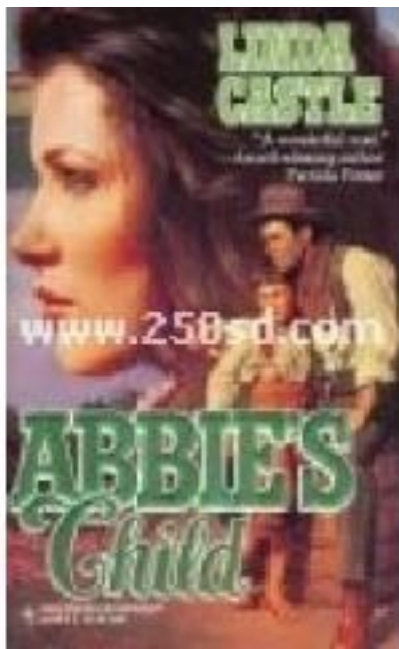


Abbie's Child



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Chapter One
Guston
Colorado
Willem hefted his battered valise and stopped to catch his breath. He looked up at the white-shuttered rooming house
perched a good quarter mile away on the steep hillside and
grimaced.
"Whoever built this place must've been part mountain goat." He sucked in a breath before he trudged on. The July
sunshine was finally breaking over the dusky blue summit
of the snow-capped peaks surrounding Guston. It filtered
down in broken shafts through the thick growth of blue
spruce and quaking aspen at the outskirts of the mining
town. Willem clenched his teeth and inhaled another gulp of
"The air at this height lacks body" he grumbled
and
stopped to clear his head. Willem dragged off his cap and
looked down at the town. A high mountain breeze ruffled
his too-long hair and blew a strand over

his eyes. He decided to see if there was a cheap barber available in Guston as soon as he was settled. went with well-laid-out lots and thriving watched the hurried activity of construction under. Wide banners were being stretched and the harsh sound of an off-key brass band on a steep incline. "What's the damned occasion?" he thought. Whatever it was he felt a wave of disappointment. If Moira was in this area, as the Pin she would be harder to ferret out with people than fleas on a hound. He slapped the cap in irritation and resumed his climb up the gully. The last thing he was interested in was being alone with people celebrating. He didn't even pause to kick the dirt from his shoes when he reached the boardinghouse door wide and stepped inside. The neat-as-a-pin spotless rugs laid atop gleaming wood floors showed his tracks. Instantly he backed out to wipe the soles of his shoes on the backs of the door but not before the smell of homemade bread. His empty belly roared to life. This was not the usual gold-camp room. He stood in a formal parlor done in shades of blue and cream while he waited for someone. A steady thunk of a long pendulum in a grandfather clock ticked off the minutes while he stood toward a shiny desk along the back wall of the hand-lettered sign proclaimed it to be the Room of Willem. He noticed the rows of key hooks attached to the paneled wall behind it. Only two of them were numbered room keys. The others were variations on Otto's opinion of the boardinghouse and other miners. A tiny brass bell sat by another door.

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