

WINNING CRYSTAL'S HAND

A HISTORICAL ROMANCE NOVEL

Miralee Ferrell

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CONCEPT

New Mexico Territory, 1875. Crystal Whitlow is desperate for money to help raise her young daughter. While winning at poker, she angers a dangerous gambler who attacks her, but a cowboy named Dakota intervenes. Crystal doesn't trust men since her daughter's father abandoned them, and that distrust extends to God. Instead of being thankful to Dakota, Crystal must confront her past—even if that means thwarting God's will for her life and denying a future with Dakota.

AUTHOR



Miralee is an active member of ACFW, past president of the Portland ACFW chapter, a member of OCW, and belongs to several online writers' groups, including an historical one. Miralee has spoken at women's groups, churches, the NW Church Librarian's conference, as well as teaching fiction workshops at NW writer's conferences, and is willing to travel to speaking engagements or book signings. She enjoys radio interviews and is excited about promoting her books. Miralee has an active web site, blog, Facebook profile, newsletter, Google Plus page, and Author Page, and is active on other social networking sites.

PERSONAL MARKETING AND PUBLICITY

Miralee already had a solid social media foundation in place when Cook contracted her for the *Love Blossoms in Oregon* series, but since then she's broadened it. During 2013, she created a Street Team of ladies who are committed fans of Miralee's work. She formed a private Facebook group where the ladies chat on a regular basis, brainstorm ideas to promote Miralee's books, and discuss ways to put those promotions in place. Not only do the women support Miralee's work, they pray for her and for one another, and a strong sense of fellowship and friendship has grown among the members. She currently has 16 members but plans to increase that to 20 in the next month or two. The only thing she asks of Cook is that each team member be given a copy of one of Miralee's new releases as a thank you for all the work and time they put in on her behalf.

So far, the Street Team has hosted a Twitter party for the release of *Wishing on Buttercups*, along with a 14-stop blog tour that experienced excellent turnout. We are working on a Facebook party using an event page, and have been actively utilizing Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Google Plus and Goodreads to promote any publicity piece Miralee does, along with any activities they think up. They started a Goodreads group in January of 2014 and currently have 55 members with over a dozen active conversation threads. Each member has added a Miralee Ferrell Pinterest board where they pin new promotions and blog stops, along with the covers of Miralee's books.

Miralee launched two other new endeavors in 2013, the first being a newsletter with her debut issue going out late in December. At the end of February, she had 200 subscribers and had put out three newsletters. She plans to release a newsletter no less than 6-9 times a year, built around new releases, contests and promotions.

Because all three of Miralee's current books deal with women's issues, and due to her background in counseling and women's ministries, she recently started a Facebook group, *Women Helping Women*, structured to encourage women to pray for and encourage one another. So far there are 65 members and growing, although she has no desire to push it too fast, as she wants women who truly have a heart to minister, pray, and care. She will not be actively using that platform for publicity, but she believes in the concept of ministry and giving back to women and has been building relationships there. However, even though she won't actively promote on that group, many of the members are avid fans of her books and occasionally mention them to others in the group.

In 2014 Miralee is doing the following, along with continuing to be involved in the above activities: She is opening a Fan Page (Group) on FB where she can more easily interact by chatting with people and allowing them to post pictures. Her Author Page works well, and she has close to 1000 Likes, but she believes in hands-on participation and interaction with fans, not just posting publicity pieces. Miralee plans to boost her Twitter likes this year, as well, although it has grown in the past year from under 800 to over 2,000. She started a 'Lovers of Old West' group on Facebook and intends to promote that and use it to bring more awareness to her work and to historical fiction overall.

Miralee recently self-published a 38K word novella, *Forget Me Not*, directly tied to her *Love Blossoms in Oregon* series. She discussed the idea of 2-3 novellas for this series with Don Pape prior to his departure from Cook and received his enthusiastic support. Miralee is actively promoting it as part of the series, while always mentioning the names of the other books. She believes that offering an affordable eBook will bring in new readers to the series and hopefully entice them to purchase one of the trade books.

