

Deleted Scene – The Ferryman

I deleted the scene for timing and fear of convoluting the themes of the novel. When I wrote this scene, I was trying to show the poverty that the average person faced and how love had nothing to do with their marriages. HOWEVER, I realized the scene needed to be cut, because though the ferryman is willing to marry an under-aged girl, I did not write him as a villain nor consider the ferryman a bad man. Notice: he isn't trying to screw her over, he is trying to find an honest marriage arrangement. I imagined him having this conversation many times with girls/women he ferries across the river since he has no money and no family member to arrange a marriage for him. He's doing the best he can in a world that doesn't care about him.

LISTENING FOR WATER, ELLIE EDGED towards Missoula proper until she found the river. Not sure where to go, she wandered eastwards until she found a sign reading: FERRY 2 CREDITS in front a wide flat-bottom boat tied to the shore.

The ship wasn't moving at night, so she hid on the leeward side of a fishing shack. As it did every day, dawn lightened the sky as the sun rose over the Rocky Mountains. She waited in her hiding place until she saw the ferryman stretching out of his blankets.

“Excuse me, I don't have any money, but I'll clean the deck if you get me across the river to the mills,” she said.

“Girl, get yourself back home.”

“Look, I heard there were jobs at the mills. I need a way across the river.”

“You're about to get my boot,” he snarled, but he didn't lift his foot.

Deciding the ferryman wasn't likely to call to police or the convent, Ellie stood her ground. "I'll run an errand if that's what you need."

The ferryman narrowed his eyes. Then glanced at his torn cuff. "You know how to sew?"

"Yes, sir, but I haven't any needle or thread."

"I keep some line and needles in the tool kit. I want my jacket mended and my boots shined. Do a good job, and when I have another customer, I'll ferry you across."

"Thank you." She put her hands together and bowed in respect.

Grumbling, the man repeated the gesture towards her and pushed his toolbox with his foot.

Ellie's fingers ached in the cold, but she sat beside his chair and mended the rip with fishing line. She took a rag out of the man's tool kit and shined his boots. It would have been easier if he hadn't been wearing them.

He opened his thermos. The smell of fish broth made her stomach growl.

"You hungry, girl?"

Ellie nodded.

He poured her a bit of broth in the thermos top. It was hot. Though her lips stung from the salt, Ellie drank the soup greedily.

"So how long have you been homeless?"

Licking the salt from her lips, she said, "Only a few days." "My mama died. Papa died a few years ago."

The ferryman nodded. "Yeah, you don't seem the type. They just beg."

"I'll find a job and never have to beg."

“Times are hard. People might not be willing to chance a job on an untested girl. Why don’t you be my wife?”

She pressed her legs together and pulled her sweater tighter around her. “I’m only fourteen,” she lied. “I need a ride.”

“You are, shit, I thought you were older,” The man frowned. “Well, now, your mama’s dead, no one will mind. Better than being homeless anyway.”

Ellie looked closely at the man’s face. His beard was brown scraggly, windswept, but his brow and cheeks were unlined. In fact, if it wasn’t for the beard, she guessed he was about Peter’s age. He was just a lonely guy with a newly mended jacket and hardly any gift in cooking. If she married him, it would be her own choice, but she wouldn’t get to the moon.

Still she found herself asking, “Do you have a house?”

“Nope, just the boat.”

“I’ve never cooked a fish before. Only rabbits and eggs. I don’t know if I’d be a good wife for you,” Ellie said.

He shrugged. He pulled out a narrow fishing rod as long as he was tall. “You couldn’t be any worse of a cook than me.”

“I’d poison you if you ever beat me or our children if we had ‘em.”

“Your pa hit you, did he? Hit your ma?”

Her throat tensed. She refused to show emotion so she didn’t answer him.

“I won’t hit you,” he said. “But I expect a faithful and hardworking wife. I need help cooking and mending. Sometimes there’s work around the boat, but I’ll catch and

clean the fish. The money from passengers keeps the boat afloat. Sometimes I catch enough to trade for bread and eggs.”

The ferryman threaded the end of his fishing line through his hook, and wrapped it four times.

“But you don’t have extra for a bride price,” she said.

“No, I don’t. But you obviously don’t have any money either, so I figure we could help each other out. Two people work better than one. I’ll even put your name on the title of the boat.” He fed the end of his fishing line back through the looped hook and pulled it tight. He pulled out a dark wriggling worm from a small cup. Ellie looked away as he pierced the worm with his hook then attached three pieces of rusted metal to his line above his bait. Then he cocked back the rod, pushed the button on his spinner, and when he pointed it back to the water, he released the button to cast his line into the dark water.

Fingering the map in her pocket, her mind spun with worry. *What if I can’t make it any farther? What if I get arrested and taken to the convent again?* “Do you catch fish everyday?” she asked softly.

“Nearly,” he replied. Then leaned back and shoved his hands in his pockets.

“Have you gone hungry?”

The ferryman studied her. “No. And I’d be damned before I let my wife or kids go hungry. And I know it looks rickety, but the shelter is pretty warm at night.”

If I married someone else, my brothers and betrothed wouldn’t ever come after me. Ellie bit her lip. “I’ll expect a faithful and hardworking husband, so I’ll think about it. I still want to see if I can get a job.”

He shrugged. “Your life, but if that doesn’t work out, come back. My offer will stand ‘til I find someone else.”

They sat in silence as he fished. He looked over his shoulder as a young couple with a baby asked if they could be ferried across. The ferryman gestured at the payment pad. The man pressed his hand on to it. Four credits were charged, two for each adult passenger. The family took a seat on the cracked polymer bench under the shelter.

The ferryman pumped a lever, which opened a slot in the engine panel. He turned another cylinder. Methane belched out of the pipe as the ferry jolted off the dock.

Ellie’s stomach lurched as the water grew deeper and faster moving underneath the boat. Though the dark water underneath the hull frightened her, she wondered if the ferryman’s proposal was genuine. He didn’t seem like a bad man.

Thirty minutes later, she was across the river. The ferryman was happy to see five people waiting to cross back to the other side.

“Remember what I said.” He tipped his hat towards her.

“I’ll remember, and thank you.” Ellie pressed her palms together and inclined her head. She followed the couple towards the city center. She hugged to the outskirts of the mill to the eastbound trucking lane. Glad she had mittens, she put out her thumb.