

# HUNTING FOR DESTINY

A DESTINY TRILOGY  
NOVELLA



DERINDA BABCOCK



## Copyright Notice

### *Hunting For Destiny: A Destiny Trilogy Novella*

First edition. Copyright © 2021 by Derinda Babcock. The information contained in this book is the intellectual property of Derinda Babcock and is governed by United States and International copyright laws. All rights reserved. No part of this publication, either text or image, may be used for any purpose other than personal use. Therefore, reproduction, modification, storage in a retrieval system, or retransmission, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, or otherwise, for reasons other than personal use, except for brief quotations for reviews or articles and promotions, is strictly prohibited without prior written permission by the publisher.

This book is a work of fiction. Characters are the product of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Unless otherwise noted, Bible verses are taken from the Authorized King James Version. Public Domain. Used by permission.

Cover and Interior Design: Derinda Babcock

Editor(s): Linda Farmer Harris, Deb Haggerty

PUBLISHED BY: Elk Lake Publishing, Inc., 35 Dogwood Dr.,  
Plymouth, MA 02360, 2018

---

## Library Cataloging Data

Names: Babcock, Derinda (Derinda Babcock)

*Hunting For Destiny: A Destiny Trilogy Novella* / Derinda Babcock

128 p. 23cm × 15cm (9in × 6 in.)

Identifiers: ISBN-13: 978-1-64949-101-5 (paperback)

| 978-1-64949-102-2 (e-book)

Key Words: Mystery and Sleuthing, Time-travel, Friendship, Pioneer & Oregon Trail, Clean and Wholesome Romance, Family, Relationships

LCCN: 2020949782 Fiction

## DEDICATION

To all of you who are hunting for your destiny ...  
May you find the joy that passes all understanding.

*And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding,  
shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

*Philippians 4:7 (KJV)*

## NOTE TO READERS

This story occurs twenty-five years after *In Search of Destiny*, Book Two in the Destiny trilogy. The daughters of Jesse and Mary Johnson, Sean and Annie West, Dwight and Josie Bell, and Jonathan and Olivia Johnson are old enough to realize their folks are hiding information about the mystery woman known as Lexie Logan.

To find out how they met Lexie in Kansas territory, please read the first book in the series, *Dodging Destiny*.

*In Search of Destiny*, Book Two, follows our characters as they make irrevocable decisions based on what they learned of the future from Lexie.

Book Three, *Following Destiny*, takes us back to the twenty-first century with Lexie to see if, when given another chance, she will run again or face her fears. Lexie learns just how important the people she left in the past were to her existence and her future.

## CONTENTS

Chapter One: ON THE TRAIL OF A MYSTERY . . . . .	1
Chapter Two: DIVIDE AND CONQUER . . . . .	13
Chapter Three: THE MYSTERY WOMAN REVEALED . . . . .	25
Chapter Four: DIGGING DEEPER . . . . .	35
Chapter Five: A STARTLING PROPOSAL . . . . .	47
Chapter Six: HEARTSICK . . . . .	59
Chapter Seven: SLOW AS MOLASSES . . . . .	71
Chapter Eight: THE PAST SPEAKS . . . . .	63
Chapter Nine: A SHOCKING DISCOVERY . . . . .	95
Chapter Ten: CONFRONTATION . . . . .	107
About the Author . . . . .	119
Other Books . . . . .	120

## THE LEGACY CONTINUES ...

Fergus Bell (deceased)

Jim Bell - Edna

Mary - Jesse Johnson

Will, Zach, **LEAH**, Deborah

Matthew "Mattie"

Dwight Bell - Josephine "Josie" Aubry (daughter of Alexander)

Susana

Polly

James Fergus Bell

Grayson Bell

Nathan "Nate" Johnson

Jonathan - Olivia Aubry (daughter of Phineus)

Rachel & Sarah (twins)

Nathaniel Johnson

Jesse - Mary Bell (see Bell family)

William West

Benjamin - Laura Shoemaker

Charles

Sean - Anne Aubry Taylor (widow—daughter of Alexander)

**BETSY**

Corbin

David

"When someone you love becomes a memory,  
that memory becomes a treasure."

Phil 1:3, Prov. 10:7; Don Jonas 2000.

## CHAPTER ONE:

ON THE TRAIL OF A MYSTERY

*Oregon, December 1882*



### **Betsy Taylor West**

PARENTS: Sean West and Anne Taylor West

SIBLINGS: Corbin and David

UNCLE, AUNT, GRANDFATHER, COUSIN: Benjamin, Laura, William,  
Charles

“Shh. Hurry.” Betsy West signaled her five friends into her bedroom before glancing down the hall both ways and closing the door.