PUBLICATIONS

A Bride's Nativity, short Christmas novella, Barbour, releasing Dec., 2014
Forget Me Not, Novella, Indie published in paper and eBook, March, 2014
Wishing on Buttercups, Feb., 2014, sales at XXXX (paper only, no report on ebook sales) with 3500 to Sam's Club.
Blowing on Dandelions, June, 2013, sales XXXXX (with an additional recent sale of XX books to WalMart) It made the ECPA Best Seller list for March, was a Crossings Book Club featured title in July, and alternate featured title in August, making the Crossings' best seller list for two weeks.
Love Finds You in Sundance, WY, (Summerside) released August 2011, 4 ½ star review from Romantic Times. XXXXX sold. Won the Will Roger's Medallion Award for Excellence in Western fiction. **Currently being considered for a movie with Mission Pictures. They are shopping it to the UP channel and others for purchase.**
Love Finds You in Tombstone, AZ, (Summerside 2011) XXXXX sold. Awarded a 4 ½ star review from Romantic Times.
Love Finds You in Bridal Veil, OR, (Summerside 2010) XXXXX sold. Awarded 4 ½ stars and **Top Pick** from Romantic Times.
Love Finds You in Last Chance, CA, (Summerside 2009) XXXXX sold. Awarded 4 ½ stars from Romantic Times Review.
Finding Jenna (Kregel 2010) Contemporary women's fiction. XXXX
The Other Daughter, (Kregel 2007) Contemporary women's fiction. XXXXX sold, second print run.

SUMMARY

Winning Crystal's Hand, Synopsis

New Mexico Territory, 1875

Crystal Whitlow loses her job as a gentlewoman's companion when the older woman dies, and somehow Crystal must raise the money to return home and support her young daughter. The only way Crystal knows is to win a large pot in a poker game, even though

she swore years ago she'd never follow in her father's footsteps. Her victory raises the ire of one of the gamblers, who promises he'll get his money back one way or the other.

Dakota Rivers is broken hearted and ready to move on from the Circle M ranch where he's worked the past three years. The girl he loved married his boss, and there's nothing left for him there. He's swearing off women forever. His bowlegged partner Wren insists on tagging along, and the two forlorn cowboys hit the trail out of Wyoming, bound for Texas and the long trail drives.

But they don't plan on meeting a gambler who is assaulting a beautiful young woman along the trail. Dakota takes exception to the treatment and rescues Crystal in a fistfight, driving the gambler off. But Crystal isn't just any female, she's a woman with a secret, and she doesn't trust men. Not men in general, but cowboys in particular. This one looks too much like a man who pretended to marry her and ran, leaving her with a child to raise alone. She aims to make the handsome Dakota pay for everything bad in her past.

Just when things can't get much worse, the gambler returns and kidnaps Crystal in the night. After a hard chase and a gun battle, Dakota is stuck with her again, at least until he can deposit her in her hometown of Dry Gulch, New Mexico.

At first, Dakota is smitten with the gorgeous blond and offers to escort her back home, but his infatuation quickly turns to frustration. Crystal seems determined to make his life miserable at every turn, and he has no idea why. Wren and Dakota reach the outskirts of town with the young woman, relieved that they'll finally rid themselves of their passenger, but it's not that simple.

Crystal's papa accosts the threesome—he's convinced that Dakota fathered Crystal's child then left Crystal and her baby behind. A shotgun wedding ensues, and Dakota finds himself hitched to Crystal and step-father to a three-year-old daughter. Somehow he has to find a way to win this woman, since he made a commitment, even if unwillingly—but at the moment, winning her is the farthest thing from his mind.

