

Promise Kept
A novel by Autumn Louisa Andrews

Chapter 1: An Ordinary Day

During her life, Emma Stanfield felt like she had not lived. She had a good life. Her family loved her and she had friends. She was taken care of quite adequately, but she wanted more. Yet Emma was content to wake up each morning, as many days before. She never questioned her life, at least not out loud; never complained. Each day she woke early, put on her ordinary cloths and went about her ordinary life with a smile. She did not even know any better.

But this day was not like all the others! This was the day Emma's life would change, forever.

It was a cold Spring morning in Boston. Emma awoke early. She was always up before the sun. The house was very quiet. She lay still in her bed for a moment, listening. Her sister, Violet, lay snuggled up next to her. She must have gotten cold in the night. Violet was such a sweet girl, just as her name indicated. She needed constant contact with others and was always flitting around the room hugging everyone. She was especially close to Emma, only one year her senior at sixteen. They had been like twins, yet so different.

Emma quietly and gently pushed Violet aside and unfolded the covers to get out of bed, quickly replacing the coverlet. She glanced across the room to the other bed which housed their two older sisters, June and Mary-Elizabeth. They, too, were still sound asleep and barely visible outside the covers. Emma moved quickly to slip on her house-dress and shoes before the cold crept into her bones. She slipped out the door without waking anyone.

Downstairs was also dark and quiet. Emma liked this time of day because it was the only time she felt any solitude. She loved having a large family and all the hustle and bustle that went with it, but it was so peaceful, just for a moment each day, to have the entire kitchen to herself. This did not last long, though.

There was just enough wood in the inside bin to start a small fire in the stove. Emma got right to work. Keeping busy kept you warmer. She lit the fire, then went to get water from the pump at the sink. After filling the tea kettle and replacing it on the stove, Emma checked the fire once again. She stopped for a moment to warm her frozen, wet fingers before going to work on breakfast.

By now she was hearing footsteps coming down from above. Samuel was the next to enter the kitchen; also very routine for their house. Samuel was more like Emma's twin than Violet could ever be, though he was several years older. He was very quiet, like their father, and hard working. Samuel made his way downstairs and stopped by the fire for a moment. He gave Emma a sleepy look and a brief hug, then, without a word, he was gone.

The coats were all in the small entry way to the kitchen from the porch. Emma heard Samuel put on his coat and boots. She listened for the door before getting back to work. No door! Instead she saw Samuel's head pop back around the door.

"Get to work! I'm starved!" Samuel poked at Emma with a smile.

Emma put her hands on her hips, "how about bringing me something to cook!"

Samuel smiled a pinched smile, then was gone. Emma could hear him laughing as he shut the door. It was so nice to have Samuel here. He was twenty years old and could have moved out on his own. He was to be married soon, to Grace Porter. They had been 'sweethearts' as long as Emma could remember. She loved Grace almost as much as she loved Samuel. He planned to continue after they were married, but they were planning to get an apartment in town, near Grace's parents.

Samuel had stayed at home to help his father in the shop. Father was a carpenter; the best carpenter in Boston. His shop was on the outskirts of town, away from the fancy shops, but close enough that they could walk in for school and shopping. They sold custom pieces and so there was no need for a store-front, but Howard Stanfield planned to have one someday, anyway. He knew his wife would want it.

Samantha Stanfield was very different from her husband. He enjoyed the solitude of his shop being on the outskirts of town; she would have preferred to live in the heart of town. Howard was strong, stable and hard working, and it showed in his face and on his hands. Samantha's face and hands were as soft as the first day Howard had laid eyes on her, twenty-two years ago. She was always sweet and thoughtful, especially to the man she loved, but she was not one to get out in the sun or let her hands be 'aged' by hard labor. "She is my princess", Emma heard her father say so many times, "and I like it that way."

The entire Stanfield family was a study in opposite extremes. Emma and Samuel were both like their father, while the others were all more like their mother in tastes and life-style preferences. Emma was so different from her mother and sisters that she almost felt uncomfortable around them from time to time. She much preferred to have something to do, always. She liked the way she was, but sometimes she was almost jealous of their ability to 'socialize'. She had never been very good in a group or at a social activity and she was finding this problem also flowed over into her 'love life' or lack thereof.

Emma was feeling very warm as she thought for a moment about her life. Then she realized she was standing very close to the stove. She backed away and immediately sprang to life in the large, country kitchen. She could hear more footsteps now. Her father and little brother Jasper came into the kitchen.

"I think Emma is in dream-land again, Pop," Jasper commented casually to his father.

"Yep," Howard replied, sending Emma a special smile that seemed to her like their secret code. Howard loved Emma second only to Samantha. He loved all of his children and doted on them whenever he could, but Emma was special. She was like a carbon copy of himself and he felt he understood her better than he did his other daughters.

Emma smiled back at her father with a warm, loving smile, then turned to Jasper and stuck her tongue out at him as they headed out the door. She had never been great at being 'playful', but Jasper was so easy to tease that she always tried to practice on him. This was another

difference she had from her sisters. They all seemed to be naturals at playing, flirting and teasing, especially with the boys. They got these traits from their mother.

Emma got to work making biscuits from the flour-drawer. She was finishing up and had them on the tray, ready to go in the oven when Samuel came in with a basket on his arm. He took off his coat and boots and handed her the basket as he poured a hot cup of tea for himself.

"It's a cold one today," he commented, as if she couldn't tell by his rosy cheeks. "The ground is frozen solid. We won't be startin' on the garden for a few days."

Emma took eggs and some thin slices of ham out of the basket and began to cook breakfast. "How is the meat holding out?" she questioned, like the manager of a restaurant from town.

"Good! Plenty to last the Spring."

"Are the animals all frozen solid?"

"Yes," Samuel replied with a crooked smile, "we can use them to make frozen cream later." Emma laughed.

Jasper came in with a large bucket of fresh milk, slopping it all over himself and the kitchen. "Got the milk," he informed them.

"Yes, and now you can get the mop," Emma replied. "I just cleaned up the floor last night." Emma felt like the mother of the house much of the time. She had learned to give orders and the boys had learned to follow them.

Jasper dutifully got out the mop and poured a little water on the wooden floors to mop up his mess. Emma finished up preparing and dishing out the food while Samuel hopped up to fill glasses with milk. They had hot biscuits, eggs and fried ham. After cleaning up, Jasper got out a big scoop of butter from the tin in the ice-box and put it on a dish on the table. Their father came in just then with a jar of maple syrup from the cellar. Their small farm boasted a nice sugar bush with several trees. They made their own syrup each Spring and Howard rationed it to make it last all year.

Samantha soon entered the room, with the youngest Stanfields in tow; Alexander and Louisa. The other girls soon followed. Each of Emma's sisters floated into a room like a flower petal being blown by a gentle breeze onto a quiet stream. Their dresses swirled around them as they lightly entered the kitchen and took their seats. Her mother was like the entire bouquet. Emma stopped and wiped her hair from her forehead with the back of her arm. She was just an ordinary leaf compared to them, maybe even a blade of grass. She felt she was beautiful in her own way, but did not know how to show it among such delicate flowers.

Chapter 2: The Post

After breakfast, Mrs. Stanfield planned take the girls into town for some window shopping. The men planned to work in the shop. Mr. Stanfield's shop had always kept him very busy. Every year it got more and more popular and as Samuel got old enough to help, he became his partner. Jasper and Alexander were also learning the basics of furniture making. This work provided well for the Stanfields, but did not make them rich. Mrs. Stanfield had high hopes, though, and occupied her time teaching her girls the finer things in life in order to prepare them.

