

ENDURING PROMISES *of the* HEART by Penelope Pottifer: VOLUME ONE

BY VALERIE LOVELESS

A salty sea breeze blew through the window and picked up a tendril of Lavender's hair, whisking it over her nose, gently tickling her. She rubbed her nose and took a gratifying stretch followed by a hearty yawn while turning to look out the window. Her soft white, lace curtains danced in the dewy, flowing wind. Lavender could hear the waves rolling and roaring down yonder. What a beautiful day it was. Lavender stretched one more time before she nimbly exited her bed and put on a white dressing coat.

She washed her hands and face in her bedroom basin and dressed in a fine, blue dress. She looked at her mess of hair tumbling down her face and sighed. She would be late to help with the shop, but she couldn't go out there looking like this.

Lavender pulled her hair back in a low chignon and let strands stay free to frame her delicate face. Stepping down the stairs she recognized each distinct, melodic creak of every step.

Her father, Jedidiah, scampered by as Lavender put her curling iron over the fire. "What you doin' sleeping in so late, girly?"

"Sorry Pa, you've afforded me far too comfortable a bed, and I couldn't bring myself to abandon it." Lavender smiled as she delicately wrapped a loose strand of hair around her hot iron, curling carefully.

"Pay no mind." Jed said as he watched his sweet daughter of eighteen, wrap another strand of hair around the iron. "You look so much like your ma today." He smiled, but it was a weak smile, and had more of an air of sadness than of cheer.

"Thank you, Pa." Lavender said as she took the last strand intended for the iron and carefully wrapped it around the shaft, careful not to burn her fingers. "I'll be right out, tea and toast will be waiting for you." Lavender was meant to come down early in the morning to fix her father's breakfast. He woke earlier than she and by the time she was supposed to wake he would be hungry. She was to make him tea and toast and then take over in the shop for an hour while he ate his breakfast and read the paper. But lately Lavender felt dreamy and restless which made her slothful and unreliable, and made breakfast frequently late.

She was tired of her daily routine. Tired of nothing ever happening. She knew everyone in town, knew where they would all be, and what they would be doing at any given hour of the day.

She knew exactly what someone needed when they came into the shop. She knew that Mr. Holland picked up linseed oil, matches, candles and a dozen eggs every Wednesday. And Mrs. Butler always had to look at the bolts of fabric for a week before she settled on one, but Lavender always knew which one she would choose. Every day at noon, her father, and their neighbor and

competitor across the street, Pauly Gallagher, would have lunch and argue about politics and who had the best general store.

Lavender felt stagnant. Her town was stale, and her mind grew even staler. She felt like she was a clever girl, but she never had any opportunity to express her intellect, except helping around the store organizing or doing inventory.

Lavender finished toasting her father's bread and steeping his tea. She placed the cup and saucer on the little table next to the morning paper and put the butter crock next to that. This was the same routine she had done for years, ever since her mother died. Before that, it was her perfect mother who did this selflessly morning after morning for her father.

Lavender then walked through their little parlor then through the storeroom which led to the store. Her father was helping a few mountaineers at the front counter. Lavender heard her father offer to get one of them some rope in the back. As her father bustled by, Lavender's eyes locked onto those of one of the men. She had never seen such beautiful green eyes before and as they looked back at her they penetrated her soul, butterflies rose up in her belly and tickled her ribs.

"Could I get some rope?" The handsome man asked as he turned back toward Lavender's father.

"How much you need?"

"A hundred feet should do it."

"I ain't got enough up here. I gotta go get some more in the back."

"Thank you." John nodded and then turned his attention back to Lavender.

"Is there anything else I can get for you while you're waiting?" Lavender blushed.

"How do you do? I am John Buxton." John walked over to Lavender and offered her his hand. She took it graciously and shook it well.

"I am Lavender Johnson, the shopkeeper's daughter." John took her hand up to his lips and kissed it gently as he bowed.

"What an extraordinarily beautiful name. It fits you perfectly." He kissed her hand again just as Jedediah came back from the stockroom.