Steven Harding, a Texas Ranger, arrives in town seeking a bank robber who's been eluding him for months, and all signs indicate the thief is headed toward Dry Gulch. Some of the townspeople are suspicious of Dakota and Crystal and urge the Ranger to take Dakota into custody. Steven arrests Dakota and places him in the town jail until he can get to the truth. He sends a telegram to the Circle M to verify Dakota's story of where he's been the past three years, and as a result, Dakota is set free.

Dakota's boss had talked to the lonesome wrangler about God before he left the Circle M, and some of it sank in. To help his new wife regain her respectability in the eyes of the town, Dakota insists they attend the small church, and through the acceptance of the congregation she begins to understand the meaning of marriage, family and faith. Crystal finally realizes that the man she married isn't like the man who abandoned her and her baby three years earlier, and she allows herself to start falling in love with this cowboy who seems to have rescued her from her past.

Garvey Sawtell, the child's father, returns to town. He's never forgotten Crystal and is determined to get her back. He snatches his young daughter as a ploy to lure Crystal out of town. Dakota hunts the man down and rescues his new daughter, discovering Sawtell is the man wanted for the bank robbery. Steven takes Sawtell to trial, and Crystal is given the reward for turning him in, along with the chance to start over again. She and Dakota reveal their love for each other and plan a real wedding. Dakota and Wren combine their funds, and along with Crystal's reward, the three are able to buy the ranch and home they've always wanted.

IDEAS FOR SUBSEQUENT BOOKS

Book Two:

The Rustler's Daughter

Steven Harding, a Texas Ranger, is sent undercover across the border into the neighboring state of New Mexico, to discover who's behind the huge influx of cattle being moved into the state. The authorities know they must be stolen, although they don't yet have hard proof. The operation appears too big and sophisticated to be only a handful of cattle rustlers stealing a few head at a time.

Steven takes on the role of a drifting cow hand. He lands a job at a large ranch not far from Dry Gulch operated by Gloria Marshall, a thirty-year old woman only a couple of years his senior. It doesn't take long before he suspects that Gloria is the mastermind behind one of the biggest cattle thefts the area has ever seen.

Hannah Marshall, Gloria's feisty twenty-year-old ward, was orphaned as a young child and raised by the woman she calls her mother. Hannah has been shielded from the truth of Gloria's duplicity, and Steven is left with a serious problem. He's been charged with the job of bringing the cattle thieves to justice, but his heart is being pulled toward Hannah. To make matters worse, Gloria seems to be falling in love with Steven, and Hannah wants nothing to do with the new cowhand.

Texas justice can be harsh, and if Gloria isn't stopped soon, the neighboring ranchers might decide to take matters into their own hands—and interfere with the possibility of Hannah reuniting with her natural family. Somehow the Ranger must find a way to bring Gloria in without destroying Hannah's life, and hopefully win her love in the process.

Book Three: Sky, a young woman of mixed blood longs to go beyond breaking horses for her tribe—she wants to be accepted in her mother's world as a medicine woman—but

the white settlers in Dry Gulch want nothing to do with a half-breed raised by the Apache Indians. When her Indian stepfather beats her for a perceived slight, Sky turns to the only white man who seems different from the rest, Wren, a red-headed cowboy who purchased horses from her string and who, out of the goodness of his heart, has adopted an orphaned, sickly five-year-old boy. When traditional medicine does nothing to help the boy, Wren turns to Sky for help. Wren's pity for the young woman quickly turns to admiration and respect, when Sky saves the boy's life. The event makes them realize that their mutual respect might be something deeper. Is God showing these outsiders that they might have a future as a family?

WINNING CRYSTAL'S HAND

By
Miralee Ferrell

Chapter One

New Mexico Territory, 1875

Crystal Whitlow glanced at her cards, then fanned the foul-smelling cigar smoke from her face and scowled. “Must you gentlemen persist in smoking those retched things during the game? It’s quite distracting.”

Ace Palmer looked up from his hand and grunted. “Good. Blow some more her way, fellas, and maybe we’ll win some of this pot back before the night’s over.”