Samantha was not a snob, but she felt they were skills that would serve them well in finding a job in a nice shop or hotel someday, just in case they needed it. She was not a particularly hard worker and did not really know how to teach them to be this way, nor could she expect it, either from her daughters. She was at a loss as to how Emma turned out to be such a good common laborer, though she was glad to have someone in the family willing to do so much and that was so good at it.

As usual, Emma tried to get out of going with her mother. She started by letting her know how much there was to be done in the kitchen. Her mother had the older girls help her finish cleaning up. She said that Emma needed to learn about being a lady so that she could someday impress some nice young man. Emma was not sure she could. She also tried to ask to stay and help her father. She enjoyed the shop and being allowed to create something beautiful. Her mother insisted. Finally, she gave up and went to her room to straighten her hair.

Shopping was such a chore for Emma, especially since they could not usually buy anything. Emma did like all the lovely things she saw, but she was too practical to ever enjoy them too much. She usually just watched her sisters try things on and imagined how she could recreate that dress or hat or handbag at home. She loved to sew and Emma especially loved to create new things. She would sit and examine the outfits and decide exactly how she would have done it differently. Her mother allowed her to daydream, assuming it could lead to a nice job in a dress shop one day.

June, Mary-Elizabeth and Violet, did enjoy shopping. They tried on as many dresses as they could find in all the shops. Even Louisa enjoyed the experience of being out with her mother and sisters. She would flit from stand to stand, twirling like she was at a fancy ball. Violet was new to the dress fitting. She was just recently old enough for any of the ladies dresses to fit. She was like a child at Christmas, opening one present after another without taking the time to enjoy anyone, but reveling in the experience. June and Mary-Elizabeth were very aware of how they appeared in each outfit. They carefully perused the racks to find just the right look. Samantha was so excited to share this experience with her girls.

June had a special interest in looking just right. She had caught the attention of Clayton Vance, a young up-and-coming lawyer from a very prestigious Boston family. She was always trying to look her best, especially when she was out in public and might cross paths with Clayton. Today she looked especially radiant. Everyone had noticed that Clayton came to call on her more and more. He always seemed enamored by her beauty and could hardly turn his gaze away from her. She tried to be coy, but she, too, was infatuated by Clayton. He was very tall and handsome with strong dark features. He stood very straight and was heightened even more because of the tall top-hat that he always wore. Clayton was always impeccably dressed in a tailored suit and shiny boots. He was exactly what June, and most of her sisters, had always wanted in a man.

Soon after they arrived at Petermann's Dress Shop, their favorite of all the shops on _____ Street, the girls had already found several things they liked. Emma had spent her time browsing and also helping her mother keep up with Louisa, who liked to touch everything. She was deep in thought about a book she would like to get from the new public library that had recently opened in Boston. Her mother had not particularly liked the idea of any of her girls getting lost in reading when they could spend their time more wisely preparing themselves and their wardrobe for society or learning a skill to work in a suitable job for a lady. However, Howard Stanfield loved the idea of a library. He was not a well-read man, but he felt that the key to success and a fulfilled life for all of his children would be greatly increased by reading.

Emma and Alexander were his hope for that literary future for the Stanfield family. The other girls were not showing any interest in reading or advancing their minds too far beyond what they could simply learn from their mother and society around them. Samuel was quiet and hard working, but he had long-since determined that his future lie in the furniture-making family business. Jasper, though having a brilliant mind, never took anything seriously and his father was never sure he ever would.

Emma, however, was bright and had learned early to read. She enjoyed it because it allowed her to stay in her safe environment, unsure of whether she could handle what lie beyond, but also to enjoy all the adventure the world outside her cocoon had to offer. She could not read a book fast enough, nor get started on the next quickly enough. She often thought that one day she would move beyond reading about the world and actually go out and see it and experience the rich, wonderful life that, for now, she could only dream of.

Emma also enjoyed sharing these adventures with Alexander. He was too young to work regularly in his father's shop, but old enough to learn. Emma enjoyed teaching Alexander to read and helping him with book selections and explaining, in her own limited knowledge, gained mostly from reading, about things that he did not understand. She had even considered being a teacher, since she had spent several years teaching her younger siblings their school lessons. Teaching would be a good profession for Emma and would take care of her in later life.

Boston was a place where people liked to be educated and put much importance on learning. Emma liked the idea of being a part of that. Her own teachers had been very encouraging to her in pursuing a career as a teacher.

Especially supportive was her current teacher, Mrs. Atherton. She was always giving Emma the opportunity to read about new things by loaning her books from her own personal library. She had come from a family of the middle-class, much like Emma's own family. Her father worked hard and had even educated himself. At the cooperation, and insistence, of his father-in-law, a somewhat wealthy banker, he had gained a degree in education and had become the principal of Emma's school. This background, from both her father and her mother had allowed Mrs. Atherton to compile a large and rather unique collection of books that she shared only with her 'special students' that had displayed the same love for reading that she, herself, possessed.

Emma was so lost in the adventure of her last book that she did not notice her mother waving at her to come over.

"I think she is dead, Mama!" Louisa cried, as she continued tugging at Emma's sleeve, almost in tears.

Her mother gave Louisa a stern look. She kept trying until Emma woke up from her daze.

She looked dreamily at Louisa, "What's the matter?"

"Are you alright?" she sobbed, hugging Emma hard around the waist.

Emma hugged her back and gave her a sweet smile. "Of course I'm alright. Why are you crying?"

"I thought you had died!" Louisa replied. She hung her head, then looked back up at Emma, as if to be sure. Louisa had always been very dramatic and took everything very seriously. She hugged Emma again, even harder this time.

Emma was always patient with Louisa when she got this way. She was actually envious of her baby sister's ability to be so animated. She tried hard not to snicker as she let Louisa come to the point.

"Oh! " Louisa exclaimed as she noticed the grim look on her mother's face, "Mama needs you."

Emma now detected her mother wiggling her finger at her, indicating for her to come to where she was sitting. Mrs. Stanfield was not one to chase her children down, but always expected them, out of respect, to come to her. Emma immediately pried Louisa from her waist and went to her mother.

"Honestly, Dear! You must stop day dreaming, especially here in town. What must people think. And with your sister going on so..." Samantha shook her head unapprovingly. "Do you think you could stay awake long enough to run to the Post and see if we have any mail?"

"Yes! Yes I can!" Emma beamed at the chance to get out of the dress shop on her own and go anywhere. She was half way out the door before her mother could say another word.

"Please walk, Dear!" she almost yelled after her daughter. "Do not be long."

Her mother's warnings fell on deaf ears. 'Being long' was exactly what Emma had in mind. She scurried down the stone pathway outside the shop, trying not to look like she was running. Maybe if she hurried she could stop at the Library for a moment without being missed. She was around the corner and on the main street now. It was crowded with shoppers and business men going here and there. The Post was just down the block.

Emma stopped and glanced on down the street to where the Library stood. It was a small library, mainly used by those on their end of town. It did not have as many books as the main library, but enough to keep Emma Stanfield happy and reading. She realized she was wasting time and hurried to open the door to the Post. As she reached for the door handle, the door opened for her.

She noticed a neatly gloved hand reaching around her to provide her assistance by holding the door for her. She looked up behind her to find Cedric Jordan's smiling face.

"How do you do today, Miss Stanfield?" Cedric said, still smiling like a Cheshire cat.

