



Dear Mr. Weaver



MAIL-ORDER BRIDE INK



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Dear Mr. Weaver (Mail-Order Bride Ink, Book One) by Kit Morgan

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Cover Design and Interior Format



One



Denver, Colorado, 1901

FANTINE LEBLANC SAT NERVOUSLY AND waited as Adelia Pettigrew read her application.

She'd been sent to the woman by the employment agency, and been warned that Mrs. Pettigrew was a tad ... eccentric. She tried not to fidget as the woman casually perused her resumé through a diamond-studded monocle pinned to her dress with a silver chain. That wasn't anything unusual. It was the thin cigar the woman was smoking that had Fantine's heart racing – and her lungs coughing.

Mrs. Pettigrew looked up from the paper in hand. “What is this? Do you need some water, *ma petite*?”

“No, *Madame* Pettigrew, I am fine,” she answered in her delicate French accent. Mrs. Pettigrew, on the other hand, sounded like a Frenchwoman trying to speak like an American Southerner. Or was it the other way around? Fantine wasn't sure.

Mrs. Pettigrew took another drag of her cigar and blew the smoke at her. “I think you should have some water, *ma petite*. You look ill.”

Fantine coughed again and waved the smoke from her face. "If you insist," she rasped.

Mrs. Pettigrew got up, went to a small sideboard laden with glasses, a water pitcher and several decanters of who only knew what, and poured a glass of water. She crossed the room and handed it to her. "Here, this will help. You must be catching cold."

Fantine half-smiled and nodded. "I must." She took the glass and drank, then set it on the desk.

Mrs. Pettigrew re-took her seat. "I see you speak several languages," she remarked, looking at the paper again. "That will be useful. One never knows where a bride may originate from."

Fantine glanced around the room. Every square inch of the walls were covered with picture frames holding what looked like letters. "You have sent out many brides over the years, haven't you, *Madame*?"

Mrs. Pettigrew leaned back and waved a hand in the air. "More than I can count at this point. After twenty-five years in business, who can keep track?"

"And what about all of these?" Fantine motioned toward the nearest wall.

"Those? They are letters from some of my favorite customers. I try to keep in contact with all my brides after sending them off to be wed, but these ..." She pointed at the walls with both hands. "... these are my triumphs!"

"Triumphs, *Madame*?"

"*Oui*, for these letters are from brides who never thought they'd make it with their new husbands. They wanted to give up before their adventures even started! They all wrote to me, told me of their woes and how they wished to return, but no! I would not let them."

Fantine stared at the woman. She was taller than most, with raven-black hair streaked grey at the temples. She had the most beautiful blue eyes and a complexion to die for,

at least for someone her age. The woman had to be in her fifties, but still had the look of one much younger. Rumor had it that she was wealthy, the widow of a miner who'd struck it rich near Cripple Creek back in the late 1860s. The Pettigrews had built an empire together, but now only Mrs. Pettigrew remained to enjoy it. "Why do you help women become mail-order brides?"

"Why?" Mrs. Pettigrew said as if insulted. "Because someone has to help the women of this town find happiness! I have had mine, and have always believed I could help others find theirs too."

"But why as mail-order brides?"

"Because of the adventure, what else?"

Fantine's nose twitched, a nervous tic. Maybe she should become a mail-order bride instead of applying for the position of personal assistant to this madwoman. "Did any of them ever come back?"

"*Sacre bleu*, of course not! Not one of my brides has ever returned to Denver, except on a visit to show off their husband. Granted, I have not always been in Denver, but even before, I've always had satisfied customers."

"I meant no disrespect, *Madame*. I ... was just curious. Which makes me want to ask, where did you begin if not here in Denver?"

Mrs. Pettigrew sighed. "Well now, *ma cherie*, that is a story." She smiled. "A very long one – too long for today, I'm afraid." She got up, went to the far wall and took down one picture frame, bringing it to the desk and setting it before Fantine. "This was my first ... for Denver, that is."

Fantine picked up the frame and studied the letter. It was dated June 8, 1876. "This is over twenty years old."

"Yes and Ebba is doing wonderfully."

"You still hear from this woman?" Fantine asked in disbelief.

"But of course. I hear from many of my girls to this day."

Fantine stared at her with wide eyes before she let them drift to the framed letter and began to read.

Dear Mrs. Pettigrew,

I've reached my destination and I must say that the Washington Territory is not what I expected. Neither is my new husband, for that matter. His family is huge, loud and boisterous! We haven't had a moment's peace since my arrival. I don't mean to complain, but I wasn't prepared to become a schoolteacher for seven children – seven mischievous, prank-pulling children, no less. No, they are not my husband's (thank Heaven). They belong to his older brother and his wife. I should have been warned! He said nothing in his letters about any of this. I don't know how much longer I can endure it. Please write back to me as soon as you can before I go mad!