A laugh circled the table and the tension eased just as Crystal had hoped. The other poker players were getting a mite too anxious over the amount of gold piled in front of their female competition, and she could tell it rankled. Not so much that they were getting beaten by a woman, but simply that they were losing at all.

These weren’t the usual, run-of-the-mill gamblers. This was a high-stakes game that had continued for more than half a day. The past hour the tide had turned her direction and one player had excused himself. A second should be leaving any time, a man she’d never met. Morris something—she hadn’t caught a last name—but losing didn’t appear to sit well with him. That would leave her, Ace, and a gentleman named Gavin.

She still couldn't believe her luck in getting into this game. If the owner of this saloon hadn't been in love with JoAnne, the woman who had employed her, she'd never have been admitted. But since JoAnne's recent passing he'd been grieving something fierce, and he'd agreed to let her take part. More than likely having Crystal close made him feel JoAnne's presence in some way.

A sharp pang shot through her chest. Her lady employer had hired her as a personal assistant when Crystal had needed help in the worst way, giving her a place to live and providing money to send home. If it hadn't been for JoAnne—well, she wouldn't go there, even in her mind. Best not to think about that part of her life while concentrating on a poker game with the likes of these men.

Crystal tossed three gold coins in the middle of the table. "I raise thirty dollars."

Morris growled a low curse and slapped his cards on the table. "I fold." He glared at the others and his chair legs scraped on the floor as he shoved away. "Should'a followed my gut and never got in a game with a woman. I always knew it was bad luck."

Gavin grinned and shoved his flat-brimmed hat onto the back of his head. "I'd say she whipped you fair and square." He turned a pleasant look on Crystal, his dark brown eyes twinkling. "Not that I enjoy losing my money any more than Morris, but I won't complain. Where'd you learn to play poker, ma'am?"

Crystal flashed him a smile. "From my pa. Before he got injured and his hand was crippled, he was one of the best gamblers in the south."

"Ah, you're a southern lady, then?"

Ace cleared his throat. “Sorry to interrupt this lovely discussion about your childhood, ma’am, but I’m in.” He placed coins in the center of the table. “And I raise you ten. What’s your pleasure, Gavin?”

“Too rich for my blood. I fold.” He grimaced. “But I’ll sit here and watch this play out, if you don’t have any objections?”

Crystal nodded and stared at her cards. She willed her heart to quit racing and drew in a deep, steadying breath before speaking. Winning this pot meant freedom. As much as she’d loved working for JoAnne, the woman hadn’t thought to provide for her in her will. Of course, she’d had no way of knowing her heart would give out, and she’d fall over dead at the young age of forty, but that fact didn’t help Crystal right now.

Maybe if she’d been brave enough to share her secret with JoAnne, but she hadn’t wanted to take that chance. There was too big of a risk of being sent packing, and then what would she do? What would any of them do? She looked up. “I’ll match that and call.”

She hated gambling. Hated everything about it, but most of all, what it did to people. It made some of them made crazy—obsessed with the need to win—always thinking there was a bigger and better pot waiting for them on the horizon. Others, like her father, it drove to drink.

Crystal hadn’t been totally honest when she’d said the accident that crippled his hand made him quit. No. Drink had done that, and drink had broken her mother’s heart and sent her to an early grave. The shock of her death had rocked her father’s world in a way nothing else could. He’d never returned to professional cards. But over the years he’d spent thousands of hours teaching her the game. Like she said—it made some people plumb crazy, even if they no longer played for cash.

“Lady? I asked what you’ve got in your hand.” Ace leaned forward and showed his teeth in what must pass as a smile in his world.

She laid her hand face up, praying this would be the last time she’d have to do so. Once the money was hers she’d go home and never leave again. There was so much to live for there, and nothing to keep her here anymore, now that JoAnne was gone. A royal flush spread in front of her, and she met Ace’s gaze.

