



Yankee Wife (Quade Book 1)

By Linda Lael Miller

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When a pretty spitfire who's down on her luck clashes with a stubborn man in search of a wife, sparks must turn to flames....

A year after the Civil War, courageous former Union nurse Lydia McQuire was gamely scraping out an honest living. But now, as she said yes to marrying a stranger, her knees gave way with fear. Mr. Devon Quade had seemed polite and handsome when she answered his ad for a wife. Only after Lydia had arrived in Washington territory did she learn that her bridegroom wasn't to be sweet Devon Quade, but his older brother Brigham, a widower with strapping shoulders, hands as strong as steel, and an arrogant belief that he was lord and master of his lumber empire, the town of Quade's Harbor, and the woman he married. Lydia's dislike of him was instantaneous...yet Brigham was awakening in her a white-hot passion, and a firm resolve: before she would share his bed, he would have to surrender himself, heart and soul, to love....

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Editorial Review

About the Author

The daughter of a town marshal, Linda Lael Miller is the author of more than 100 historical and contemporary novels. Now living in Spokane, Washington, the "First Lady of the West" hit a career high when all three of her 2011 Creed Cowboy books debuted at #1 on the *New York Times* list. In 2007, the Romance Writers of America presented her their Lifetime Achievement Award. She personally funds her Linda Lael Miller Scholarships for Women. Visit her at LindaLaelMiller.com.

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Chapter One

San Francisco

1866

Lydia McQuire was desperately hungry, and a night's piano playing had earned her enough for a bed at Miss Killgoran's boardinghouse *or* a meal, but not both. She squinted to read the bill affixed to the wall outside the supper club, her blue eyes still stinging from the dense cigar smoke within.

WANTED: ONE WIFE FOR A GOOD,

SOBER, AND PROSPEROUS MAN.

CONTACT DEVON QUADE,

ROOM 4, THE FEDERAL HOTEL

Lydia sighed. The Federal Hotel was just a few blocks from where she stood, yet it might as well have been in another world. There, people slept on crisp linen sheets, drank hot, strong tea with all the milk and sugar they could want, ate full meals without first examining the fare for mold and weevils. Perhaps if she went to see this Devon Quade, he would offer her some small refreshment during the interview -- coffee and

rolls, perhaps. Even that sounded like a feast to Lydia, who hadn't eaten since the day before, when a kindly bartender had given her two hard-boiled eggs that had somehow been overlooked in the mad scramble of hungry, thirsty patrons.

She started automatically toward the hotel, picking up speed as she walked. It was dawn, and there were only a few carriages and wagons in the brick-laid streets; a Chinaman wearing a round, pointed hat, his trousers and shirt made of black silk, hurried along on the opposite sidewalk. A policeman strolled his beat, looking bored and weary, his nightstick making a clunk sound against each lamp post he passed.

It occurred to Lydia that she would probably rouse Mr. Quade from a sound sleep, arriving at his door so early, but she proceeded anyway. Perhaps he would be impressed by her industry and initiative and overlook her tattered dress, her mussed blond hair, the smell of smoke that had permeated her skin and grown stale there.

Her resolve was beginning to fade, so she walked faster. It was only when she reached the front door of the Federal Hotel that Lydia realized she was holding the advertisement for a wife in one hand. She didn't recollect pulling it from the wooden wall where she'd found it.

Standing on the sidewalk, drawing in deep breaths, Lydia folded the bill into neat quarters and then tucked it into her pocket with the two pitiful coins she'd received for entertaining that lot of sodden, pinching drunks. Briefly, she considered the idea of actually applying for the post of wife to this forthright stranger, but she soon discarded it again. In time she would find an honest position as a governess, or she would scrape together enough money to take a room in a boardinghouse where there was a piano. That way, she could give lessons and earn a dignified if modest living.

The hotel doorman, looking like an officer in an army of rich soldiers in his maroon suit, gold epaulets, and gleaming brass buttons, peered at her from under the brim of his cap. The expression in his eyes revealed both admiration and contempt as he took in Lydia's compact figure, her moderately pretty face and her one glory, her rich, honey-gold hair.