*Sincerely,
Ebba Weaver*

Fantine raised her eyes to Mrs. Pettigrew's. "What happened?"

"Oh, my dear sweet child," she said with a roll of her own eyes. "What *didn't* happen is a better question."

Fantine scooted to the edge of her chair. "How so?"

Mrs. Pettigrew chuckled. "Well, I suppose I can tell you a little. Ebba Knudsen came to me on a spring day, much like this one. I had just opened this bridal agency, back when Colorado was still a territory. It became a state later that year. But what does that matter? What does it matter where I sent Miss Knudsen."

"Where did you send her?"

"To a little town called Nowhere, in what was the Washington Territory."

"Nowhere? Who names a town Nowhere?"

Mrs. Pettigrew shrugged. "Who knows? But that is where I sent Ebba."

"What happened to her?"

Mrs. Pettigrew leaned forward. "She married a *Weaver*."

"A clothmaker?"

"No, no – not a weaver, but a man named Weaver, from a large family of Weavers! A man of many talents, but also of many brothers and cousins and nieces and nephews ... well, you understand now, I think."

Fantine settled herself more comfortably in her chair. "And he didn't tell Miss Knudsen about them?"

Mrs. Pettigrew looked at the ceiling in thought. "Not that I recall, no."

"What do you recall, *Madame*?"

Mrs. Pettigrew smiled. "Well, let me see ..."



Denver, Colorado Territory, April 10, 1876

Ebba Knudsen stood as the owner of Pettigrew's Bridal Agency walked a slow circle around her. "Chin up, don't slouch," the woman ordered. "You want your future husband to be proud of his new wife, not cringe at your stooped shoulders."

Ebba swallowed hard. Maybe this wasn't such a good idea. What made her think she could become a mail-order bride? Obviously there was a lot more to it than she first thought: pick a prospective husband from a stack of applicants, write a few letters, receive some train fare and off you go. But what did she know?

"*Mademoiselle* Knudsen! Are you listening?"

Ebba snapped to attention. "Yes, ma'am," she answered with a Swedish accent.

Mrs. Pettigrew's eyes grew wide. She pulled a monocle from her skirt pocket, put it over one eye and peered at Ebba as if inspecting an odd insect. "Come again?"

Ebba curtsied, unsure of what the woman wanted. "I said yes, ma'am."

Mrs. Pettigrew let the monocle fall from her eye into her waiting hand. "That's what I thought you said." She looked her up and down. "You didn't tell me you were Swedish."

"I saw no reason to."

"And you'd be quite right," Mrs. Pettigrew studied her. "Your hair is too dark, for a blonde that is, your eyes ..." She placed the monocle over her eye again, "...well, I suppose green will have to do. I was expecting a deep blue considering your heritage. But you do have nice cheekbones ..."

"Is that relevant?" Ebba blurted.

Mrs. Pettigrew looked at her aghast. "It most certainly is, *ma petite!* How else will I match you with the most perfect gentleman possible?"

Ebba opened her mouth to speak, but couldn't come up with anything to say to that other than "Oh."

"Qualifications?"

Ebba shook herself. "I beg your pardon?"

"What qualifies you to be a wife?" Mrs. Pettigrew walked behind her desk and sat.

Ebba felt her throat tighten. "Qualify?"

"But of course! I don't send off just any mail-order brides. I send off the finest."

Ebba swallowed hard. This was definitely not a good idea – she might as well turn around and march right out the door. Maybe slaving over other people's laundry wouldn't be so bad ... for the rest of her life ... until the day she died ... oh dear.

"Can you cook?"

Ebba shivered at the question, her mind still on a life full of dirty laundry. "Er ... yes."

"Good. Sew?"

"Yes, I sew very well." Well enough to be hired on by Mrs. Feldnick as a laundress. Though her sewing skills were wasted there – laundry was the order of the day and lots of it.

"Are you organized?"

"What?"

"Organized? Can you clean a house from top to bottom? Make it shipshape?"

Ebba rubbed her temples. "Yes." Maybe if she left now, the woman wouldn't be too upset.

"I have just the applicant."

Ebba's hands dropped to her sides. "You do?" she asked in shock.

"Yes, I think he'll be perfect for you. Tell me, do you like the country?"

Ebba's heart began to beat like a thundering herd of horses. "Well ..."

"The open air? The smell of fields? Oh, but you'll love being a farmer's wife!"

Ebba gulped. She'd been born and raised in New York City, lived in Chicago for a time and had only recently moved to Denver with her parents. Both of which, unfortunately, were now dead. "Farmer's wife?"

"He writes in his preliminary letter that Nowhere grows some of the best apples in the world!"