He stared for several silent seconds then slowly lifted his chin. “You got me beat. Don’t know how you did it, lady, but I got to hand it to you—you’re one of the best I’ve ever played.”

She swept the pile of coins and bills toward her and opened her velvet reticule, dropping it all inside and closing it with a snap. “Thank you. I’m done for the night, gentlemen, and need to retire.”

Gavin tipped his hat and shoved his chair back to stand. “I hope you’ll give us a chance to win some of that tomorrow?”

“It’s possible.” She didn’t lie, as anything was possible, but Crystal didn’t plan on being around here long enough to see daylight break. “Good night.”

She stood and swept from the room, stepping outside and drawing in a lungful of fresh air. The comment she’d made about the smoke had been an honest one. More than once she’d felt ready to retch but had stayed bolted to her seat. The stench, the game, and what she’d been forced to do, all made her sick to her stomach, but she’d do it again under the circumstances. There was too much at stake at home, and right now nothing else mattered. Not her honor, her sense of right and wrong, or even her life. She’d give it all up if she had to and never think twice.

* * *

Arizona slouched in his saddle and scowled at his longtime pard and best friend. “I’m not griping, I’m stating facts. Angela Ramirez was the love of my life, and I lost her. You wouldn’t be happy, neither.”

Wren rolled his eyes and wagged his head. “You ole Billy goat. How many times you been in love? She never looked at you twice. ’Sides, she’s Angel Martin now, not Ramirez, since she up and married the boss. I don’t see why we had to quit workin’ at the ranch and hightail it halfway across the territory.”

“’Cause my breaking heart couldn’t tolerate seeing how happy Angel and Jonathan were after they returned from their wedding trip.”

“Yer a sore loser.” Wren wiped his sleeve across his brow. “It’s plumb hot today.” He rammed the flat-brimmed sombrero onto his head and smirked. “Now quit bein’ a cry baby and let’s find a place to light and build camp. I’m tuckered out just listening to your caterwaulin’.”

Arizona glowered at his friend but didn’t reply. What was the use? Wren would think what he wanted, but he didn’t know what it felt like to be rejected—again. Seemed like every time he got sweet on a decent woman someone else corralled her before he could drop his loop over her head. Sure, there’d been girls he’d flirted with along the trail, but the memories made his face burn just thinking about them. Thankfully, those days were past. Since coming to Travis Martin’s ranch three years ago he’d gone straight in more ways than one. He hated leaving the Circle M, but staying and seeing the happiness Angel shared with his old boss wasn’t an option.

He’d decided to die a bachelor. A grin tugged at the corner of his mouth as a vision of himself and Wren sitting in rockers on the front porch of a cabin flashed through his mind. He shook himself. Not likely he’d live that long. About the only place he’d stayed out of trouble and

kept shut of gunplay had been the Circle M. No, he'd die with his boots on and a gun in his hand, but better that way than letting some low-down skunk run roughshod over him.

Wren shot him a sideways look. "Saw a purty blond gal dressed up real fine crossin' the road in that town back yonder. She was carryin' one of them fancy parasols."

Arizona snorted. "She was leaving the saloon. You think I'm gonna look at a woman like that, after having Miss Angel in my life?"

"She didn't appear to be no saloon gal. Why, she could'a been tryin' to get her man to come home, or somethin'."

"If she's got a husband, then he should be home with her, not sitting in a saloon. And what kind of decent woman would go in after her man, anyway?"

Wren glowered at him. "By jing, I don't know. Why you askin' me all these lame-brained questions?"

"Because you're trying to foist me off on some woman from a saloon, that's why. She probably works there."

Wren rolled his eyes. "Naw. After we got done wettin' our whistles I saw her ride out of town headin' this direction." He snapped his mouth shut as though regretting his words.

Arizona pulled his horse to a sharp halt. "That why you pushed us to keep riding tonight? I wanted to stay in the hotel." He shook his head. "I told you, I'm not interested in women. I've sworn off them for life."