"Very well. Thank you, Mr. Jordan," Emma was cordial, and gave Cedric a warm smile in return. Cedric had been visiting their house several times during the last winter. He would come and visit with Samuel, as they had gone to school together. He would also linger around Howard

Stanfield's shop, asking questions and acting interested in the business of making furniture and general business as well. The Stanfield family knew that he was much more interested in the Stanfield daughters, but for the life of them, they could not figure out which one. Cedric doted on all the females of the household and did not seem to be particularly fond of one over the other. He never spoke to Howard about the idea of courting one of his daughter, either. He was simply a fixture in their parlor and made all, yet none, feel desired.

Emma was sure that it was not because of herself that Cedric made his frequent calls upon their home. But was sure that her mother was holding out hope for someone and that if her sisters were happily married, Cedric would do as a suitable husband for her third, or fourth daughter, as well.

Mr. Jordan held the door as Emma stepped into the Post and followed her to the counter where a clerk was waiting to serve them both.

"Have you any mail for the Stanfield family?" Emma asked the clerk. As she waited, Cedric continued to make idle conversation with her and she answered back.

"What are you doing out on such a fine day?" Cedric asked.

Emma watched for the Postal clerk who had gone to the back. "Shopping with my mother and sisters at the dress shop," she finally replied.

"Have you found any smocks to your liking today?" he plodded on.

"No. I was just browsing. I believe my sisters have found some suitable dresses, though."

Cedric smiled and hesitated, not sure how to respond. He was a sweet boy, but very unsure of himself and always had a hard time conversing, especially with women.

Just then, the clerk came back and handed several envelopes to Emma. "Thank you," she threw at his direction, too interested in the letters to look up. She attempted to escape Cedric walking her back to the shop by practically skipping from the Post office, waving good-bye over her shoulder with a large smile just for him. She was gone before he could turn to ask for his own mail.

Emma walked briskly toward the library, as to not be caught again in Cedric's social advances. She was just entering the library when she noticed him come out of the Post through the corner of her eye. He was scrutinizing the street, obviously looking for her, but she was in the door before he noticed. She leaned against the inside of the door, almost out of breath and feeling like she had won a prize.

Slowly she caught her breath and the excitement of winning at the chase subsided. She stood up straight and examined the main room of the library building. No one seemed to notice that she had even entered. She saw several young people glancing through books and a librarian at the back, replacing books onto the shelf from a basket on her arm. It was always so peaceful here. It was one of her favorite places. No one was even allowed to speak, except in whispered voices and only to inquire of the librarian. Emma loved the silence which was emphasized by the comparison to her own busy home.

Emma spent a moment wandering about the book-lined shelves, perusing the selections and occasionally taking out a book to examine it more closely. Finally she noticed the librarian back at the main desk in the middle of the room. She wandered over to speak to her, "hello Miss Graham," Emma whispered.

"Why, hello Miss Stanfield," she replied. "Have you finished your book already?"

"Yes! It was wonderful," Emma pulled the book from her handbag where she had been hiding it from her mother. She laid it on the shelf next to the selection she had just retrieved from the shelf. "I would like to take this one, now."

Miss Graham examined the returned book and marked her log. Then she turned the page and wrote again, entering Emma's new selection. "Here you are. Enjoy your reading," she smiled. "I hope to see you again soon."

"Yes, ma'am! I will be back on my next opportunity. Thank you!"

The library was again quiet. Emma walked over to a small table and sat down on the comfortable chair. She only intended to stay for a moment, just to read a few pages of her new book before getting back to her ordinary life outside of books. As she sat down, she inadvertently dropped the pile of letters from the Post. She had forgotten all about them. In fact, she never usually even looked at them when sent to retrieve the mail.

Emma leaned over and scooped up the mail and something caught her eye. It was a letter was addressed to her!

Chapter 3: The Letter

Emma did not get mail. None of the children got mail in her family and her father did not approve of her opening mail not addressed to her. But this WAS addressed to her. Actually, it was to "Miss Stanfield".

She supposed the letter could be to any of the five Miss Stanfields living at her house. Or it could have been addressed incorrectly and might have meant Mrs. Stanfield or even Mr. Stanfield. But there it was, Miss Stanfield. She stared for a long moment at the letter. The handwriting was very plain, but neat. It was so neat that it appeared the author had taken great care in getting each letter correct, therefore emphasizing to Emma that they did, in fact, mean for the letter to be addressed to Miss Stanfield.

Emma supposed that since the letter was obviously to one of the Misses in her home and she was, in fact, one of the Misses; and since it was not in any way evident from the outside of the envelope exactly which Miss in the Stanfield house the letter was for, that it made as much sense for her to open the letter as any of her sisters. And since Emma was the one who had seen the letter first and was in possession of the letter that it made sense, as well, to her to be the first to open the correspondence and read the content.

She very carefully looked around, not that anyone in the library would have cared that she open the letter or not. It made her very nervous and also very excited to open this letter, perhaps just because of the novelty of getting a letter addressed to herself or possibly because of the adventure of the unknown.

Emma finally opened the letter and carefully removed the contents, unfolding the piece of paper. She read the letter to herself. She was in such unbelief of the content that she gasped out loud. Could this be true? What type of person would write such a letter? Emma was, in fact, faced with a letter offering the reader one of the greatest adventures of her lifetime!

She folded the paper carefully back to its original size and laid it on the table, as if it was burning her hands and she must put it down. Then she slowly picked it back up and read it again. The letter, obviously written in a man's handwriting, read as follows:

Dear Miss Stanfield,

My name is Jack Campbell. I live in the state of Tennessee. My Grandmother, Harriet Campbell, has convinced me to write to you, urging you to fulfill your family's commitment of betrothal. The details of the pledge were made by Harriet Campbell and your own ancestor, Retha Lindsey, upon the time when my father, William Campbell, and your mother, then Samantha Lindsey were to be betrothed to be married by their mothers, who were close acquaintances. As your mother, Samantha Lindsey, took it upon herself to escape from such an obligation and was, indeed, married to another, your father, Howard Stanfield, and, as your grandmother, Retha Lindsey, was not inclined to conclude her friendship with my grandmother, the following arrangement was constructed. The first daughter born to Samantha Stanfield and the first son born to William Campbell would become engaged and soon-after married to each other to restore and conclude the original agreement between the two old friends.

As I am the oldest son of William Campbell and you are the daughter of Samantha Lindsey Stanfield, and further that I find myself living alone with two small children in a part of our country that is still somewhat untamed and not ample in the supply of ladies, and as I am in need of support and companionship, I here request that you do me the honor of becoming my wife.

You may find this request odd for I am not an adequate communicator. As I have been living in this savage country, I find that I am now lacking in some of the social graces to which I am sure you are accustomed, living in Boston. Yet, I assure you that my intentions toward you are completely honorable and that I give my pledge to you now and upon your acceptance of my proposal to provide you with as comfortable a life as is possible and to be faithful to you always.

I understand that this would not be a simple undertaking on your part, but I have confidence in your families honor and have thus included the enclosed writing of agreement to pay for your transportation to Tennessee upon your arrival. And though I know this would be difficult for you, I ask that you respond as soon as you possibly can. I wait in anticipation of your reply!

Sincerely,
Jack Campbell

Emma stared at the paper for what seemed to her like an eternity. In today's modern world, could it still be true that some were married by arrangement. And an arrangement made long before the contracted couple was even born.

She thought about her Grandmother Lindsey. Could this be something she did arrange and agree on in order to secure her own daughter's happiness at marrying for love, instead of family obligation. Perhaps she assumed that the matter would not be pursued, or that her family would not feel legally bound by this commitment.