"Here's your rope. What else—" Jed started but stopped when he caught Lavender yanking her hand away from John, who was still bowing. John straightened up gracefully as Jedediah angrily threw the rope on the ground. "We don't have nothing your kind would need, you get! Go on! Get!"

Lavender sighed as her father shoved his barrel chest at the handsome adventurer and pushed him, fists clenched at his sides. John backed away from Jed, but before he was pushed out for good, he turned back to Lavender, "Good day, Lavy." He winked. Lavender smiled, and then shuddered when her father began yelling, "It's Miss Johnson to you! Ain't you mountain fellas got manners?"

Lavender's face sweltered with embarrassment even though she was used to her father being rude to any man who paid her any romantic intentions. She had given up hope of ever getting married.

When the store cleared of other customers, Lavender stood in front of her father who was arranging cans on a lower shelf. "Well?" She waited for her father to glance at her, "You going to

chase away all of our customers for fear they might talk to me, Father?” Her arms crossed defensively, and her eyebrows drew together in an angry “V”.

“Yep! I’m goin’ to keep them mountain men away from my girl. That I can promise you. Aint no dirt sleepin’, dog chasing man going to take my Lavender away from me. We’ll know when the right man come along for you. He’ll be real smart and want to take over here for me.”

“Take over here?! You expect I should only fall in love with a man who will want to take over for you in this dusty little store?”

“It ain’t be dusty if you’d give it a good cleanin’ once in a while!” Jed snapped as he hoisted himself off the floor and wiped his hands on his dusty apron.

“Ugh!” Lavender threw her little fists down angrily at her side. He wasn’t wrong. She wasn’t the best at cleaning. Not like her mother who was good at everything. Lavender seemed unable to keep up with the household chores her mother did so easily. She always helped out and worked with her mother, but without her mother here, she seemed unable to duplicate her efficiency. “That’s not fair. Mother had my help, I have no help.”

“Ah,” Jed waved a hand dismissively at Lavender. “Don’t you mind. I ain’t angry about your cleanin’. I just don’t want no mountain man comin’ round here thinkin’ he’s gonna have a heavens prayer in taking you away from me. Them mountain men, eatin’ berries off the ground and whatnot. No how my Lavender is goin’ to marry one of them.”

“He didn’t ask, Pa. You shouldn’t be chasing out our customers, sending them running over to the competition, Gallagher’s!”

“I’ll chase out any one of them that be kissing on my daughter like that.”
“He was very polite, Pa. Please. He was simply being a gentleman.”

“They ain’t no gentlemen, them mountain fellas. I’m mighty wary of one with such manners. He’s probably one of them city criminals hiding from the law, up in the hills!”

Lavender thought about this. Usually when these trappers came down, they grunted and pointed what goods they wanted. They weren’t rude so to speak, but they certainly weren’t polite either. “Father, I promise. I will not tempt fate with him. I’m certain we will never see him again anyway.”

Jed shrugged and nodded his head at his daughter, then plodded to the kitchen to eat his tea and toast. Lavender began dusting the counter halfheartedly.



Lavender needed to go to the post office later in the afternoon. The trouble was, she could see that mountain man John was walking her way. She froze, unsure of what to do. She was still in sight of her father’s store and she could see John coming straight at her. If her father looked out a shop

window and saw her speaking to John, he would surely have a conniption fit. She did what any sensible young lady avoiding a mysterious man would do, she would go where he dare not go. She darted into the dress shop across the street. Once inside she peered out the window to see John standing in the street, looking toward the shop. He struck a fine figure, with his leather jacket flapping in the sea breeze and his brown hair flowing to the side. She ducked away from the window and fanned her face with the letter she had intended to post. She knew the dress shop had a side door that let out into the small side street but was stopped by Mrs. Ribbons, the dress maker. "How can I help you, Miss Johnson?" She asked with her usual snooty disposition.

"You know, I can't remember now." Lavender said as she glanced out the window again, confirming that John was gone. "I'm just going to slip out your side door here."