“Where’s Leah?” Sarah Johnson looked at her twin, Rachel, and then toward the door. “We can’t start without her.”

Betsy grinned. “She’s washing up and changing her clothes. Mary told her she smelled like horse and gave her *the look*.”

## HUNTING FOR DESTINY

Rachel giggled. “What did Leah do?”

“She smiled and said, ‘Don’t worry, Ma, I’ll be ready for the Christmas party,’ then tromped up the stairs in her boots and spurs.”

Susana Bell stared at her reflection in the long mirror and straightened the lace at her throat and wrists. “Aunt Mary always gives Leah that look. Usually, the look is accompanied by a heavy sigh. After more than seventeen years, you’d think my dear aunt would resign herself to the idea Leah loves horses and riding more than people and parties.”

Polly Bell stepped up to the mirror and stood beside her sister. “I think the males in our families encourage her. In my opinion, they always have.”

Rachel sat up. “Which males, Polly? Surely you don’t think Sean encourages her, do you?”

Betsy rolled her eyes. “Daddy Sean wishes she’d gain a little more polish and start looking for a husband. So does Mother. She’s been talking about setting Leah up with my cousin, Charles.”

Polly chuckled. “Charles seems like a gentleman. He looks a lot like his father—your uncle, Benjamin. Dr. Benjamin West. Impressive. He’s so sophisticated. So is your Aunt Laura. I’m glad your relatives decided to travel all the way from Boston to enjoy Christmas with us.”

Betsy grimaced. “I hope Grandpa behaves himself.”

Polly looked toward Deborah Johnson, who sat in a comfortable chair.

“What do you think, Deb? Do the men of our families encourage your sister to be horse-mad and focused on things other than matrimony?”

Deborah shrugged and brushed a strand of dark brown hair away from her face. “Leah is Leah. She’s had a mind



## DERINDA BABCOCK

of her own ever since I can remember. Even Will and Zac , though older, look up to her. I think she may influence the men more than they influence her.”

“I like your brothers, Deb, especially Will. He reminds me of your pa—full of fun and life.” Sarah lowered her eyes. “I’m glad our fathers didn’t kill each other during the war.”

Deborah nodded. “Me too.”

Someone knocked.

“The signal. Leah’s here.” Betsy opened the door. “Come in.”

Leah glanced around, and a slow smile curled the corners of her mouth. “What a pretty picture. You all look festive in your Christmas finery.” She tilted her dark head. “Everyone knows Sarah and Rachel are identical twins, but if I didn’t know better, I’d say Susana and Polly could pass as twins too. Many might think you were quadruplets.”

Betsy laughed. “I agree, but shouldn’t you expect something like this when Mother and Aunt Josie are identical twins whose fathers were identical twins? When they’re together with Olivia, they could be triplets.”

“I suppose.” Leah sat on Betsy’s hope chest and looked at each person. “What is the latest? Did you discover anything?”

“Not really.” Susana frowned. “Polly and I overheard Pa and Sean talking about our mystery woman when they walked to the barn yesterday. We weren’t close enough to hear much, but when they saw us, they changed the subject.”

“Hmm.” Betsy pursed her lips. “Matthew, Edna, and Jim also know something about her. When I entered the kitchen to offer my help, Edna was speaking. She said, ‘I wonder what she be a-doin’ now? Been twenty-five years, but I sure do miss her.’ They saw me, and Edna changed the subject.

## HUNTING FOR DESTINY

“When I waylaid Matthew a couple hours later and asked him about the woman, he winked at me and said his lips were sealed.”

Polly flicked an invisible piece of lint. “Seems to me, you’re waylaying Uncle Mattie a lot these days.”

Heat climbed into Betsy cheeks. “Well, why not? He’s a kind, handsome, soft-spoken, black-haired giant who knows how to work. He’s honest, and people like him. *I* like him—a lot.” She wiggled her eyebrows. “Besides, we have much in common. We traveled the Oregon Trail together, you know.”

Deborah laughed. “Yes, Uncle Mattie said when you were born, your hair was so light he thought you were bald.”

“Never mind about Uncle Matt.” Leah turned to the twins, her brown-eyed gaze intent. “Have you heard anything?”

Rachel tapped her bottom lip and frowned. “A few days ago, Mother didn’t know Sarah and I sat in the next room reading. When Josie and Annie stopped by to visit, they chatted about how glad they were transportation had improved so much since their days on the Trail.”

Sarah nodded. “We didn’t pay much attention until they lowered their voices and laughed about how Mother worried about what Pa’s reaction to his first sight of her would be. Rachel and I eased toward the door so we could hear more.”

Betsy stared. “Why would Olivia fear Jonathan’s reaction?”