Furthermore, Emma realized that this was most likely intended to be an arrangement between Jack Campbell and Samantha Stanfield's eldest daughter, June. For a moment forgetting the seriousness of this idea, Emma almost chuckled as she considered June, or any of her sisters living the harsh life of a farmer's wife in Tennessee, not to mention marrying a man who was in no way influenced by their beauty, grace and charm which they spent so much of their time cultivating. It was absurd! And taking care of two children! Emma knew that her sisters more likely enjoyed being the child and had never really shown any interest or concern in raising children of their own, much less someone else's. No! This would never work.

Finally, there was the issue of their current suitors. June was practically engaged already to Clayton Vance, and he suited her to perfection. Mary-Elizabeth had many men buzzing around her but was always intimating, at least in the private circle of her sisters, to be in love with George Butterfield. Violet was already starting to have many young men looking her way and trying to walk with her in town. She had even had a few 'visitors' at the house. Though Violet was not interested in one particular man, she was definitely interested in the social chase and all that living 'near town' had to offer. She despised visiting any of our relatives that lived too far into the country and considered it an abundance of 'fresh air' to go to a ladies tea 'alfresco'.

Emma's thoughts were interrupted by the sound of the large front door of the library closing with a loud thud. She glanced up, instinctively shoving the letter into her lap. The lady and gentleman who entered were not known to her and had immediately found something on the far side of the library to capture their attentions. Emma slowly raised the paper back to the table and smoothed it, then folded it back up and put it back in its original residence.

She held the envelope tightly as she thought for a moment, "What should I do?" She knew that upon returning home the letter would be discovered by all. She would have to answer the question of how the parcel had come to be open. Her father would have wanted to read the correspondence first, before letting any of the 'Miss Stanfields' ascertain its contents.

Emma knew that her father was a man of great honor. He would have diligently sought information concerning the facts of the letter, possibly from Grandmother Lindsey, and would have then possibly felt obligated, upon confirmation of those facts, to dedicate his eldest daughter to this man, Jack Campbell, and to a life that Emma was sure would be complete misery for her beloved sister.

Emma put the envelope carefully in her bag, glancing carefully around the room. She gathered the rest of the posts and her newly acquired book and rose to her feet, and walked slowly toward the door of the library.

'Miss Stanfield' knew exactly what she had to do!

Chapter 4: Visitors

It was now a little after ten in the morning as Emma resolutely strode down the street toward the dress shop. She had been gone for what seemed to her way too long, but as she entered _____s, her sisters were still admiring more dresses and seemed to have hardly noticed that she had even been gone. Mrs. Stanfield was standing with another lady in the center of the store, catching up on all the happenings in their small area of town.

Louisa was the only one that acknowledged Emma's absence at all, "Where have you been, Emma? I have been so bored without you." Emma smiled at her, but before she could begin to answer, Louisa went on, "Mother has been talking to Mrs. _____ for hours, and Violet cannot seem to choose one dress over another. Lizzy (as they sometimes called Mary-Elizabeth) & June have found the perfect dress... five times! And I am ready to go home, but Mother keeps telling me to 'be patient, my dear'." Emma was still smiling sweetly and looked intent on what her sister rambled on about, but Emma was far, far away.

Louisa took a short breath and continued, "Where did you go? I twirled around and you were gone somewhere and I would have loved to go with you. Did you go to the library? Is that a new book?"

Emma had completely forgotten about the book, "Oh, yes Louisa, it is."

"What is it about? Can you read it to me?"

Their mother interrupted the train of words charging out of Louisa, "Did you get the mail, Dear?"

"Yes, mother," Emma replied.

"Oh, did I get anything in the mail?" Louisa interrupted.

Samantha Stanfield stared at her daughter as if she had just asked if she could fly to the moon, "and what, exactly, do you think you would get in the mail? Why of all the ridiculous things, a young girl getting mail. Who would be writing to you?" She turned her attention back to Emma as if never expecting an answer to what she saw as an obvious rhetorical question. "Well, just give the mail to your father when we get home." Her attention was immediately diverted from the subject, to Emma's relief. "Now girls, we must be going," and she was on her way out the door, waving goodbye to her acquaintance and the shop keeper and expecting the girls to follow closely behind.

June, Lizzy & Violet had to quickly put away the things they had been admiring and scurried toward the door.

"Oh, Emma, where have you been?" June questioned. "I have found the perfect dress for you and I wanted you to try it on." June was always trying to help all her sisters look their best, as she believed her obligation was as the oldest sister. She hooked her arm under Emma's and prompted her to walk with her as they left the shop. "You know, Emma," she began as they strolled arm-in-arm after their mother, "there is to be a ball at the end of the month. There will be many wonderful young men there for you to get acquainted with."

She paused briefly and smiled sweetly at her younger sister. Emma just smiled back. June continued, "Clayton Vance will be there. I was hoping you would help me with my hair. You always make it look perfect..." June always knew the perfect thing to say, always complimenting everyone. This skill was passed down from her mother and came in very useful in social conversations. "...and perhaps I could do yours..." she stopped again and looked deeply at her sister, then instantly turned and continued on her walk down the street, almost tugging Emma along. "You know, Clayton's cousin from the country may be there..." June trailed off, smiling sweetly and glancing occasionally at Emma to try to judge if she had even been listening.

Emma had not been listening. She could hear June talking and somewhere in her subconscious it had been heard, but Emma's mind was still on the letter, and on her now resolute decision of what to do about it.

As the Stanfield women arrived home, the house seemed very much alive and abuzz with activity. There was a beautiful buggy parked near the house. It had two seats and lovely white top with hanging fringe all around. It belonged to 'Gran' and Grandfather Lindsey. This was just what Emma had hoped for. The Lindseys lived just a few blocks away and the children enjoyed walking the short distance to visit their grandparents quite often. Gran, as the grandchildren referred to their grandmother Lindsey, did not care to walk anywhere if she did not have to. She had invested too much in her shoes to want to ruin them.

Gran and Grandfather did love to see their daughter and their grandchildren. They expected regular visits at their home, both formal family gatherings and quiet visits with each child and they found as many occasions as possible to drop over to see the Stanfields as well. Samantha was their only child and they doted on her, and, by extension, her husband and children.

They entered the house and Louisa ran to the parlor to greet their guests. They had been sitting, enjoying tea with the Stanfield men. Grandfather was on his feet and began giving hugs to all the girls, one-by-one, as they entered the room. In turn, each would then go to where Gran sat perched on her chair and kissed her cheek. Louisa still acted as though she had not seen them in years each time she saw them. Gran always commented on how unladylike her behavior was, but always commented on how unladylike her behavior was, but anyone observing could tell she would not change it.

The Lindseys were very formal most of the time, but they realized that Howard Stanfield's home was not always. They enjoyed taking the grandchildren to their house, especially the girls, and expecting them to act like high society ladies. However, their love for their daughter and their desire to spend time with her and her family helped them overcome their distaste for the common life of the Stanfield house and make allowances.

In like manner, Howard Stanfield had decided a long time ago that peace in their families was well worth the sacrifice it was for him to act 'genteel' upon occasion to suit his mother-in-law. He also loved Samantha and loved to make her happy and he knew that this made her happy. Howard also had an appreciation for society and for the training the Lindsey women were giving to his daughters to allow them the choice, when the time came, as to what kind of life they would want to lead.

As was their custom when the day came to go into town, the Stanfields would be having a less formal meal today. Emma and Violet, after a proper amount of time visiting, hurried off to the kitchen to begin to fix things. Samuel and Jasper, ever too glad to leave the stifling parlor, dutifully followed just behind them, offering their assistance. Emma stopped before leaving and asked if her grandparents would be joining them for the mid-day meal. Of course, they would be.

