

Book One: Blooming

*Call Me
Cali*

LANA GOLD

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Chapter One



It was the wee hours of the morning when Cali Kistler jolted awake from a shallow sleep. Easing off the roadway, her Greyhound bus crawled its way slowly through yet another mystery city, somewhere in the middle of the USA. Since she'd left home, the bus had stopped in so many different towns that picking up on any regional distinctions through the window had lost all its novelty for her.

Her mind churned once again over the extreme highs and lows of the last twenty-four hours leading up to her boarding this Greyhound bus back in California: her joyful acceptance to the most prestigious art college she could have ever dreamed of getting into, in New York City; followed by the flat-out rejection of Dash and Pearl (her aged parents) to finance her education. This had included some insults to her intelligence and her worthlessness as a daughter. And then over her mother's tears, and pleading for her and her father to make *some* kind of reconciliation, she'd heard loud and clear her dad's rather blunt invitation for her to leave home as soon as possible: "Get the hell out of my house, and see

what you can make of yourself, little refugee – I never wanted you in the first place – and you’re eighteen now so we’re done here!”

Of all the choices she felt she had for launching herself like a flaming mad rocket into her education and future – begging, borrowing, or stealing – she’d found a quick expedient, by “appropriating” for herself some of her wealthy father’s gold coins that he kept buried in their back yard.

So often as a girl, she’d spied him – a real estate investor – return from collecting his rents in cash, which he had exchanged at the coin dealer’s, for a harder currency. He would bury coffee cans full of new, highly-graded collectible coins, carefully packaged in their plastic cases. There was a ritual to it. He’d first look around for any witnesses, then verify with his metal detector that there weren’t already coffee cans under where he intended to bury his loot. Then, afterward, he’d carefully tamp down the dirt with his shovel, and stand with a smug expression on his face on top of his pile, looking like a crafty, proud cat that had just taken a poop in the garden, and covered it up nicely.

There was never enough buried “loot” for anyone *else* in her miserly father’s life to enjoy, however. Life’s little luxuries were almost a complete mystery to Cali; they were something other people savored but not her, and certainly not her mother who’d long ago given up on being spoiled by Dash. *Things will change*, Cali had promised herself. *I’ll spoil the hell out of myself.*

As he’d often presupposed about his daughter’s future, Cali had indeed become a “gold digger” – a literal one. After his

mandate for her to leave home, Dash had gone off to drink beer in town with his cronies. It had left her and her pious (but feisty) mother, Pearl, with a “golden” opportunity, and just enough time to dig up some loot to help finance her dreams.

The thing was: she didn’t take enough. She hadn’t been generous enough with herself, and gold was low on the day she’d sold. Or the coin dealer had cheated her. She’d never know, only that it wasn’t *quite* as much as she needed. *One more* coffee can of that pirate’s booty would have left more options for her on this adventure to start life anew (*and* pay for the first semester at the prestigious school in NYC). She’d have to “make do” – it was a term her mother often used, and a concept she hated with a vengeance.

“Onward, Cali! You’re on the up and up...” Her mother had tried to say with conviction, as they sat in their old Jeep at the bus station, eating stale granola from a ziplock bag as they waited for the Greyhound to whisk Cali away. It was way too late to turn back to extract more gold out of “them thar hills.”

As Cali retrieved her scuffed-up and overstuffed suitcase from the trunk, Pearl lost her composure. Sobbing, she begged Cali to “Stay close to Jesus,” which was code for: “Don’t (or really, DO) get down and dirty with too many men; be pampered and have more fun than I ever did!” Then, she asked out of the side of her mouth, “Do you have condoms?”

“You’re asking me this *now*?” Cali rolled her eyes. “Wasn’t this a conversation we should have had years ago?”

“Do you know what they are?” her mother asked,

squinting ahead of her, afraid to hear the answer.

“Are they like little finger cots that people use when they cut themselves?” Cali guffawed, and the bus honked loud and long, like a ship leaving a port.

“Smart Alec! Go! Don’t get trapped in a living hell like I did! God will light your path!” These were her mother’s final words before Cali headed over to the bus.

She stood and hesitated for a long moment before boarding, wondering if she should really leave Pearl behind like that. But her mother would be fine, wouldn’t she? She had her sense of martyrdom, her religion and her charities, after all. What did Cali have? *Nothing to lose!*

It was all or nothing. Do or die. Go NOW or stay and forever pay the price. Cali had enough cash wadded up in her various purses to see her through a month in NYC. That was the maximum it would last, *if* conservative measures were taken... but “conservative” was not a word in Cali’s lexicon. She was naturally (and artistically) more of a maximalist than a minimalist.