Sarah frowned. “I’m not sure, but Aunt Josie said she and your mom wondered the same thing. Aunt Josie thought Pa might pass out when he saw them all together. They laughed even harder at Grandpa Nate’s words the first time he laid eyes on them. He made some comment about the mystery woman. Then Mother saw us hovering in the doorway and told us to help set the table.”

## DERINDA BABCOCK

Betsy glanced from Sarah to Rachel and then to Leah. “Do you think they expected Jonathan to be surprised because they are twins? Were twins so uncommon back then?”

Leah shook her head. “I know Uncle Jonathan too well to believe he would be shocked enough by their identical looks to faint unless something else ...”

She pointed to Rachel, Sarah, Susana, and Polly. “All four of you, go and stand by the window and look at me.”

Betsy marveled at how quickly the girls obeyed their eldest cousin.

Deborah left the chair and stood next to Leah as they observed their cousins. “Quite impressive, but shocking? Shocking enough to upset our strong-as-a-bull, battle-hardened uncle?”

Betsy waited for Leah to speak. Her friend continued to stare as if she were gazing into the past. “Leah?”

Leah stood and looked from her to her cousins. “We need a plan. We’ll never unlock the secrets to this mystery until we stop depending on random encounters with those who knew this mystery woman.”

Betsy raised her hand. “I’m in. Where do we start?”

“I think the first thing we need to find out is the woman’s name. Once we have this, we can slip her name into our conversations as if we are in the know. We’ll see what happens. Unless we tell them otherwise, they’ll assume one of the others gave us the information. Be subtle. Don’t act curious. Maybe they’ll be more willing to tell us more if we don’t ask direct questions.” Leah looked at each girl. “We need to divide and conquer.”

Deborah’s smile lit her eyes. “Divide and conquer who or what, Leah?”

“People and information. We need to get our people to talk about their days homesteading and their time on the

## HUNTING FOR DESTINY

Oregon Trail. Something interesting might also come out of the conversation if we can get Pa and Uncle Jon to share their war stories.”

Sarah frowned. “Pa doesn’t say much about the war, Leah. He gets a strange look in his eyes, and his jaw tightens whenever he’s asked to tell us things. Even after all these years, he still has an occasional nightmare.”

Deborah nodded. “My pa doesn’t say much either, though sometimes, I hear him, Zeb, and Uncle Jonathan mention a battle or general when they’re together and don’t think anyone else is around. He has nightmares too, but Ma calms him down.”

“Do you think Peter, Big Tom, Mammy Sue, or Elliot know anything, Leah?” Rachel frowned.

Leah turned to Betsy. “Grandma Edna said this woman showed up twenty-five years in the past?”

Betsy nodded.

Leah sounded as if she were simultaneously calculating dates and events as she spoke, “1857. Then the time period would exclude Elliot or Zeb unless someone told them about this mystery woman. Elliot came to help on the homestead after Uncle Jonathan left for war in ’61. Zeb came home with him and Pa at the end of the war in ’65. I’m guessing the others know something though.

“Peter was freed in ’57 and traveled the trail with Grandma Edna, Grandpa Jim, Uncle Matt, Uncle Dwight, Aunt Josie, Annie, and Sean in 1858. His folks were freed before Ma, Pa, and Grandpa traveled the Oregon Trail after the war.”

She rubbed her chin with a forefinger. “Grandpa Nate probably knew this woman, too, because he and our parents traveled together to Kansas Territory and claimed homesteads next to each other.”

## DERINDA BABCOCK

“Grandpa Nate.” Deborah fidgeted. “Do you think he’ll be ... all right, Leah? He’ll be surrounded by a lot of people, and you know how grumpy he gets when his routine is upset. His memory seems to be slipping, too, and lately, he’s been repeating himself.”

“I’ll keep an eye on him, Deb. If he appears to be getting too agitated, I’ll get Pa or Uncle Jon.”

A knock broke their concentration. “Girls?” Even through the solid door, Olivia sounded excited. “Are you ready? The last of our guests have arrived. We’re waiting for you.”

Betsy opened the door. “Come in, Livvy.”

She stared, and moisture came and went from her eyes. “You all look so grown up. You’re as pretty and bright as Christmas ornaments.”

“You’re beautiful, Mama.” Rachel rushed to embrace Olivia, Sarah only a step behind.

Olivia hugged them. “We’d better go down. The men are trying to hide how hungry they are, but I can tell. They look toward the dining room every minute or two, and their noses twitch like hounds catching a scent.”

Betsy’s heart raced. They would enter the Aubry dining room with all eyes on them. Even though those who waited were mostly fathers, uncles, brothers, relatives, or friends, she felt like a debutante at her first ball.

When they stepped into the dining room, all conversations stopped. The males stood if they weren’t already standing.