Emma made a quick excuse and hurried to her room before going to the kitchen. She shut the door, making sure she was alone, then hurried to her bedside dresser. She quickly removed the letter and hid it in the bottom drawer under her cloths. She deposited her purse in the top drawer and ran back downstairs, as not to draw questions. She was still clutching the rest of the mail and she easily deposited it on her father's desk just inside her parent's room on her way back downstairs.

In the kitchen, Violet was relating to her brothers her version of all their adventures in town. She teased, "You should come to town with us sometime, Samuel. Occasionally we run across Grace. And I know she would want you to have a new suit for the ball later this month."

It was almost an assumed fact that Samuel and Grace would be married, as soon as her father approved the arrangement. But Samuel, ever cautious and not too sure of himself around any female, would not admit it. He still acted like a schoolboy about her, hoping she would look his way. This made him an easy target for his mischievous sisters to torture with teasing. In fact, Grace only had eyes for Samuel and that was obvious to everyone.

Emma quickly began working on preparing lunch for the large crowd that was her family. This had become such a routine for her, fixing meals for so many, that she could achieve the task without a second thought most days. Today, however, was different. Emma's mind was constantly drawn back to the letter now deposited secretly upstairs. She almost found herself staring at the ceiling, as if to bore a hole in it and see that the letter was still safely hidden away.

Life around her kept moving at its normal pace. Finally her thoughts were interrupted by Samuel, "Are you alright?" Emma had not noticed that he was standing right in front of her, staring at her.

"Yes," she quickly answered him with a smile and began to move around the kitchen again. She could tell he was not completely convinced, but as she worked and smiled and even forced herself to hum a low, cheerful tune, he eventually went back to his work of setting the table.

Emma felt she did her best at staying busy and looking as if all was normal throughout the meal and the busy kitchen time of cleaning up. Soon the men were back in the shop, along with Grandfather, who loved to go out and 'supervise' the work. Samantha and her mother were chatting over another cup of tea and some sweet cookies in the parlor while the girls sat around them, all working on their respective pieces.

Gran had always felt that young girls should learn to be useful in a way that would also allow them to remain "genteel". "Idle hands are the devil's workplace," she would say quite often. She had taught her daughter and her granddaughters each how to work some kind of needlework. They were to practice each day for several hours. The older girls enjoyed using this craft to create beautiful things for their rooms and future homes. They also liked to try to recreate the dresses that they had seen in the shops in town. They were not as successful at dress-making as they would like and many times would need 'fixing'. Gran was excellent at polishing up their efforts.

Emma was considered the most 'handy' of all the Stanfield ladies. She had inherited her grandmother's talent for finishing things and could make their dresses look just like those for purchase. However, she did not usually care about that. Emma was a more practical person. She enjoyed a fancy dress, but thought her efforts were better suited to quantity, rather than items of the highest quality. She could make simple smocks that would last through much use and many washings.

On the days that Gran came to visit, however, Emma appeased her by working on adding decorative finishes or fixing ball gowns for her sisters. She would have much preferred to be outdoors working in the garden. Emma even enjoyed going fishing with her brothers, which was strictly forbidden for her to even insinuate in front of Gran Lindsey.

The afternoon was being whittled away in the parlor, and Emma had something quite different in mind. She was watching for her opportunity to speak with Gran alone, but was not hopeful about it in such a busy house. It soon became dark and just when she thought her chances were gone, her grandmother rose from her seat.

"This has been such a lovely afternoon, my dears," Gran announced. "Your grandfather and I must be getting home now." The girls all dutifully sighed their unhappiness at this suggestion, though they were, in fact, all ready to stretch their legs. Gran put her needlework items in her bag, leaving it for someone to carry for her. Emma dutifully got to her feet and almost darted for the bag, still hoping to spend a few moments alone with Gran.

Then, as if she had read Emma's mind, Gran announced, "I would like one of you girls to come and stay with us tonight. It has been so long since I have talked to you by yourselves."

Emma was by her side and smiling, "I agree! I have missed talking with you." All the other ladies in the room stood quietly with a look of shock on each of their faces. They all knew that when Gran invited just one grandchild over to her house alone, she was wanting to find out about their future plans, a subject that they all knew Emma detested to discuss.

“Well then, Emma, why not come with us yourself,” Gran said, linking arms with Emma, “and we will have a nice little chat.” Emma grinned slyly. That was exactly what she had in mind!

Chapter 5: A Talk With Gran

It was a pleasant ride to Gran’s house. Emma could hardly contain the smile on her face. She could hardly believe that things had worked out so well toward her ‘plan’. She spent most of the ride concocting how she would get Gran to talk about her daughter’s past engagement to William Campbell, without awakening her suspicions.

As they entered the house, Emma could smell the fresh scent of lavender. This was a beautiful house and Emma did love to visit and take in the aroma of flowers, tea brewing or fresh bread from the oven. It always smelled good here.

“Why don’t you go to your room and freshen up, Dear Emma, then come down to the solarium and we will have a nice cup of tea and some cookies that Jeanette baked fresh this morning.”

Emma obliged and headed straight for the stairs. Soon she was back downstairs, feeling fresh and ready to take on her grandmother in her undercover endeavor.

“I am so glad to get to come and talk to you, alone, Gran. It has been far too long.” Emma coaxed, knowing this was what her grandmother was wanting. She paused, took a sip of tea and waited.

“Yes, I agree,” came Gran, as if on cue. “I do have something I would like to talk to you about, Dear.” She stopped and eyed Emma who was sitting and looking distracted by all the pretty things in the room. “Have you given any thought to any of the young men in town?” She added, being very direct.

Emma was ready, “Oh, yes, Gran!” she replied. “There are so many. I suppose that is one of the reasons I wanted to come talk with you, alone.” She could see her grandmother’s eyes brighten. “I think it would be so hard to choose,” Emma chose her words carefully, “I need your help.”

From her silence, Emma supposed she had really taken Gran by surprise at these type of comments coming from her, so she continued, “have you ever heard of an arranged marriage?” Finally, it was out there. Emma lifted her cookie in triumph and started nibbling on it, waiting.

Her grandmother sat, looking completely washed of color, as if she had seen a ghost. She picked up her cup and saucer and it rattled so that Emma almost got up to help steady it for her, but she managed to control her urge and sat there, calmly eating cookies and drinking her own tea. Finally, she started again, “Did you ever consider an arranged marriage for mother?” she only paused a moment to eye Gran who sat wide-eyed, perched on her chair. “I mean, well... of course not, I ... suppose there was never anyone for mother but father, but... have you ever heard of such a thing?... as parents,” again, Emma paused for effect and this time looked directly at Gran and smiled, “or grandparents, choosing a man for their girls to marry?”

Emma felt as if she was on a wagon, rolling down a hill, unable to stop. She continued, “I think it might be a good idea!”

Gran finally found her voice, just for a moment, “Really!?... Dear?” she quizzed with a confused look on her face.

“Oh, yes! I think there are many young ladies who have no idea how to choose a proper husband, and could benefit greatly from the... wisdom of those... more mature than they.” Emma had taken great care in every word, hoping her grandmother would confide her own attempts to be the voice of maturity for Samantha.

“Well, I think that is very astute of you, Emma! Marriage is a very important step for a young woman and it would do you good to listen to those who can see more clearly and who love you. They would give you good advice. But as to an arrangement of marriage, I suppose that most people want to marry for love and would not care for this idea.”