She’d hopped up on the bus, and never looked back.

It’s going to get interesting.

When the young cowboy boarded the Greyhound in Oklahoma City, it was another slogging morning on the multi-day bus journey. *Why didn’t I fly like a normal person!? I would have been there already*, Cali had reprimanded herself so often during the trip. But then she reminded herself about her Budget, a.k.a. the “B” word, which was as offensive a word as Bitch or Butthole.

A pale blue light showed through the bus windows as Cali watched the cowboy carefully. He and his tall hat were just a shadow moving along the seats. There were precious few riders, and Cali was surprised when, of all the open places to sit, he sat down next to her.

He quietly put a few things, including his hat, in the overhead compartment and then settled in, nodding “howdy.” His presence was rather mysterious; she dared not check if he was handsome or not. What did it matter? As a young lady with no experience to speak of, Cali’s sexual fantasies were strangely dominated by nameless, faceless men... men with no real agenda other than mutual pleasure. Having a mystery man appear in real life in this silver bullet, sliding in next to her... Well, it wasn’t unwelcome.

“Where you headed?” he asked in the semi-darkness. His slow drawl reminded her of dark maple syrup slowly dripping on pancakes. She was hungry!

“New York...” she sighed, trying to hide her anticipation about the place, as well as her apprehension about this strange man sitting next to her.

“Where you coming from?” he asked, turning slightly toward her; she could see the checks on his cowboy shirt as he got ever so slightly closer. She smelled a hint of a decent drug store cologne with vanilla and spice.

“Does it really matter?” she said it flatly, as if she never wanted to see the place again, and even better if it sunk into a crater. He nodded in understanding. “You?” she asked.

“Fort Smith, Arkansas.” He turned in her direction, “I’m sorry, but I *don’t* understand how your mama and papa

could put a sweet and pretty little thing like you on a bus like *this*, going off to a city like *that*.”

“Oh, well thank you for saying I’m pretty but...”

“You’re mighty welcome. But pretty is as pretty does, remember *that* when you get into *New York City*.”

“OK. But I sort of put myself on this bus.”

“Do you even *know* what kind of trouble you could get into, in a place like that?” he asked.

“I’m excited to find out,” she countered.

He chuckled, “Up for anything, huh?”

“Yes, I think so.”

She dared not ask his name. Leaving him nameless for as long as possible kept him in the realm of fantasy, just like the dark of the bus was keeping his face semi-shrouded in mystery. His body, however, outlined in the *ombre*... Well, Cali couldn’t help but intuit there wasn’t an ounce of fat or flab on him. He was pure muscle, like a snake probably. Her thoughts turned to that snake he must have hidden in his pants, too.

Behave yourself! Her mother’s voice echoed in her head. Cali sighed and leaned her head on her thick coat that was folded against the window, as the bus got back on the open road and rambled toward the next stop. As the ride continued, she felt restless. Tucking a folded scarf behind her neck, she turned and shifted to face the cowboy. Her body language was by no means a subtle invitation, but it wasn’t a rejection either.

As they slept, she was semi-conscious of his hand beginning to creep slowly over her way, then scaling the small mountain of her thigh. Over the next several hundred

miles, it made the most miniscule of movements toward her crotch, keeping her in a constant state of arousal. As his hand finally began circling and applying pressure through her jeans, there was no doubt as to his intentions.

“OK if I make you come, hun?” he whispered in her ear as her entire body was getting closer to his, and his face was nearing hers.

“Uh, huh.”

As his lips touched hers, and his hand rubbed harder against her jeans without relent, she stiffened her body before she felt her entire crotch flower into a massive explosion of pleasure. She went limp as a new kind of pleasure whipped through her, and she marveled that she’d made it to this age without ever having kissed a guy. And now her first kiss was taking place on a skeezy Greyhound bus, and *while* coming with...? What’s his name? *Too much thinking!*

He pulled back on the intensity of his kisses, but remained gentle and steady as he leaned over. As she calmed into his embrace, a new set of more intense and tongue-infused kisses started again. His fingers unabashedly strayed over her hips and her breasts, and he unzipped her jeans with a slow, calculated skill.