Betsy smiled at Matthew Bell. The astonished admiration so clearly showing in his blue eyes made all the hours she’d spent sewing her dress worth every moment.

He walked to her and held out his elbow. “May I escort you to your chair, Betsy?”

She nodded and placed her hand in the crook of his arm.

## HUNTING FOR DESTINY

As Matthew slid her chair under the table, she glanced toward her friends. Her eyebrows raised when she watched her brother, Corbin, offer to escort Leah. The look in his eyes for her friend showed a depth of emotion she hadn't seen from him before. He shuttered his expression in a moment, but she'd seen.

Startled, she stared at the two. Corbin and Leah? Did Corbin care Leah was not quite two years his senior? She watched her brother. His athletic physique and serious face reminded her of Daddy Sean—a scholar with callouses. At sixteen, Corbin stood a head taller than Leah. The muscles of his shoulders stretched the fabric of his shirt, and his biceps corded under his sleeve when he moved her chair. His strong jaw showed no hint of childhood. He'd taken on a man's responsibility on their ranch at fourteen, so maybe the age difference didn't matter to him.

Betsy studied Leah's face from the corner of her eyes. How did her friend feel about her brother?

"You're staring."

At the sound of Matthew's deep voice, Betsy turned to him. "Everything and everyone is so pretty, tonight, don't you think? I want to remember this night forever."

He placed the napkin on his lap. "You're one of the prettiest."

Betsy looked around to make sure no one could hear her and then stared in Matthew's eyes. "So are you," she whispered.

His laugh came from deep within his belly.

"Shh." She frowned.

He lowered his voice. "Pretty? Me? Come on, Betsy, stop teasing."

"Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, Matthew Bell."

He laughed again. "Well, something must be in your eyes

## DERINDA BABCOCK

then, but you can believe I'm pretty all you want. Just don't tell anybody. When you wake up from whatever Christmas dream you're in and see me in my soot-covered work clothes and with my hands dirty from swinging a blacksmith's hammer, don't blame me if you think I'm not so pretty. I warned you."

Betsy watched a couple of the neighbors' daughters bring around serving plates and begin to serve the guests.

Uncle Phineas had hired an extra cook and a few local women to help with the meals and housekeeping during the holidays, since the Bostonian relatives were staying at his ranch—The Aubry Rocking A—instead of at her house.

For this, Betsy was thankful. Their place was too small to house so many guests comfortably, and she didn't want to be around Grandfather when he asked her, for what seemed like the fiftieth time, when she was going to get married, or when was she coming to Boston to live.

Daddy Sean could only take so much of Grandfather, too, so the housing arrangements suited him as well.

Matthew dug into his food with enthusiasm, while she took small bites and savored the flavors.

He stared at her, his fork half-way to his mouth. He lowered the utensil. "You eat so daintily—like someone I knew a long time ago. She chewed every bite and never talked with food in her mouth. I'm sure we disgusted her by the way we ate."

Chills raised on Betsy's arm. Could this woman from long ago be the mystery woman? She took a deep breath to calm her suddenly racing heart.

"Really?" She glanced around as if she weren't totally involved in the conversation. "Why do you think the way you ate disgusted her?"

## HUNTING FOR DESTINY

“For years, we smacked and spoke with food in our mouths. Sure has taken us awhile to lose these habits.” Matthew looked toward Sean. “Thanks to your dad and my long-ago friend, Peter and I learned our manners. They were good models.”

“I’m glad.” Betsy sipped her soup, her mind spinning to try to find ways to keep him talking. “Daddy told us he taught you and Peter after your friend left.”

Matthew nodded. His attention caught when he saw Annie, Josie, and Olivia laughing at some joke. His eyes took on a far away look.

“Why are you looking at Mother, my aunt, and cousin like that?”

He jerked and fingered a small scar near his jawline. “They remind me of someone I knew a long time ago.”

The mystery woman.

*Keep him talking, but don’t mention the woman directly.* “I never noticed your scar before, Matthew. What happened?”

He chuckled. “Oh, I couldn’t outrun a buffalo stampede when I was seven.”

“What? You must have been terrified. Tell me.”

He shrugged. “This woman I knew saved me. She pulled me into a crack in the ground and covered me with her body as hundreds of the beasts crashed through the homestead.”

Betsy gasped. “Did she get hurt?”

“Yes, a buffalo calf’s hoof gashed her arm as she moved to protect me.” His words slowed and quieted until they stopped altogether.

“Your mother said she missed her after all this time. Do you?”

He nodded and resumed eating.

Betsy searched his face. The closed expression in his eyes



DERINDA BABCOCK

told her the conversation about the mystery woman was at an end.

“Matthew? I’m glad she saved you. I’m glad you’re here beside me.”

He patted her hand. “I am too, Betsy.”