"Oh, please Miss Johnson, use our front door. It's not seemly for a lady to "slip" out any door." Mrs. Ribbons looked down her crooked nose at Lavender, who ignored her and quickly escaped to the side street. There were crates and barrels littering her way. Lavender thought she heard something behind the barrels, and she turned to look, perhaps it was a stray cat. She saw nothing but bumped into a wall.

"Excuse me, Lavy." The wall said. Lavender jumped back and realized the wall was John.

"Excuse me, Mr. Buxton. I didn't see or hear you there. What are you doing here, on the side of the dress shop? One might think you were following me."

"I was," he smiled. His sea green eyes crinkled as his warm smile made Lavender want to swoon. She knew she had promised her father she would stay away from John Buxton, but it was going to be challenging, he was so magnetic.

"Mr. Buxton, really? To follow a lady and put her in a compromising position. What will people think?"

"I don't care what anyone thinks." He took Lavender's hand again and kissed it gently. His soft, warm lips made Lavender's fingers tingle.

"I- I don't think I need to tell you that my father disapproves of you speaking with me and he may resort to violence if you are seen with me in such a manner." Lavender pulled her hand from Johns and tucked it away behind her nervously.

"I wonder, Lavy, if you would do me the great pleasure of having dinner with me, over at the diner perhaps? Or the hotel."

"Oh. No. That would be... You are staying at the hotel? I thought you slept in the wilderness-- No. That would incite my father to violence for sure."

"Why would I sleep in the wilderness when I am in town? I am not an animal. What about your wishes? Do you wish me to leave you alone?" John folded his arms across his broad chest. His silky brown hair flopped in front of his eyes in the wind and he tossed his head to the side, flipping the locks out of his way. Lavender had never seen or met a man like this before. He was dashing, large and when he spoke, she felt weakness all over her body and in her mind.

“I -- I would like to have dinner with you. But my father-- he forbids me to speak with you so I must go.” Lavender put her head down as to avoid any more tingling and weak feelings from looking at John’s rugged and manly features. As she passed, he grabbed her elbow and gently turned her toward him again.

“I will just have to keep bumping into you then.” He said softly, almost a whisper. He was so close, Lavender could smell the leather of his jacket.

“Excuse me,” she said as she turned around to leave again.

“I’ll see you soon.” John said hopefully.

Meeting John Buxton was the most exciting thing that had ever happened to Lavender. She felt hot and flushed, as though her heart was beating between her ears. She could scarcely think as she tried to post her letters. She floated back home on a cloud and passed her father who was busy in the shop. Jed noticed his daughter was acting strangely as she mindlessly dusted a men’s shirt and hummed a romantic tune.

“You been talkin’ to that mountain man again, ain’t you?” He said as he crossed his burly arms across his barrel chest and frowned.

“No-- Well, not on purpose. I ran into him and I was just being polite. I told him to leave me alone.”

Jed nodded carefully, his eyes squinted in disbelief. “Well, alright. You just be sure you don’t encourage him.”

“Father, please. Being polite is not encouragement.”

“He might think so!”

“I won’t be rude Father! Mother taught me better than that.”

“Ahg.” Jed grunted. His sweet and kindly wife had indeed taught Lavender to be the most respectable type of woman.



Nan Fey Gallagher, the most contemptuous and vile girl Lavender had ever known, entered their store. She had not set foot in their store for years, a bad omen. She was over the top in every way. Her hair was curled so perfectly that she looked like she had a doll’s wig placed upon her head. She always wore the most vibrant, perfectly matching fashions. Today she wore a bright pink,

oversized bow in her hair that was the same fabric as her dress. Her dress was perfectly pressed and her bustle was so big that it looked as though she was always fighting to stay upright.

“What can I do for you Nan?” Lavender asked trying to hide her disdain for this pretentious creature.

“I saw that you were talking to that new fella, John.” Nan looked sideways at Lavender.

