



Springwater Seasons

By Linda Lael Miller

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Linda Lael Miller's national bestselling novels of frontier life overflow with the passion and warmth of Springwater, a tiny stagecoach stop that blossoms into a bustling Montana town.

Rachel Springwater's first schoolteacher, she crosses paths with rough-hewn barkeep Trey Hargreaves -- who puts a slow burn on her proper Eastern ways.

Savannah Behind her rouge and bangles, the dance-hall girl has a sure and steady heart. Can her kind, gentle love help Dr. Prescott Parrish heal his wounded spirit?

Miranda An unwed mother in search of a place to call home, she finds her heart's desire in Springwater -- and in the arms of rancher Landry Kildare.

Jessica The sparks fly when she comes to take charge of her late brother's bankrupt newspaper -- and finds herself in a heated love match with town mayor Gage Calloway.

FOUR SPLENDID SPRINGWATER NOVELS -- TOGETHER FOR THE FIRST TIME!

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Editorial Review

Review

Romantic Times A delightful and delicious miniseries....Rachel will charm you, enchant you, delight you, and quite simply hook you....Miranda is a sensual marriage-of-convenience tale guaranteed to warm your heart all the way down to your toes....The warmth that spreads through Jessica is captivating....The gentle beauty of the tales and the delightful, warmhearted characters bring a slice of Americana straight onto readers' "keeper" shelves. Linda Lael Miller's miniseries is a gift to treasure.

Booklist This hopeful tale is...infused with the sensuality that Miller is known for.

BookPage Nobody brings the folksiness of the Old West to life better than Linda Lael Miller.

Rendezvous Another warm, tender story from the ever-so-talented pen of one of this genre's all-time favorites.

Publishers Weekly Miller...create[s] a warm and cozy love story.

I>Affaire de Coeur All the books in this collection have the Linda Lael Miller touch....

About the Author

The daughter of a town marshal, Linda Lael Miller is the author of more than a hundred historical and contemporary novels. Now living in Spokane, Washington, the "First Lady of the West" hit a career high when all three of her 2011 Creed Cowboy books debuted at #1 on the *New York Times* list. In 2007, the Romance Writers of America presented her their Lifetime Achievement Award. Visit her at LindaLaelMiller.com.

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Chapter One

Trey Hargreaves had business to attend to that chill and misty day in early spring; he was dressed for courting and in a fair-to-middling hurry, so he very nearly rode right on by when he spotted the stagecoach bogged down square in the middle of Willow Creek. The driver, a strapping, ginger-haired young Irishman by the name of Guffy O'Hagan, was fighting the mules for all he was worth, but the critters had gotten the better of him and there was no denying it.

It wasn't that the creek was exactly dangerous, Trey thought, reluctantly drawing the black and white paint gelding to a halt on the bank to survey the scene proper-like. The water was fast-moving, what with the thaw and all, but it was no more than four feet deep, and a person would have to be downright stupid to drown in a trickle like that.

He sighed. The problem was, there were a surprising number of stupid people, even in these isolated parts, out beating the brush for a chance to get themselves killed. While he had no real worries about Guffy, the man being no sort of greenhorn, he wasn't so sure about the woman. First of all, she was wearing a blue feather on her hat, a bedraggled, plumelike thing, bent at one end -- by the ceiling of the stage, no doubt -- and second, she was halfway out the window, fluttering a handkerchief at him like some duchess summoning a servant.

He sighed again.

Her voice rang out over the rush of the stream, the infernal splashing and the bellows of the balking mules, not to mention Guffy's loud litany of forbidden Anglo-Saxon words. Clearly, he'd forgotten that his passenger, traveling alone as far as Trey could tell, was a lady.

"Sir!" she cried, with more waving of the handkerchief. "Pardon me, Sir? Are you an outlaw?"

Trey allowed himself a semblance of a smile; perhaps the woman was more perceptive than he'd first thought. Did they show, all those years when he'd been a wanderer and a scoundrel, making his living mostly by gambling and serving as a hired gun?

He ignored her question, sighed once more, and sent the paint wading into the icy water. His pant legs were soaked through by the time he reached the door of the marooned stagecoach, and his boots were full. He'd be lucky if he didn't lose a couple of toes to frostbite.

