

# Chapter 10

Chapter 10 begins with Margery recalling her unsettling confrontation with Clem McCullough, a man known for holding grudges and acting on them without hesitation. His words, dripping with venom, had left a lingering sense of unease, making her feel as though she had unknowingly set something dangerous into motion. McCullough had warned her that she would regret humiliating him, and Margery couldn't shake the feeling that his retribution was not only inevitable but possibly lethal.

Sven listens carefully, his expression growing more serious with every detail she shares. He knows Margery is no stranger to conflict, yet there is something different about her unease this time—it isn't just bravado or stubborn defiance fueling her worry. There is real fear in her voice, a hesitation that is unlike her, and that alone is enough to make him understand the gravity of the situation.

Sven immediately suggests that they seek the sheriff's help, reasoning that if McCullough is making threats, law enforcement should be involved before things escalate further. But Margery is firm in her refusal, knowing all too well that justice in their town bends in favor of men like McCullough. "No one's going to stop him," she tells Sven, her voice steady but laced with an unmistakable edge. "Men like him, they don't need proof or reason. They act, and everyone looks the other way."

It is then that Margery reveals she has begun carrying a Colt .45, a decision that makes Sven's stomach tighten with anxiety. He understands her need to protect herself, yet the thought of Margery standing alone, armed against a man like McCullough, makes his blood run cold. He knows she is capable—strong, fearless, and unwilling to back down—but he also knows that violence often breeds more violence, and he fears what could happen if Margery is forced to use that gun.

As the night deepens, the two sit together in her dimly lit cabin, the air heavy with the weight of their conversation. Margery confesses the exhaustion that has been pressing down on her, not just from McCullough's threats, but from the sheer burden of trying to live freely in a place where old feuds and small-town politics dictate the course of one's life. "Sometimes, I wonder if it's even worth staying," she admits, her voice quieter than before. "But then I think—where else would we go?"

Sven, who has spent his life tethered to these mountains, understands her turmoil better than anyone. The land they live on is more than just a home; it is part of who they are, woven into their very existence. To leave would be to abandon not only their past but also the life they had fought to build, and that was not something either of them was ready to do.

He squeezes her hand gently, his voice resolute. "We're not running, Marge. Whatever comes, we'll face it together." It is a promise, one that binds them not just as lovers, but as partners in the ongoing battle to hold on to what is rightfully theirs.

As dawn begins to break, their conversation shifts from fear to strategy. Margery refuses to let McCullough intimidate her into submission, but she also knows that caution is necessary. They agree that she will continue her Pack Horse Library deliveries, ensuring that her routine remains unchanged to avoid drawing suspicion.

However, she will no longer travel alone. Sven plans to adjust his shifts at the mine to accompany her on the more treacherous routes, ensuring that she is never isolated in vulnerable areas. They also decide to establish a silent signal system with their closest allies, a network of people who can be relied upon in case of an emergency.

By the time Sven steps outside, the first rays of morning light spill over the frost-covered ground, casting long shadows that stretch toward the mountains. Despite the uncertainty ahead, Margery feels an unexpected sense of relief. She knows the road forward will not be easy, but in this moment, she is certain of one thing—she will not be facing it alone.

As she watches Sven disappear down the trail, she takes a deep breath, inhaling the crisp morning air. The fight ahead is unavoidable, but she is ready. And no matter what McCullough has planned, she refuses to let fear dictate her future.