“Just play with each other. Hands,” she whispered. She was asserting her influence over the cowboy, waiting to feel the bare skin of his fingers glide over her pussy, which was now deluged with wetness, wanton for another orgasm.

“Yes, ma’am. Wouldn’t think of anything more,” he agreed. Reaching inside, he gently found his way under her panties. As he did, she rested a hand on the hard bulge

straining at his jeans. Her fingers clumsily tried to find a zipper, but found difficult snaps instead.

“Not me,” he sighed. “*You.*” He nibbled her ear with his lips as she let go of him. “I don’t need anything out of this,” he assured her.

This is my first rodeo she felt like saying, but kept quiet. He need not know. She panted hard and suppressed a moan when she felt the pads of his fingers rubbing up and down over the entirety of her soaked flower. Gathering some of her panty fabric, he used it to lightly chafe her over her clit. Leaning back, he watched her as his fingers continued to steadily pleasure her.

“Come on for me now. You can let go,” he said, as she felt two fingers deliciously gliding lower, filling her up with their bulk as he pushed them up and down inside her. Her hips went up and met each of his moves.

“Ahhh!” she said, as his fingers began gently hammering away.

“Aw, give me that sweet cum,” he said. His honey voice overtook her, and she let go, as he dove his tongue into her mouth the deepest it’d been. A nearly heavenly release made her shudder and grab onto him in the privacy of their seat.

He stopped moving, and ceased kissing her for a moment, to perhaps bask in triumph. He quietly and gently slid his hand from her panties. Leaning back, he let out a small “Whooh, boy!” Then he grabbed his coat into a bundle, and excused himself to the restroom.

Once he was back in the seat, he rode along, supposedly sleeping a bit more as he leaned against her shoulder. She

took a peek at him then, in the brightening morning light. He was pretty damn good-looking for someone she'd been playing with "sight unseen."

Before she knew it, Fort Smith was announced, and they pulled into the station. He gave her a quick squeeze on the knee, grabbed his things, and waltzed off the bus. She watched out the window, looking for his profile from the side, curious to see how he walked, whom he might be meeting. But he was nowhere to be found. As she stepped off the bus – having taken some time to stretch and gather her various purses and sacks – she looked for him again but he was gone. Had he vaporized? Had he merely been a figment of her overactive, "oversexed" imagination?

In the bus station, with 10 minutes left until she had to be back aboard, Cali quickly made her way to the snack bar. She chose the "Get Up And Go" pre-prepared tray of bacon, eggs, toast, and a cup of juice wrapped in plastic. She confidently reached into her purse for one of her rubber-banded "wads" of cash: one of several she'd hid on her person, and in her various travel bags...

But she didn't find it there.

She felt suddenly faint. Her heart beat madly, pounding all the way into her head. She felt all around inside her purse, blindly seeking an answer. All she found were cosmetics or small, sentimental things. There wasn't that wonderful feeling of money in her hand. *Oh my God.*

The cowboy had made off with the stash that was hidden supposedly deep in her purse! And she'd *stolen* to get that

cash! Mr. Slow Hands apparently had two hands: one which slowly seduced, and the other that quickly explored, grabbed and secured the most important wad of all. It was the one she'd intended to use for a safe place to stay for the night, once she arrived in New York. She'd intended to use the rest to secure something longer-term the next day.

She pushed the tray of food back to the cashier, her stomach lurching. "I'm so sorry, I've changed my mind." She turned and walked toward the door, leaning for a moment on a wall. The station swirled around her, as if she were on a carousel with the motley crew of various travelers circling the filthy station.

Outside, the smell of diesel fuel hit her, and she bit her lip to keep from crying.

How could I have been so stupid? So blinded by...

She hated the cliché, but she'd been blinded, disabled, and nearly financially paralyzed and potentially stranded – by lust! She wouldn't let *that* happen again. *What's good in this?* Her mind buzzed with a way to assuage her guilt and complicity in her own defrauding. At least her passage on the bus was pre-paid. As she knelt down on the pavement, quickly checking her pockets and other bags for cash, she took comfort knowing there was still something left.

She would have the rest of the ride to work out a new budget for her escape to New York City. But right now she felt like getting to her seat and sobbing into her scarf. She would need to face the devastating fact that her small fortune had been diminished considerably. *And to think I had my first kiss with that thief, and let him make me come.*

"All Aboard!" the bus driver called.