Close up, he could see that the stranded lady was young, barely out of her girlhood, probably, and more than passingly pretty. Her hair was auburn, a billow beneath that silly feathered hat, and her eyes were someplace between gray and green. She had good skin, long lashes, and a soft, full mouth that made Trey ponder on what it would be like to kiss her.

"As you can see," she said primly, in starched Eastern tones, "we are in need of assistance. First, though, I should like you to answer my question. Are you an outlaw, Sir?"

Trey wanted to laugh, but he didn't. He was afraid she'd stop being funny, out of sheer cussedness, if he gave in to the urge. "Well, Ma'am," he said, "I reckon that depends on who you ask." He touched the brim of his hat when he saw the flicker of alarm in her eyes. "Name's Trey Hargreaves and, for the most part, I've contrived to stay on the right side of the law. I reside at Springwater," he cocked a thumb over one shoulder, "back that way a few miles."

At the mention of Springwater -- he didn't flatter himself that his name had wrought the change -- her eyes lit up and some color came to her cheeks. "Thank heaven," she said. "It has seemed to me that we would never arrive. Especially since we've run aground here in the middle of this...this river." She nodded to indicate the roof of the coach, where a great deal of baggage was affixed with rope. "If we should overturn, the books would be lost, and I don't need to tell you, if you come from Springwater, what a dire event that would be. Without education, the children will be left to the influences of places like the" -- she lowered her voice confidentially here, and lent the words a dire note -- "like the *Brimstone Saloon*."

It was all Trey could do, and then some, not to laugh out loud when she said that. As it was, he felt the corners of his mouth twitching dangerously, but he managed to retain a somewhat sober expression. "God save us all," he said, with fervor, and laid one hand to his breast.

Her eyes narrowed for a moment; she was bright, that was clear enough, and she'd discerned that he was pulling her leg a little. She put her hand out to him. "My name is Rachel English," she said. "I've been engaged to teach at the new school in Springwater."

The coach swayed dangerously, nearly turning onto its side, and Miss English drew back the hand she'd offered to hold her hat in place. With the other, she clutched the window's edge, and the expression of thwarted fear in her face tugged at Trey, in the empty place where he'd once kept his heart.

"I can wade ashore," she said. "I can even swim a little, if need be. But those textbooks mustn't be ruined. Please, Mr...Mr. Hargreaves, lend us your assistance."

"Sit tight," Trey counseled her. Then he reined the paint toward the front, where the mules were still carrying

on fit to whip up a froth on the water. "How-do, Guffy," he greeted the youthful driver, with a grin and a tug at the brim of his hat.

"Not real well," Guffy ground out, cordial enough, considering he had both hands full of reins and fractious jackass. "If you'd kindly...get the lady on solid ground...I'd have less...on my mind."

Trey made another motion, as if tipping his hat, and rode back to the door. Bending down, he turned the latch and pulled -- no easy task, even with his strength, with the rushing water working against him.

"Come on," he said to Miss English, and curved one arm to reel her in.

She drew back, and it struck him that she could probably show those stage mules a thing or two about digging in their heels. "The books -- " she said.

Trey was wet and he was cold and he was hopelessly late. He was not, therefore, of a mind to argue. "I'll get the damnable books," he said. "But only when you're out of this coach and standing on the bank over there."

She grabbed a small, tattered handbag and something that looked like a plant cutting from the seat beside her. "Very well," she said, "but I will hold you to your word, Sir."

Trey hooked an arm around her waist -- she was hardly bigger than a schoolgirl and weighed about the same as a bag of horse feed -- and hauled her, her unwieldy plant stem, tiny handbag, and all, up in front of him, just this side of the saddle horn. She smelled of roses after a rainfall, Trey thought, in a fanciful fashion that was utterly unlike him. She might have just climbed out of a bathtub and dried herself off, instead of traveling three-quarters of the way across the country. If she was the new schoolmarm, she was Evangeline Wainwright's friend, sent for from Pennsylvania, and the topic of such interest around Springwater that even he had heard of her. From his daughter most especially; Emma eagerly anticipated her arrival.

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Holding her fast, lest she slip away and float downstream like so much flotsam, Trey squirmed the new teacher to the Springwater side and set her on her feet. She clutched her bag, the plant cutting wrapped at the roots in damp cheesecloth, and her dignity, and there was a plea in her eyes as she looked up at him.

"The books, Mr. Hargreaves," she said.