The conversation was going well, but Emma was afraid that Gran would tire of it before she got the information she was looking for. She pushed on, “So you would not have arranged a marriage for mother, then, would you?”

Again, Retha Lindsey went ashen. She stared at Emma so hard that it almost made her regret this whole idea. Then, just as quickly, her look softened and she looked soulfully down at her hands lying in her lap. After a moment, she continued in a very soft and almost regret-filled voice, “I had a very dear friend when I was a young girl. Her name was Harriet. I always thought that your mother would marry her son.” Gran stopped there for a long moment, then looked up with a smile for Emma, “but she chose your father instead... and he has made her very happy... and I am happy, too... because I got you.” She reached over and squeezed Emma’s hand with a very loving smile.

“I am too!” Emma smiled back. Emma was so glad she had come to stay with Gran tonight. This was a special moment and she would never forget it.

But Emma now knew that Jack Campbell’s letter could be true!

Chapter 6: Daydreaming

Emma slept in the most comfortable bed. She always felt like a princess at Gran’s house. Yet she had the most restless sleep. She had so much on her mind, so much to do! She had laid in the dark last night, repeating the letter over and over in her mind. She could tell there was some urgency to this matter and that if she was to accept this offer, she would have to hurry. She was also afraid that the longer she waited, the more likely she would lose her resolve.

She thought of the description, the savage and untamed country that was lacking in social graces. She had lived in Boston her whole life and had become accustomed to life in town. She enjoyed having a library and going town and seeing all that life had to offer there. She was also

very close to her family and must include in her decision the fact that she would not get to see them often if she moved to Tennessee, possibly never again!

However, there was a part of her that had always wanted to break free from all of this life, not because she found it horrible, but because she was not sure she was best suited to it. She did not enjoy the fancy dresses or strolling up and down the street, hoping to see a gentleman of your liking. She had never really had any gentlemen callers, except for possibly Cedric Jordan, whom she was convinced was always hoping to spend time with one of her sisters. She was fairly sure that her family held out little hope for her marrying well, and she tended to agree with them. She could not imagine herself as a socialite.

Emma had always enjoyed a simple life, working hard in their home and in the garden, spending quiet afternoons reading books. She enjoyed talking to others and having close friendships, but she did not look forward to large gatherings and social events. Perhaps that is why when she read this letter it seemed to fit her. There was a part of her, in spite of the fear, that was actually excited of the prospect of the great adventure ahead of her.

There was also Jack Campbell! Emma had tried not to think much about him so far. She had concentrated on finding out if there would be some truth to the letter at all and her mind had been kept occupied with details of how, exactly, she planned to pull off this escapade. But in the still of the morning, she was having a hard time getting him out of her head.

What was he like? She had originally fictionalized an idea on first reading the letter. She assumed he was a similar age to June, but thinking back now, there was nothing in the letter to indicate that. The words did seem to be from a somewhat older character, with a bit of maturity. And there were children. This was a man who had been married and had a family. He did indicate that he needed help with them, so Emma could guess that they are young, but how young?

And how did Jack's wife die? His letter stated that he was of the determination, as was Emma, to marry for life, to be always faithful, so she must have died. Was it from childbirth? Or could it be that she was murdered by savage Indians that Emma had read about? Perhaps the life in this untamed country was just too hard for a woman to survive, especially a woman bred to life in town.

Finally, on this topic, Emma could not help but wonder how much Jack loved his wife. Would she be able to fill the void that had been left behind? Or would she want to? Though she was not good with socializing with men, Emma had always gotten on very well with the many boys that were in her life, her brothers and their friends, schoolmates and boys she had known from church. She prayed that someday one would come along that would understand her and would want to marry her and that she would be in love with him as well.

Emma had never over-fantasized about romantic love. She saw love as a commitment that grew in your heart until it was so big that it had to be shared. A promise of faithfulness to one other person that would be warm and fulfilling now, while they were young and energetic, and later, as they started a family or even as they went through life's challenges and that they would grow old together, looking forward to each day.

For her, marriage was a commitment for life, and that is what she planned to give to Jack Campbell. But could he love her the same way?

Chapter 7: The Plan

Suddenly Emma realized that she had spent way too much time lying in bed, daydreaming. She was very concerned about so many things, but she had to have a plan. She made a list in her mind. She must pack a bag with all those things that she really needed, including the little bit of money that she had tucked away. The house must be prepared for her to leave. They were used to her being there and working in the kitchen and doing some of the housekeeping. She could not think about that too much or she might not go.

Emma also thought of saying good-bye to her family. She could not do this without tipping them off to her plan, which must remain a secret, but she would like to find a way to let them know how much she would miss them. Perhaps she could write a note and leave it in a place that they would find it, but not too soon as to stop her from her determined course. Yes, a note would be perfect. She added that to her list of items to take care of.

And now as to the timing of the plan, she knew it would have to be done quickly, first because of the urgency of the letter and so that Mr. Campbell would not attempt to write to them again and perhaps her father would intercept this second letter, and second, because Emma was afraid of changing her mind.

She planned to go home today and clean the house as thoroughly as possible, and prepare a few things for the kitchen to be left in the icebox for her family to eat. A snack for her to take on the trip would also be essential. Emma had no idea of how long this trip would take and she had little money to buy food or water on the journey.

She would also clean out one drawer in her dresser and begin going through her things when no one was around to collect in one place all the items she would take with her. She would have to travel light and be able to carry her own bags to the train station, but she wanted to be prepared for whatever she would face in this wild, new country.

Emma had been scurrying about the room as she thought of her preparations. She was now dressed and had made her bed, her personal items were collected into her small bag and she had tidied the room to Gran's satisfaction. She looked in the mirror and straightened and repined her hair into a neat bun on the back of her head.

She was just ready for the day when she heard a knock on her door. Opening the door, Emma was greeted by Gretta, Gran's upstairs maid, "Good mornin' mum," she said with a small curtsy, "The Lindseys is in the conservatory for breakfast, a waitin' on yerself, mum."

"Thank you, Gretta," Emma smiled back, returning the curtsy.

"May I git yer thins, mum?" Gretta added, seeing the bag that Emma had in her hand, "I'll put them downstairs for ya', miss."

"Oh, of course, thank you again," Emma handed the bag to Gretta. Emma was not used to having someone to do things for her, except when she came to Gran's house and it always seemed to take her time to get used to it again. Gran would not have liked Emma taking her bag to breakfast, and Gretta was always good to keep her from making these errors in Gran's home.

Emma followed Gretta down the stairs and then turned to walk into the conservatory and was greeted by both of her grandparents. Grandfather, of course, was on his feet, unwilling to sit until both ladies had been properly seated. He came to greet her at the door with a warm hug. Emma stopped to enjoy it, taking in the scent of her beloved grandfather, possibly for the last time.

"Why, are you all right, my pet?" he questioned, sensing her emotion in their embrace.

Emma looked up at him and smiled sweetly, all the memories of their times together racing through her mind, "Yes," she finally got out, "I am just glad to be here." He smiled back at her and took her hand and escorted her to the small table by the window where her grandmother was already seated, enjoying the exchange between the two of them.

Gran offered her hand and Emma instinctively took it, giving her a small kiss on her cheek, "Good morning, Gran."

"Good morning. I hope you slept well."

"Oh, yes, thank you," Emma hedged the discussion of her night's sleep.

