

# The Redemption of Caralynne Hayman

Carole Brown

Chapter One

*Twenty years earlier*

The shadow creatures on the wall shook their wings and legs. Heads with horns nodded. Scary, dark faces watched.

The little girl clasped her floppy-eared rabbit against her chest and stared into the dark.

“Mmm ...” Mommy’s murmur reached to her through the walls, and the giggles from her mother tiptoed in, shooing the fear away.

Whoosh. She blew out a breath and squeezed her rabbit tighter. “Mommy has a friend with her, Ramsey. She loves me just like I love you and will give me hugs in the morning after the man leaves.”

Ramsey said nothing. She ran her fingers over his face and could feel his black button eyes staring at her, trusting her to protect him.

“And she’ll read to us and I’ll sit on her lap and we’ll snuggle—all of us together.” She nodded and tugged on Ramsey’s left ear then rolled over.

Real live whispers and laughter floated into the room.

Opening her mouth in a wide yawn, she patted Ramsey’s tummy and whispered again, “Don’t be afraid. I’m right here.”

“Please. That hurts.”

“Mommy?” The little girl frowned but her eyes wouldn’t open. Just like they did when she and mommy put cucumbers slices on their eyes.

“Stop it—”

Rubbing at her eyes the little girl sat up. Mommy had never sounded like this before, and neither had any of the men—the men who brought flowers and candy and money.