“Yes, what of it?” Lavender shrugged. Nan had a habit of getting into Lavender’s business and attempting to cause her grief. When they were young girls Nan tried to push Lavender into the ocean by the dock, but she lost her own balance and fell in instead. She nearly drowned with the weight of her wet dress and crinoline dragging her down. Lucky for Nan, Lavender’s father Jed jumped in and was able to pull her out.

“Are you courting him?” Nan asked with a polite smile, but her raised brow gave away her concern.

“No, Nan. Of course, I am not. He is—”

“So handsome,” Nan interrupted, dreamily.

“No, I was going to say—”

“Dashing? Rugged? Remarkable?”

“Nan, I assure you, I am not courting Mr. Buxton.”

“Buxton?” Nan gasped, “what a name for such a man. What else can you tell me about him?” Nan straightened up and looked at Lavender expectantly.

“Nothing, really. I have only talked to him for a moment before my father chased him out of the store.”

“Mm, yes... right into our store. I love Jed.” Nan smiled wickedly. “Well, Lavender, if you have no claim on him then I suggest you stay out of my way.” Nan lifted her brows and looked down her nose at Lavender.

Lavender took a defensive stance. “You have nothing to worry about.”

“Good.” Nan slapped her hand on the counter and quickly left.

“Oh, that Nan!” Lavender muttered to herself.



Lavender was walking through town as she headed down to the beach to spend some much-needed time alone. Her father had been looking over her shoulder all week. Any unmarried man that came into the shop was immediately shooed away from Lavender.

She just needed a little peace and quiet and to allow the breeze to blow away her problems and the sea to wash away her anxieties.

It wasn't long into her relaxation when she heard a voice that made her skin crawl.

"Lavender?"

Lavender looked up to see Nan sitting on top a horse with another horse tied to it. "What luck! I was hoping to find you. Let's go riding like old times!" It had been many years since Lavender and Nan had gone riding together. They were just little girls, in fact. Nan was never a pleasant child and Lavender didn't spend any time with her unless her mother made her.

"I'd rather not," Lavender huffed.

"Oh, Lavender. We have been so estranged. We used to be the best of friends."

"We were never best of friends, Nan." Lavender scowled.

"Oh, perhaps you are right. But maybe we could be, we should mend this rift." Nan sniffed slightly and pretended to wipe a tear from under her eye.

"Fine." Lavender sighed. She knew that once Nan got something into her head, she had little choice but to go along or perhaps suffer Nan's wrath.

Lavender mounted Nan's spare horse and Nan took off quickly. Lavender urged her horse onward to keep up with Nan. Nan had obviously given her an inferior horse because no matter how hard she urged it on, it could not compete. Nan led her through the countryside and down the country road that let up to the mountains. Lavender thought she should have just stopped and turned back to town, but the competitive spirit in her urged her to keep up with Nan even though it was getting late in the morning and she had things to do.

Nan led her up the mountain road and Lavender almost lost her, then she saw that Nan took a rarely used fork in the road to the right. The road turned into a narrow trail that was dark in the old growth forest canopy and her steed was having difficulty with footing. The sunlight flickered in and out as she raced beneath the trees. It was still early spring and there were patches of snow in the dark recesses of the forest.

Nan took a sharp turn around a rock outcropping and disappeared. Unfamiliar with this trail, Lavender slowed her horse around the corner and as she came about, she pulled back hard on the reins, as Nan's horse stood in the middle of the trail, sans rider, blocking the way. But where was Nan?

Lavender dismounted her horse and began searching. She thought Nan must have fallen off her horse and rolled downhill somewhere. She called out, "Nan? Are you alright? Nan?" As Lavender wandered farther off from her horse, she heard a rustling behind her. She turned to see Nan mounting her horse.

“Oh, Nan, there you are. What happened? Did you fall?” But Nan didn’t answer. She grabbed her reigns and then led her horse over to Lavender’s and took its reigns as well. She grinned deviously at Lavender. Then with a swift kick to her horse’s flank, she galloped off, with Lavender’s horse in tow. Lavender didn’t have a chance to catch her horse.