"Ha. Till one of them bats her big eyes at you and smiles, then you'll be a goner."

"There's not a woman on this earth that can make me forget Miss Angel."

"Mrs. Martin, not Miss Angel."

"Shut up, Wren. Or you ain't going to be my pard much longer."

* * *

Crystal turned in her saddle, thankful she'd taken the time to change into her comfortable split skirt and long-sleeved cotton blouse before hitting the trail toward home. She'd left her fancy dress at JoAnne's house and told the butler he could give it to one of the maids or toss it, whatever he wanted. Those costumes wouldn't find their way into her life again anytime soon, she was sure of that.

A large pack rested behind her saddle containing a few of the finer things her employer had given her that she couldn't bring herself to part with. A couple of modest dresses, a cotton skirt and lace-trimmed blouse, and some hair do-dads JoAnne had shown her how to use. Tied to the saddle horn and resting between her and the pommel was a smaller pack housing the money she'd won.

She sighed and let her mind wander over the past two years. While she'd missed home dreadfully it had been a necessary sacrifice, and one that had changed her in ways she'd never expected. JoAnne had taken a chance on a rough-around-the-edges girl, and turned her into something akin to a lady. They'd become more than employee and employer in the end—they'd formed a friendship that still brought tears to Crystal's eyes when she let herself dwell on her loss.

Her mare snorted and shied, nearly unseating her. "Easy, girl." Crystal reached forward and peered through the scattered trees, wondering what had put her horse on edge. She could feel the tension in the coiled muscles beneath her, and she gathered the reins a little tighter. "Come on. Let's get home."

"Hold it right there, lady." Morris, the sour-faced gambler stepped from behind a large clump of dense brush. "You and I need to talk."

Crystal hesitated one moment too long.

The man moved forward and grasped the reins close to the bit, jerking the horse to a stop just as she laid her spur into the mare's side. "I said I want to talk to you." Her mare reared and nearly broke Morris's grip, but he jerked her down and spat out an oath.

"I have nothing to say, mister. Now get out of my way." Crystal slipped her hand into the pocket of her skirt and wrapped her fingers around her small, ivory-handled muff pistol. She never carried a hand-warmer like some ladies did, but the four inch pistol was easy to conceal in a pocket. This would be her first time to use it on a man, but she'd do it if pushed.

"Can't do that. I want my money you took." He dropped his hand to his waist where the butt of a pistol protruded from his belt.

Crystal eased off the safety catch and withdrew it, keeping it hidden in the folds of her skirt. "It's not your money. I won it fair. You can't blame me if you lost."

"Ain't no woman a good enough player to beat me without cheating. I say it's mine." He let his hand settle on the pistol butt and glared up at her, his narrow-set eyes squinted against the setting sun behind her.

"I don't think so." Crystal raised the pistol and aimed at his heart. She only had one shot in this gun, and she'd need to make this count if he tried to pull his gun. "Now take your hand away from your belt and step off the trail." She waved the muzzle an inch to the side, then brought it around to point at his chest. "Now."

Blood rushed into his face. He started and glanced past her, and the color drained away leaving his skin pasty white. "Who . . . what?"

"You ought to do as you're told, mister." A man's voice behind Crystal sent shivers up her spine.

She kept her gun trained on Morris. “Thanks, mister. This man was going to rob me of what’s rightfully mine. You came just in time.”

A harsh laugh broke from the stranger’s lips. “Yeah, guess I did. I saw you win all that gold at the saloon. This gent plan on relieving you of some of it?”

Morris growled deep in his throat, and the hand hovering above his gun twitched. “What’s it to you? She cheated and stole my money. I’m only taking what belongs to me.”

“So you weren’t planning on helping yourself to the rest?” There was a definite edge to the man’s voice.

“Course not. Only what’s mine.”