"Trey," he replied, sounding foolish even to himself. He turned the paint away and the two of them splashed quickly back to the coach.

"I could use some weight up top," Guffy said, breathless from the battle. "You mind climbin' up, Trey? Go round the other side, so you don't tip the damn thing over."

Any fool could have seen what needed doing, but Trey overlooked the unnecessary specifics of the suggestion, given the state of Guffy's nerves, and made his way to the far side of the coach. There, grasping the framing of the baggage rack, he raised himself to stand in the saddle, then scrambled upward. The stage swayed perilously for several moments while Trey spread his weight as best he could, like a high-wire artist seeking balance.

The rig finally settled, though, and the animals calmed down a little. The paint plodded his way back to the shore and up the bank, reins dragging, and shook himself off like a dog, thereby baptizing Miss Rachel English in the ways of the wild and wooly West.

"Come on down here and take the lines," Guffy shouted back, over one meaty shoulder. "I'm going to see if I

can persuade that knucklehead out there in the lead to point himself in the right direction."

Trey nodded and made his way carefully to the box, where he took up the reins, watching as Guffy climbed nimbly over one mule's back and then another, until he was mounted on the animal in front, on the left.

"Mr. Hargreaves!" he heard a voice call. "Oh, Mr. Hargreaves!"

Exasperated, Trey turned his head and saw the schoolmarm with her hands cupped around her mouth. He was too annoyed, and too busy with the reins, to reply.

"Don't forget about the books!" she called, and pointed with one hand to indicate the roof of the coach.

He heaved yet another sigh and ignored her. She was as exasperating a female as he had ever come across, and he felt sorry for the man who would eventually marry her. Someone surely would though, trial that she plainly was, for women were scarce in those parts, especially passably pretty ones, like her.

Suddenly, miraculously, the wheels of the coach grabbed and lurched forward, and the eight mules pulled as one, rather than in all directions, as they had before, nearly pitching a distracted Trey into the water. At a careful pace, the stage gained the bank and lumbered, dripping, up over the muddy slope, onto the grass.

The mules stood shuddering, wet through to bare hide, and looking even more pathetic than mules commonly do.

Miss English picked her way toward the sodden coach, stepping daintily over mud and stones and slippery grass. The feather on her hat looked somewhat the worse for wear, but it still bobbed foolishly in the breeze. Trey couldn't help noticing her womanly shape as she approached, though; perhaps because of the hectic nature of their encounter, he'd somehow overlooked that particular aspect of her person, despite the fact that he'd practically carried her from the stage to the shore just a few minutes back.

"I suppose I should thank you for your assistance, Mr. Hargreaves," she said, with restraint, clutching her plant cutting in both hands. "Alas, you did not heed my instructions concerning the crate of books."

He secured the reins and climbed down from the box to execute a sweeping bow and open the door of the coach. Only the most extreme forbearance kept him from telling her what to do with her books. "I seldom heed instructions, Ma'am," he said, "unless, of course, they're called for, which yours were not."

She blushed and clambered into the dripping rig, fussing with her skirts in a hopeless effort to keep the floor from wetting her hem. Guffy, meanwhile, had gotten back to the box and taken the reins in hand.

"I see you have no appreciation for the value of an education," she said.

Trey suppressed a grin. "On the contrary, Ma'am," he countered good-naturedly, but with a sting, "I hold the skills of reading and ciphering very dear. If that coach had turned onto its side, though, I reckon most everything would have been lost -- the rig itself, the freight, and half the mules. You might not have fared too well either, and Guffy, well, he could have gotten himself crushed without even trying. So good day to you," he made to tug at his hat brim, but the hat was gone, probably a mile downstream by then, "and think nothing of it. You're mighty welcome."

She flushed all over again at that, and a pretty sight it was, too. Almost fetching enough to make Trey forget that he'd never make it over to Choteau, some twenty-five miles away, in time to stop Miss Marjorie Manspree from getting onboard an eastbound stage and leaving his life forever. He'd gotten a late start as it was -- maybe he had dallied a bit, back at Springwater, though he had a whole string of excuses at the ready -

- and now it was downright hopeless. He'd have to ride the rest of the day and much of the night to get there before Marjorie lit out, and he just didn't feel up to making the effort.