They enjoyed a delicious breakfast together with fresh eggs and milk, warm biscuits and home-churned butter and fresh fruit of all kinds. Emma and Gran had a hot cup of tea, as well. The conversation was very light, especially compared to what had been on her mind all night, and Emma was glad. She enjoyed spending time with her grandparents when there was not a particular agenda up for exchange. It also gave her a chance to be a little spoiled, not having to do anything but enjoy her breakfast. Gran did not bring up anything about her future again or even ask her her plans for the day. They just had an enjoyable morning and gave her a wonderful memory to take with her.

Soon, though, it was time for Emma to return home. She felt so good about how things had gone here this morning and hoped that all her other plans would go so well. Gran rarely 'hugged' anyone, but Emma gave her a gentle hug as she left anyway. Grandfather walked her outside and gave her a big bear hug, "I thought since you are in such an affectionate mood today, I should take advantage of it," he grinned mischievously.

Finally she was on her way home and she was happy!

Chapter 8: Cedric

Emma arrived at the Stanfield house to find it all abuzz with activity. All the windows were open, though it was still a bit nippy out, and she could hear voices from all over her home as she approached the front door. She entered to see confirmation of as her family was busy scurrying about. Louisa was the first to notice her standing in the entry.

"Good morning, sleepy head," she chirped as she raced over and swung Emma around. "I am so glad you are home. I missed you!"

"Thank you," Emma gave her a twirl, as they were still hand in hand, "What is all the excitement I have missed?"

It was as if Louisa had forgotten all about it momentarily, then it all came back like a waterfall going over the edge, "Ooo, yes, it is so exciting. We are to have guests soon. We should take your bag upstairs." Without further explanation, Emma was practically pulled up the stairs all the way to their bedroom. Louisa took her bag and deposited it in the armoire for her with a fling.

Emma was almost in shock, but finally tried once again to spy out who this mysterious visitor might be, "Louisa, slow down. Who are you talking about?"

Again, Louisa took her hands and flopped them both on the bed, face to face. She could hardly contain herself, "It is Cedric!" she almost squealed.

"Cedric?!" Emma repeated, confused, "but Cedric comes here to visit so often, what is all the excitement for this particular visit?"

Louisa leaned in close and became as serious as Louisa can be. In a whisper she replied, "Cedric is coming to propose marriage!" She immediately grinned, and then began rolling all over the bed, giggling like a school girl.

Emma was sitting perfectly still, wondering to herself about whether this was true and, if so, to whom did Cedric plan to 'propose marriage' to? Louisa was again on her feet, hearing scuffling feet in the hall, she did not want her mother to catch her sitting idly while so much needed to be done. She yanked on Emma's hands, pulling her to her feet, "We must get back to work," she sang, and as she drifted quickly from the room, Emma could hear her melodiously flitting, "soooooo... exciting...!"

Though questions still remained in her mind, Emma quickly joined the crew of busy preparations. She saw her mother in her room with June and Lizzy, fixing Lizzy's hair. She assumed that since it was a well known fact that June was to marry Clayton Vance, that all this excitement related to Cedric must be because he had finally let his true feelings toward one girl be known and must be in love with Mary Elizabeth. Emma had been having such a good morning and this day was turning out to be full of joy throughout!

She entered the kitchen to find Violet barking orders to Jasper and Louisa. "We must have the good tea set prepared for the visitors, and Jasper, stop eating the biscuits."

Jasper looked at the biscuit in his hand with a sheepish look of guilt, then a second later popped it into his mouth anyway. His face turned red and he ran to the pitcher and poured a glass of water, making horrible sounds.

"What is the matter with you," Violet asked, her hands on her hips the way she had seen her mother do so many times to him.

He took another long drink before answering, "OH!!! That was awful! Are you trying to kill Cedric or impress him with what his life will be like after marriage?"

Violet immediately looked worried. She turned her attention to the tray of goodies she had just prepared, then noticed Emma for the first time, almost in tears. Emma had come over and put her arm around her shoulders, "don't worry about it. What does he know?"

"I know when something tastes wrong!" Jasper chimed in. Emma gave him a look that sent him running from the room.

Turning her attention to the tray, Emma picked up one of the biscuits. She carefully smelled it, then took a tiny nibble. "It is not too bad, Violet," she said sweetly, trying to sooth Violet's obvious pain. "What did you put into them?"

"I put flour, and soda, and ... I think a little water. Oh, I cannot really remember, I was in a hurry. What are we going to do? We ate all the biscuits you had made for breakfast. There is nothing to serve our guests! Oh, Oh, Oh we are ruined." Watching Violet talk was somewhat like going to the theater. She could make anything seem like the world was ending.

Emma immediately grabbed her apron and put it on. She tossed Louisa one as well. "Put it on. We might as well have a small cooking lesson right here and now."

"But there is no time!" Violet almost cried.

"Well then, we must hurry even faster." Emma went right to work, and worked fast, but was extremely conscience of making sure that Violet and Louisa learned this basic recipe. As she began, Samuel had come in with some wood for the parlor fireplace. She asked him to reheat the kitchen stove, as well. Before long, they had a new tray of wonderful blueberry biscuits, ready to go in the oven. She had made them thinner, so as to have them bake faster, and warned Violet to keep a very close eye out not to burn them or let them dry out.

Everyone went back to work, busying around the house trying to prepare for the visit. Emma still felt somewhat lost, not having had time to question anyone about the marriage proposal. She was still not completely sure to whom the proposal would be, thought she was quite confident it would be Lizzy.

Soon the squealing let everyone know that Cedric must be close by. "Everyone come quickly," they could hear their mother calling.

A scurry of activity ended with all of the girls seated in the parlor, as if they had been there all day, working on their handwork like proper ladies. The men of the family stood around the room in various places, leaning against something or another, trying to look interested in a book or to be deep in philosophical thought. Father was seated at the fire in his favorite chair, puffing on his pipe. No one would have ever guessed the worry he held for all of his children and their futures. He never showed it.

There was a ring at the door and it was as if everyone was holding their breath. No one seemed to move. Emma thought of the many times that Cedric had come to their house and had been completely ignored, moving about the home like the household cat, wandering underfoot, but never really noticed. Now he was the center of their universe for the day.

Cedric rang again.

All Stanfield eyes were on their father. Casually, Howard looked up, as if he had just noticed. He nodded to Samuel, "Please, son, could you be so good as to see who is at the door?" After a short moment of silence, a burst of laughter rippled through the room. Smiles showed on all their faces and they all felt considerably more relaxed, all except Lizzy, that is.

The rest of the day at the Stanfield house seemed to be filled with nothing but joy. Cedric had come and, though seeming very nervous, had asked to speak to Mr. Stanfield alone. After everyone had politely left the room, hovering just outside the door, he had asked for permission to ask Lizzy for her hand.

Howard Stanfield was not considered an extremely bright man by those who have a shallow acquaintance with him, but he was actually a man of deep thought. He would go to his shop and work, but his mind was often on other things. Upon hearing that Cedric had finally made up his mind and had decided to pursue only one of his daughters, Howard had given his decision, as the patriarch of the family, much deliberation.

His decision, which was not to be argued with, and which seemed to give a since of relief to the happy, yet apprehensive couple, was to allow Cedric to court Lizzy for a time, then, upon reexamination of the matter, he would most likely give his approval. This was not exactly what Samantha Stanfield had hoped for on this day, but she, too had to agree it was the best verdict.

This was satisfactory to everyone, as it gave Cedric a chance to convince Lizzy of his true affection toward her alone, and it allowed June to save face as the older, and yet unmarried and unengaged sister.

Howard's main concern was for the life-long happiness of each of his children.