"There something you want, ma'am?" he inquired, with an acid politeness that stung Lydia. It was obvious even to a woman who'd never had an intimate experience with a man, that he thought she was a lady of the shadows, seeking lowly commerce.

Lydia wanted to run, but her hunger left her too weak and discouragement had robbed

her of all aplomb. She took the handbill from her pocket and held it out. "I'm here to see Mr. Devon Quade," she said, with her last shred of pride.

The doorman looked her over again, then smiled. It was not a friendly expression, but he granted her entry with a gesture of one arm.

Lydia walked into the lobby, with its potted palms and brass fixtures and lovely Oriental carpet, and for a few moments she was filled with such aching weariness that her throat closed tight and her eyes filled with tears.

She blinked, and sniffled, looked at the handbill again made a mental note that Mr. Quade was housed in Room 4, and proceeded toward the stairs. The door she sought, prominently marked with a brass numeral, was all too easy to find.

She had only to knock.

Lydia bit her lower lip. She was tired, hungry, and dirty, and the last thing on the face of God's earth she would ever want was a husband, so what was she doing here? She didn't know; there was nothing in her knowledge or experience to explain the strange instinct that had propelled her through grimy streets to this place. It was far more than the hope of coffee and rolls, she concluded.

She raised her hand to knock, heart thundering against her rib cage, stomach grinding out a reminder that it was empty, held her breath and pounded at the door.

The instant she'd done that, Lydia was overcome by terror. She glanced in one direction, then the other, ready to flee down the hallway and escape, but her legs wouldn't take orders. She was frozen there on the threshold of a strange man's quarters, with little or nothing to say for herself.

There was grumbling inside the room. Lydia continued to struggle against her own inertia, but to no avail. She was rooted to the spot like a willow tree planted in good ground.

Then the door opened and he was standing there, tall and classically handsome, his tawny-gold hair sleep-rumpled. His indigo-blue eyes went narrow and he scowled.

"Yes?"

Lydia offered the advertisement with a shaking hand. The man was clearly prosperous, as the poster claimed, and no doubt sober, given the hour, but whether or not he was good remained to be seen. Such fine-looking men were often rogues.

She realized she was staring and forced herself to speak. "Mr. Quade? My name is Lydia McQuire and I -- I've come about your...proposal." It was plain he wasn't going to offer refreshment, clad in his dressing gown and barely awake as he was, but Lydia felt she had to make some explanation for interrupting his sleep, so she pretended she wanted to be a stranger's bride.

Ink-colored eyes looked her over speculatively, but not with the same insulting presumption the doorman had employed. "Come in, Miss McQuire," he said, stepping back.

Lydia swallowed. Somehow, perhaps because of her desperation, she hadn't anticipated this awkward development. She intertwined her fingers and twisted them until they ached. "I don't think -- "

Suddenly, a blinding smile burst over his face, like early morning sunshine on the surface of a clear lake. "Of course," he said. "I've been living among lumberjacks so long, I've forgotten my manners. Give me fifteen minutes, and I'll meet you downstairs in the dining room. We'll talk while we're having breakfast."

Lydia's stomach rumbled loudly at the prospect; she could only hope Mr. Quade hadn't heard. She nodded and stood there in the hall, still as a marble monument, long after he'd closed the door. Then, driven by the thought of food, she broke free of her frenzied thoughts and dashed for the stairs.

The dining hall was just opening up for a day's business, and when Lydia told the waiter she was joining Mr. Devon Quade of Room 4, she was immediately escorted to a table. Coffee appeared, sending fragrant steam from the spout of a silver pot, and a crystal plate towering with fresh pastries was set before her.

Lydia's eyes went wide as she watched the rich brown liquid being poured into a delicate china cup.

"There you are, madame," the waiter said kindly. Then he went away.

Lydia's hand trembled as she reached for the pots of sugar and cream. She treated the coffee with generous portions of both and took a noisy slurp, too eager to honor convention by sipping. A gray-haired matron, the only other customer in attendance, gave her a look of censure.

Lydia took two more gulps of the coffee -- oh, Lord, it was delicious -- then reached for a pastry. Her mouth was stuffed full when Devon Quade materialized in the doorway of the restaurant, looking so startlingly handsome that she nearly choked. With frantic haste, ...

Users Review

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