He whistled to the paint, which ambled toward him in obedient response, while Miss English put her head out the stage window. "I apologize," she said briskly. "You were quite helpful, and I should have thanked you."

"Not at all," he said, and that time he did grin. There was just something about her that drew that response from him. He turned his attention to Guffy, who was beaming down on him from the box, the spring sun shining around his big frame like an aura.

"Much obliged, Trey," he said.

Trey mounted the paint and leaned down to gather the reins in his hands. "Come by if you're staying over. We'll discuss the trials and tribulations of skinning mules."

Guffy laughed and nodded, setting the team in motion again, making for Springwater, and the stagecoach station that had given the place its name. Another team would be waiting there, and maybe even a relief driver, if the gods were smiling. With luck, the boy might get himself a night's sleep in a clean bed, some of June-bug McCaffrey's legendary cooking, and a few well-earned shots of whiskey down at the Brimstone -- on the house, of course.

Since Emma, Trey's eleven-year-old daughter, was visiting the Wainwright ranch for a while, in order to help with the housework and the little boy and keep her good friend Abigail company, Miss Evangeline being exceeding pregnant these days, he decided to follow the stage in, dry off a little, and take a meal at the station himself. If there was any justice at all in the world, Miss June-bug would have made up a batch of her baking soda biscuits to go with supper. Trey had a powerful yearning for biscuits and besides, he'd lost a perfectly good hat and a prospective wife helping Guffy get the coach across the creek. He deserved something as a reward, and the taste of Miss June-bug's cooking would serve for now.

* * *

Rachel was sick unto death of that dratted paeonia cutting, which she had nursemaided all the way across country, forever taking care that it wasn't crushed, that it didn't dry out, that it wasn't left behind on some sooty train seat or in some rustic station along the way. She probably would have flung the thing out the stagecoach window long since if it hadn't been for Evangeline's wanting it so. Dear Evangeline, her good and trusted friend. She could hardly wait to see her again, to look into her eyes and find out if the happiness glowing in her letters was shining there, as well.

No one on the face of the earth, Rachel firmly believed, was more deserving of marital bliss than Evangeline Keating Wainwright. Not that Rachel was even remotely interested in marriage on a personal level. No, there had been but one man for her, Langdon Pannell, and he had died in the war, so horribly, so senselessly. She could not and would not take the risk of loving so thoroughly again; her grief over Mr. Pannell had shaken the very depths of her spirit. Besides, in a rash and reckless moment, she had given herself to him, the night before he rode away to fight, and he had given himself in return. Their communion had been so complete, a fusing of souls really, that for Rachel, even the prospect of lying with another man seemed a travesty.

She was thinking these thoughts as the stagecoach rolled and jostled over the last few muddy miles to Springwater, where the stream called Willow Creek had its beginning, according to Evangeline's letters. She was honest enough to admit that she was watching their erstwhile rescuer, riding along beside the coach, while she reflected. He was a handsome man, in a rakish sort of way, with dark hair tied back at the nape of his neck, and eyes the color of mercury. She hadn't been able to help noticing his eyes; she'd never seen any

quite like them.

There was a scar, long healed, along the edge of his jaw, and he was big; to Rachel, who was diminutive, he seemed almost as large as the horse he rode. The man and his mount gave the impression, in fact, of a war monument come to life, all brick and bronze and stubborn majesty.

She sat back and closed her eyes, but the image of Trey Hargreaves and his warhorse stayed with her. That set a vague sense of panic astir in her, for in those moments, Langdon was but a shadow in her memory, without face or feature. She sat rigidly upright, and fixed her eyes on the opposite wall of the coach, upon which someone had posted a tattered bill that read, "Repent or burn. Thus sayeth the Lord."

"Thus sayeth you," Rachel grumbled, and ripped the bill down. She'd been looking at it ever since she'd left the last coach, at Choteau, and boarded this one. She crumpled the warning and tossed it onto the floor. Dear heaven, but she was weary of traveling -- she longed for a hot, savory meal, a night of sound sleep, and the near-forgotten pleasure of getting about on her own two feet. Rachel was a great walker, and she had sorely missed that pastime over the weeks she'd spent in transit.

At last, she heard the driver, Mr. O'Hagan, hail someone from his perch in the box of the rig, and the vehicle itself sprang violently from side to side as he hauled back on the reins, shouting to the mules, and set the brake lever. "Springwater station!" he called out, with a jubilant note in his voice.