“Now ain’t it too bad you’re not going to get any of it.”

Something about the sarcastic tone made Crystal’s muscles tighten. She gripped her gun and made a half turn toward the stranger.

He held a Colt .45 and his face wore a sardonic smile. “I’m going to have to ask you to drop that plaything, ma’am. I’d hate to have it go off accidental like and hurt someone.”

“I can take care of myself. There’s no need for your gun.” She narrowed her eyes and frowned.

“Oh, but that’s where you’ve got it all wrong. You see, I plan on riding away from here a little richer than when I arrived.” The smile disappeared and his gaze hardened. “Drop the gun.”

Morris let loose a bellow and Crystal swung toward him, her pistol extended. She felt pulled both directions, but for the moment, the angry gambler seemed the worst threat.

“Don’t try anything stupid, Morris. We’ve both got you covered.” Her mind scrambled to find an escape from this dilemma. All she wanted was to get home and be reunited with her

family. She'd only returned a handful of times when JoAnne graciously allowed her to visit, and it had been over three months since she'd seen . . .

The report of a gun boomed near her ear, and she nearly fell out of her saddle as her horse jumped sideways. Morris's revolver flew through the air and landed several yards away on the edge of the trail. He let loose a yowl, followed by a string of curses that would make the most hardened outlaw blush.

"Shut up, if you don't want the next one in your belly." The stranger motioned to Crystal. "Lady." He spoke in a smooth, low voice. "I'd suggest you do as I asked and drop the gun."

Now that Morris was disarmed she swung her horse around and turned her full attention on the man behind her. His hat was pulled low over his forehead shading his eyes. Wisps of dark hair stuck out from under the brim just above his ears, and he looked like he hadn't shaved in several days. "You wouldn't shoot a woman."

"Maybe not, but I'll kill your horse if I have to." He aimed at her mare's neck and cocked his pistol. "Throw it into the brush. Hard."

"All right!" Crystal tossed the gun into the clump of brush he indicated. "Are you happy now?"

"Almost." A grin split his wolfish face showing a broken front tooth. "Untie the bag with the gold and hand it to me."

"I will not." She placed her palm on top of the bag. "I need this money."

He shrugged and raised the muzzle of his gun, taking careful aim at her horse's head.

"Wait." Crystal drew in a shuddering breath. "I suppose you'll get it sooner or later. There's no need to kill my horse." She untied the bag and reluctantly lifted it from the saddle horn.

“Hand it over nice and slow.” He leaned forward and grasped the top of the cloth, then slung it across the saddle in front of him. “Get off.”

“Why? You’ve got my money.”

“Do it.”

She swung down and pulled the reins over her horse’s head. “Now what?”

“Pick up his gun and hand it to me. I don’t care to have anyone try to shoot me in the back.”

Crystal walked slowly to the edge of the trail ahead and scooped up Morris’s pistol, all the while praying the gambler wouldn’t do anything foolish that might get them both killed. She hated losing her money but staying alive was far more important. A few quick steps and she’d handed it to the man and stepped away.

“I’ll move along now. I hope the two of you enjoy each other’s company.” The man touched the brim of his hat and grinned. “Adios.” He reined his horse around and drove the spurs into its sides. In a matter of seconds hoof beats retreated in the distance.

She stared after him, then turned to look at the gambler who’d been nursing his hand. He’d disappeared. Had the man been so desperate for the gold that he’d taken off after the thief on foot?

A distinct click sounded behind her and she stiffened, then slowly swiveled. Morris stepped out of the thicket holding her pistol, cocked and aimed right at her heart.

A proposal has 3 chapters (if requested) but since this is a sample, I’m only including one. I don’t care to have three chapters of an unpublished book out there. Do

include 3 chapters if the publisher/editor requests it. You will also want a section that shows where the book would fit on a bookshelf. Genre, comparison to other books in the genre (what it would be competing against), why yours would sell, and who your specific market would be.