“Nan! You horrible little--!” Lavender screamed after her. Nan knew exactly what she had done. She had stranded Lavender far from home. Lavender estimated it was an entire day’s walk down from the mountains to get back into town.

“Ugh!” Lavender groaned. “How could I be so stupid to trust that wicked Nan!?” Lavender had not expected to be walking for an entire day and she was wearing her fancy boots. They were fine on even streets and indoors, but out here she slipped on rocks and fell several times in just a few minutes. She was hungry also, as she had left home right after breakfast and now it was surely well after four. She was going to be alone, in the woods overnight.

Then her thoughts began to wander to the dark recesses of her mind, prompted by the dark recesses of the forest. She heard many unknown sounds that began to put her on edge. What large and fierce animals were in these woods? She didn’t really know. She had heard stories, but she had never gone this far up into the mountains before. Her father wouldn’t have allowed it.

For over an hour Lavender walked, jumping at every sound, hugging herself to not only keep herself from feeling the chill of winter still lingering in the mountains, but because she was frightened. She slipped again on a stone that protruded from the trail. This time she fell down the side of the trail several yards and as she fell, she scratched her hands and face on twigs and branches. She tried to scramble back up the hill to the trail, but her shoes afforded no traction and she slipped even further. She tried again, this time grabbing branches as she went and clawing her perfectly manicured nails into the dark musty soil of the hillside.

She got back to the top of the trail, but she had ruined her dress, and her hands. She wanted to cry, but she wouldn’t give Nan the satisfaction. She said a little prayer, however. She knew that her daylight hours were passing and if she couldn’t get off the mountain before it got dark, she would probably freeze to death by morning. Lavender heard a heavy rustling in the woods and thought her prayer had quickly been answered! Surely it was a person to rescue her.

Through the brambles and tangled branches, a large dark figure pushed through, but Lavender quickly realized that it was too short to be a man coming to her rescue. Lavender felt her blood run cold and her heart falter as she realized what was on the other side of the brambles. Her suspicions were confirmed when a furry nose followed by a large, black, furry head emerged.

“A bear—” Lavender whispered. She was standing now, and she slowly backed away. She had no idea how to defeat a bear, and she had trouble enough walking through the woods in her stylish boots, running would be impossible! Had Nan known that there was a bear in this area? Could she really be that wicked? The bear looked at Lavender for what seemed like an eternity. Perhaps it would be afraid of her and leave her alone. The bear was almost cute. It was covered in soft, black fur and had little black beady eyes, round ears and its snout wiggled as it sniffed the air. Its adorableness was short lived, however, as the bear reared on its back legs and let out a fierce growl and swatted at Lavender’s head. Lavender responded by letting out a fierce scream. She backed up

again but lost her footing and slipped. The bear returned to all fours and roared at her again, swatting in the air. Lavender couldn't scramble fast enough as the bear swiped at her nearest foot. It caught the leather lace of her boot with a big, razor sharp claw. Lavender kicked at the bear with her other foot and was able to free her boot and she rolled to the right onto all fours and scrambled in between two trees that were placed too close together for the chubby bear to pass through. This gave her the moment she needed to get back on her feet, but she was headed down the steep hill on slippery, leaf littered terrain and she was not sure footed.

Lavender half slid down the hill until she came to a small clearing. The day was fading fast, and Lavender could barely see where she was going anymore, but she could hear the bear growling behind her, so she persevered. At last Lavender came upon a road. The trees were cleared back from the sides of the road and Lavender could see better now that she was out of the dark, heavy tree cover. It was a steep mountain road and Lavender had no idea which way she should go. It could lead down to home or down into another valley away from home. She was unsure. She heard the bear behind her as it barreled out of the tree line right towards her. Lavender knew it would overtake her quickly, and in despair she fell to the ground and curled herself in a ball, holding her neck with her hands as the bear's heavy paws bore down on her. She said another quick prayer before she died, that her father would be taken care of, and not be too sad.

To be continued in VOLUME TWO