Rachel slid across the hard, narrow seat of the coach and peered out at the station house. It stood on the far side of what looked like a full acre of mud, and someone had laid down rough-hewn boards as a sort of walkway. A beaming woman in a calico dress and an apron stood on the step, waving, while a large man of somber countenance made his way along the zig and zag path of planks. Here, of course, were the McCaffreys, the town's founders and leading citizens. It had been Jacob and June-bug McCaffrey who had seen that the schoolhouse got built, according to Evangeline, and they'd rounded up the funds to send for her and a supply of primers as well.

"Hello, Miss English," Mr. McCaffrey said, in his impossibly deep voice, opening the coach door and putting out a work-worn hand. "Welcome to Springwater, such as it is. We were beginning to fret about you."

"We run into some trouble at the creek," Guffy put in, before Rachel could reply. "Hadn't been for Trey here, we'd still have trout swimmin' betwixt our spokes."

Jacob concentrated on helping Rachel down before acknowledging Hargreaves with a noncommittal nod of his head. "Obliged," he said.

"Don't mention it," Trey replied, his tone as clipped as Jacob's. "You have another driver here? Old Guffy's had a hard day. I promised him some consolation whiskey."

It seemed to Rachel that Jacob bristled beside her; not surprising, she thought. After all, Evangeline had told her a great deal about the McCaffreys in her letters, for she considered them dear friends. Jacob was a preaching man, as well as the stationmaster, and therefore liable to take a dim view of whiskey drinking. As Rachel did herself.

In the end, though, Jacob simply shrugged and said, "You look a mite used-up yourself, Trey. You're welcome to stay for supper if you'd like."

Trey grinned full out, a devilish, boy's grin, and Rachel was dumbstruck by the change it wrought in his face. "Nobody but a fool would turn down one of Miss June-bug's suppers," he said.

Miss June-bug was waiting on the porch, her eyes shining. The woman was close to sixty, Rachel knew, but there was a glow about her that made her seem twenty years younger. "We're mighty glad you've come to us," she said, and embraced Rachel warmly.

It brought tears to Rachel's eyes, that simple human contact. She did not think anyone had embraced her since Evangeline and Abigail had set out, four long years before, on their splendid adventure.

"The girl is plumb tuckered," Jacob observed. "You look after her, Miss June-bug, and I'll spoon up some of your chicken and dumplin's for Guffy and Trey."

"You bring a plate for Miss English first," June-bug said, taking Rachel by the arm and leading her over the threshold and into the fragrant warmth of the station. There were long tables set throughout the room, six in total, and a blaze crackled merrily on the hearth of a great stone fireplace. "Guffy and Trey will manage just fine on their own."

With that, Mrs. McCaffrey squired Rachel to a room at the very back of the station. It was a small chamber, with a high window, and the bed looked inviting, plain though it was. Just an iron frame, two pillows, and an old, faded quilt. Nearby was a table, with a freshly filled kerosene lantern and a box of matches close at hand. There were pegs on the walls for Rachel's clothing and a pitcher and bowl of plain red and white enamel stood on a rickety washstand in the corner.

"We can heat up some water for a bath once you've eaten, if you'd like that," June-bug said quietly.

Like it? Rachel's eyes stung with tears of joy and relief at the mere idea. It would be her salvation, after all those days and nights spent traveling, first on various trains and then on stagecoaches. She had managed only furtive washings along the way, and she needed a bath as much, if not more, than she needed sleep and food.

"You're very kind," she murmured, with an accepting nod. "Thank you."

Mrs. McCaffrey cast an eye over the paeonia cutting. "I could put that in water for you, too. Looks like it's lost most of its starch."

Rachel smiled at the idiom and handed over the cutting. "Evangeline asked me to bring it," she said, "and I don't mind admitting that I've grown tired of babying the thing. No doubt I'll forget what a trial it was, when I see the first blossoms."

June-bug looked at the start with such longing then that Rachel found herself wishing she'd brought two, difficulties be damned. "That will be a sight to see," the older woman said, on a long breath.

"The blooms are this big," Rachel replied, making a plate-sized shape in the air with both hands. "I'm sure Evangeline will be happy to give you a cutting, once the plant's established."