"Apples." She was still back at the part about being a farmer's wife. "Perhaps a shopkeeper, or a banker or merchant, would be a better match, *ja?*" Under stress, her Swedish was slipping out.

"None of those will do. A farmer will be perfect!"

Ebba's shoulders slumped again. She had no idea how to be a farmer's wife. But then, what other type of man sent away for a mail-order bride? A banker certainly wouldn't – there would be no need unless the area in which he lived was completely bereft of eligible women. But a farmer might

live well out of town somewhere, which meant animals and fields and barns and ... sneezing. Lots and lots of sneezing!

Ebba eyes watered at the thought and her nose twitched. She couldn't possibly! "Mrs. Pettigrew, I don't think this man would be a good match at all."

Mrs. Pettigrew tapped a few papers on her desk to straighten them. "He's perfect."

"No ... he's not," she stammered and took a step toward the desk. "He would be all wrong ..."

"You *can* read and write, can't you?" the woman asked suspiciously.

"Yes, of course, but ..."

"Oh, thank goodness. This man stipulated he must have a wife who could read and write." She glanced up from the paper in her hand. "Then what is the problem? At least one of you will be able to."

A chill went up Ebba's spine. "*One* of us?" she squeaked. "Oh dear ..." She glanced around for someplace to sit, spotted a chair a few steps away and went to it. "I need to think."

"What is there to think about?" Mrs. Pettigrew asked in shock. "I grant you, men like this often have someone else answer the advertisement for a bride, as they haven't the necessary skills. But as long as you can read ... I have a wonderful man waiting for a wonderful wife! Are you saying you are not wonderful?"

"No! That's not what I'm saying at all --"

"Good, sign here." Mrs. Pettigrew shoved a paper across the desk. She dipped a pen into an inkwell, held it out and waited for Ebba to take it.

Ebba stared at it as if it were some poisonous snake.

"Come now, Miss Knudsen. It will be the adventure of a lifetime."

Adventure, yes, but all Ebba could think about was her allergies. Sneezing, coughing, itchy eyes, the constant tickle in her throat ... "Have you any other applicants? One that

lives by the sea, perhaps?" She'd heard that the seacoast was wonderful for her particular malady.

Mrs. Pettigrew frowned. "I'm afraid not. Mr. Weaver is the best applicant I have for you at the moment. Unless you'd like to wait?"

Ebba paled. To wait meant becoming a slave to Mrs. Feldnick for who knew how long. "No, I can't wait." She pulled the paper the rest of the way, took the pen and signed. She shoved it back across the desk. "Now what do I do?"

"Write him back, of course, and tell him you accept his proposal."

"What proposal? The man hasn't proposed. I've seen nothing from him. Isn't there supposed to be a letter or something I'm to read?"

"Oh yes, of course, of course ..." Mrs. Pettigrew pulled out another sheet of paper from a pile in front of her. "Here it is."

Ebba took it from her and read:

My Dearest Bride,

My name is Daniel Weaver, and I am writing to you because I want to marry you. I'm tall with dark hair and green eyes. My mother tells me they are my best feature. I work on a farm outside the town of Nowhere in the Washington Territory.

I was born and raised here, and there is no place on Earth like it. Now that I am of marriageable age (24) I am ready to take on a wife to help me farm. We raise apples, pears, walnuts, and keep cattle, sheep, and chickens.

The farm is a wonderful place and I cannot wait to marry and raise a family. I am a strong man and love working the beautiful land the good Lord has provided.

The End

(of that tale, anyway ...)

Be watching for *Dear Mr. Turner*, the next book in the Mail-Order Bride Ink series. If *Dear Mr. Weaver* was your first introduction to the Weaver clan, you can read more about them in the Holiday Mail-Order Bride Series. The books the Weavers appear in are:

His Forever Valentine
(Book Three) – the family is introduced.

The Springtime Mail-Order Bride
(Book Five) – Arlan and Samijo's story.

A Midsummer's Mail-Order Bride
(Book Twelve) – another appearance by the family.

The Columbus Day Mail-Order Bride
(Book Thirteen) – Benjamin and Charity's story.

The Harvest Time Mail-Order Bride
(Book Fourteen) – Calvin and Bella's story.

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About the Author

Kit Morgan, aka Geralyn Beauchamp, lives in a log cabin in the woods in the wonderful state of Oregon. She grew up riding horses, playing cowboys and Indians and has always had a love of Westerns! She and her father watched many Western movies and television shows together, and enjoyed the quirky characters of *Green Acres*. Kit's books have been described as "*Green Acres* meets *GunsSmoke*," and have brought joy and entertainment to thousands of readers. Many of her books are now in audio format, performed by a talented voice actor who brings Kit's characters to life, and can be found on Amazon, Audible.com and iTunes.