty to her life. However, the hope of a better future and the possibility that Eliza might have also found her way to the Colorado gold rush pushed Clara toward the westward frontier. This hope for a reunion motivated her to travel west, driven by the belief that the opportunities in the goldfields could change her fate and possibly reconnect her with her daughter.

In the spring of 1859, Clara joined a caravan led by Colonel Benjamin Wadsworth, and her strength and resolve soon caught the attention of her fellow travelers. Over the course of eight weeks, Clara and the caravan traversed a challenging 700-mile journey to Colorado. Along the way, Clara became an indispensable part of the group, serving as the cook, keeping the crew nourished while maintaining her own physical and mental strength. Upon their arrival in Colorado, Clara quickly established herself as one of the first Black women to arrive in the region. She opened a laundry and cooking business, becoming a valued figure in the mining community. Her warm and generous nature endeared her to the miners, many of whom relied on her not just for practical services but also for emotional support, reinforcing the bonds of loyalty and respect she cultivated. Her entrepreneurial spirit and resilience became key components of her

success as she helped to build a better life for herself and her fellow settlers.

The mining boom brought a greater demand for essential services, and Clara's role in the community grew in tandem. As her business flourished, she began to offer health services and took on the role of midwife, assisting those in need of medical care. This nurturing role was symbolic of Clara's deep compassion, as she mirrored the love and care she had always wished to provide for Eliza. Her kindness and commitment to the welfare of others led to her being affectionately known as the "Angel of the Rockies." In addition to her work in healthcare, Clara ventured into real estate, hoping to build long-term security for herself and her community. Despite the setbacks caused by natural disasters and financial exploitation, including a devastating flood and fire in 1873, Clara's determination remained unshaken. The losses were severe, but Clara continued to press forward, seeking justice for herself and others. She applied for a pension meant for early pioneers, only to be denied because of her race and gender. Nevertheless, Clara's community, ever loyal and grateful for her support, rallied to help her secure the recognition she deserved.

Clara's unwavering hope for a reunion with her daughter never faltered, even as the years passed. At the age of 82, in 1884, Clara finally received word of a possible connection to Eliza in Iowa. Encouraged by the support of the community that had stood by her through thick and thin, Clara set out for Iowa. After enduring a long and emotional journey, she was joyously reunited with her daughter, fulfilling a dream that had sustained her through decades of hardship. Clara passed away a year later, in 1885, but her legacy lived on in the hearts of the many people she had helped throughout her life. Clara Brown is remembered for her resilience, compassion, and selflessness, as she spent her life improving the lives of others. Her story serves as a powerful reminder of the strength of the human spirit and the profound impact one individual can have on the lives of many. Clara's life was one of unrelenting determination, and her contributions to the community continue to resonate to this day.