June-bug beamed. "I reckon you're right," she said. "I'll be sure to ask her soon as I get the chance." With that, the stationmistress left Rachel to look at her accommodations -- she would be boarding with the McCaffreys for the foreseeable future -- and the other woman had just left when Guffy knocked at the still-open door, bearing the satchel and small trunk that held her personal belongings.

"Ma'am," he said, eyes averted, and blushed as deeply as if he'd found her naked in that room, instead of just sitting on the edge of the bed, trying to gather her wits.

"Thank you," she said, and meant it.

No sooner had Guffy gone than Jacob appeared, carrying a wooden tray filled with food. He brought a bowl of chicken and dumplings, steaming and fresh, and a cup of coffee besides. In addition, there was bread and a weathered-looking apple.

Rachel moved the lamp and matchbox to the washstand, and Jacob put the tray down on the bedside table. It made her feel a bit guilty, being waited on, as though she were playing the invalid to avoid having to do for herself. A farmer's daughter, the youngest and only girl in a family of four, Rachel was not unaccustomed to work.

"I could have eaten at the table," she protested gently.

Jacob treated her to one of his rare smiles; Evangeline had described him very well in her letters, so well that Rachel felt as though she already knew him and Mrs. McCaffrey. Odd, she thought, that there had been no mention of Trey Hargreaves, either for or against. On the other hand, Evangeline was no gossip, for all that she professed to enjoy a generous serving of scandal with her tea -- that was one of her finest qualities, her willingness to believe the best of people until they proved her wrong. Rachel wished she herself were half so charitable.

"You've had a long trip," Jacob said to her. "You take your rest while you can get it. You won't have too many pupils at first -- only a dozen or so, from the ranches and farms near enough for the children to make the trip -- but you'll have your hands full all the same."

Rachel wanted to ask about Mr. Hargreaves, who he was, where he'd gotten that scar on his jaw, and a hundred other things, but she knew her curiosity wasn't suitable, so she quelled it. She could and would ply Evangeline for whatever details might be forthcoming.

Having served her meal and offered his plain counsel, Jacob left the small room, closing the door behind him. Rachel devoured the delicious food -- June-bug's reputation as a cook was wholly justified -- and continued to assess the room as she did so. Having been a schoolteacher since she was sixteen, nearly ten years now, she reflected with disbelief, Rachel had boarded with all sorts of families. As humble as this chamber was, she'd never lived in a better one -- the log walls were thick, and there was an inside shutter for the glass window. The mattress felt as though it were stuffed with feathers, instead of straw, and the floor was made of solid planks, planed smooth and set tightly in place, so the draft wouldn't seep between the cracks. There were no visible mouse-holes and no spider webs. Furthermore, the bedding smelled of spring sunshine and laundry soap, and she ventured to hope that the sheets were fresh.

Even on the few nights when the stagecoach had stopped for a night, she'd slept sitting up in the dining room, for it was common practice in hotels and way stations for several guests of the same gender to share a bed, with no allowances made for matters of hygiene or term of acquaintance. Privacy was, of course, impossible in such circumstances, and in any case Rachel was not willing to close her eyes in the presence of a stranger. She was, as a consequence, utterly exhausted.

She ate as much of the food as she could, then carried the tray out to the kitchen area herself. June-bug was already heating bathwater in a number of kettles, and she smiled, pleased that Rachel had eaten well.

"You go on in there now and put your feet up. Jacob will tote in the tub in a minute, and then I'll carry the water. It's nice and hot."

Again, Rachel's gratitude was such that she could barely keep from embracing the woman and slobbering all over her with wails and sniffles. "Thank you," she said, with hard-won dignity. She was a grown woman, after all, and should have been past such wild swings of emotion, whether she was tired or not.

An hour later, she was climbing out of her bath, scrubbed clean and smelling of the rose-scented soap she'd bought before leaving Pennsylvania. Rachel was a great believer in the restorative powers of perfumed soap; hadn't Evangeline mentioned, more than once, how much the cake she'd given her as a farewell gift had meant to her, out there on that isolated ranch?

After drying off with a towel from the wooden rod above the washstand, Rachel took a nightgown from her satchel and shook it out. The garment was chilled, and slightly damp, from the creek crossing, no doubt, but it was a great improvement over the clothes she'd worn for the better part of a week. She got into bed, stretched, and tumbled into a fathomless sleep, never stirring, even when Trey and Jacob came in to carry out her tub.

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