Chapter 9: Talking with Father

That night, marriage seemed to be the only topic of conversation at dinner. Clayton Vance had called on June in the afternoon for a short while. It seemed more and more certain with each visit that he would soon propose to her. His family seemed to like June and, though her circumstances were not extremely wealthy, Clayton had plenty of money for both of them. June was also very popular with other men, but she was very conscience of subtly letting Clayton know that he was her first, and perhaps her only, choice.

Samuel and Grace had already privately committed to each other. Grace was from a family with some wealth, but not enough that Samuel felt he could depend on that for their livelihood, not that he would ever want to do that. He was, however, learning the family business and had come up with some innovative new ways to make furniture that made them even better than before. Howard encouraged this as he anticipated Samuel becoming his partner someday. Samuel was also a good salesman. He had helped increase he clientele as well. All this added up to his soon feeling sufficient to ask for Grace's hand officially from her father.

Lizzy, of course, was the most excited. She had reluctantly accepted her father's proposal to take things slowly, but she considered herself as good as married. She and June had spent much of the day discussing plans for their futures as ladies of their own households, with Violet and

Louisa hanging on every word. Their mother was busy giving advice and helping them look through their dresses to see what they had that was appropriate for a matronly lady and what would need to be added.

Howard sat mostly quiet throughout dinner, watching and listening to all the discussions around the table. He beamed with pleasure, thinking how proud he was of all his children. Everyone looked so happy and care-free tonight, enjoying each other's company as one big happy family should.

Perhaps the only exception was Emma. She had been listening to all the conversations and seemed interested, but she was very quiet. She had always been quieter than most of her siblings, but as Howard perused the many excited faces this night, she seemed to be somewhat melancholy.

Emma was actually listening intently, particularly to her sisters conversation. This truly convinced her that her plan to intercede with Jack Campbell was the best course of action for her family. Now that both her older sisters were in good situations with men that they cared about and that would take good care of them here in Boston, she could never allow this stranger to take them away to the wilds of Tennessee. She must take their place, she felt, to save them from what they would think a horrible fate.

After dinner, Emma worked quickly to finish the work in the kitchen to try to escape to her room and pack before anyone else went up to bed. She was about to make her exit as others were going into the parlor when her father stopped her, "Emma, do you think you could join me in the shop for a moment? I have something there that I need your help with." He smiled casually at her, then disappeared around the corner.

"Of course," she could barely get out before he was gone. She walked slowly to the back door leading out to the shop. It was strange for him to ask her specifically out to his shop for 'help'. She had visited with him many times while he was working. She enjoyed watching him create beautiful things from wood that she knew others would enjoy in their homes for many years. Yet she had never been asked to help before.

Emma entered the shop and looked around for her father. He was toward the back. Howard looked at his daughter lovingly and motioned for her to join him. On getting to the back, he turned and said, "There is actually just something I wanted to show you." He moved aside and pointed behind him to a lovely bench. Emma loved being outdoors and loved to sit and read, especially in a garden. She was always encouraging her father to make benches so that others could also find this joy.

"It is beautiful, father!" she exclaimed. She walked over to touch it. It had ornate carvings on the back, arms and legs and the seat was smooth. "May I sit on it?" she questioned.

"Yes," her father replied, coming over to join her on the bench, "as much as you'd like. It is going in our garden."

"Really!? How wonderful! It is truly a work of art, father."

"I made it for your mother, for our anniversary," he replied. "She has been saying lately that she would love a quiet place to sit by herself, or just with me, occasionally. She is always surrounded by you children, and she would not have it any other way, but she does need a chance to be herself, too."

Emma looked at her father very lovingly, "Why, Father, how romantic of you!" She grinned at him. Being romantic was not something his children ever got to see. He was always strong and helpful, sometimes silly and mischievous, but he saved his rare romantic moments for Samantha alone. It was extremely obvious, however, to his children just how much he did truly love her.

"Thank you for sharing it with me," Emma said with appreciation.

"Well, you were sort of my inspiration, you know. You said everyone should have a nice garden bench. One day maybe I will make one for you, too," he hesitated and looked at her, "maybe for your wedding."

Emma looked up in surprise at him, then she smiled, "maybe?"

"Are you alright, my dear? I mean, I know now you think your sisters are leaving you and that then you will be the oldest sister, but they will never go too far away, you know." He looked very concerned for Emma. "I noticed you looked rather melancholy at dinner tonight..." he paused, looking seriously at Emma, "You know you can talk to me, if you ever need to."

Emma squeezed his hand, "thank you," she replied sweetly. "I am alright. Really! I was just... letting them have their moments, and enjoying them with them. I am very happy for them. Really, Father!" She tried to get up, hoping not to talk too long or she might tell about the letter.

Howard still had a hold of her hand, "You will be married one day, too, Emma. And you will be happy. I know that because you are always happy, no matter what, but... I pray for your happiness everyday. I know it will come."

"That is wonderful, Papa," Emma replied, using the term of endearment that she saved for their special father-daughter moments like this. "Please always keep praying for me."

Emma almost left at that point, feeling the emotions overwhelming her as she thought about this possibly being her last chance to talk like this with her father. Then she turned and looked at him, "Father, when did you know that you loved mother?"

He smiled at her, a look in his eyes that took him back to a time long ago, yet something that was still there, growing stronger. "I feel like I have always loved her," he sighed, "but I love her more everyday!" He looked at her, as if to tell her the secrets of the universe, "Love is not something that happens 'to you', it is something 'you do', something 'you give'."

"Thank you, father!" Emma smiled and started out the door before all that she was thinking came pouring out.

Emma knew that she had much love to give. She thought for a moment about Jack Campbell, and about his children. Now she was completely convinced that going to Tennessee was the thing she must do. It was where she belonged, with a family that needed her and her love.

She went to bed that night feeling good. She pushed her sad feelings about leaving to the back of her mind.

All that she could see now was love, and tonight, she was going to be on her way to giving hers away!

Chapter 10: Breaking Away

Emma had gone straight to sleep, content in the fact of what she planned to do. She had spent most of the day traveling up and down delivering her things to her secret hiding place in the barn behind the house. Her brothers were the main ones that went in the barn and they would not have noticed her small pile in the corner, hidden under an old blanket. No one in the house seemed to notice, either. They must have thought she was preparing to wash or just spring-cleaning.

Her small purse was packed with the small amount of money she had, her Bible and another book that belonged to her that she might want to read on the way, a brush for her hair and a twig for her teeth with some peppermint oil, the brooch that Gran had given her on her 16th birthday, and the letter. She had also packed, in her larger bag, the primer she had used in school. She thought this would come in handy with small children living out in the wilderness who might not be able to attend school.

She had written a note to leave for her family, as well. She did not want them to worry, but she also did not want them to try and interfere with her plans. They would, of course try to talk her out of it and, as she had now made up her mind to go, she would have no part in that. The note could not be left out in plain view because they would find it too quickly and have time to stop her. She had checked and found out that the train left from her station at five in the morning. She wanted her family to know where she was by nightfall, so they would not be concerned for her safety.

Therefore, she had decided to leave the note at the post office. She had been there many times to pick up letters for her father, as on the day that her letter had come in the mail. She knew that their mail would be left at the post office until someone came to retrieve it. Samuel made deliveries most days in the late afternoon and then stopped by to see if anything was at the post for their family. She was sure this would be the best course to follow. The letter was also in her small bag, which, by this time was getting full.

The other piece of business that Emma had taken care of was to reply to Mr. Campbell. He had sent the note, not knowing if anyone would receive it or take it seriously. She decided to use some of the little money she had to send him a short telegraph. Emma had seen her father send several telegraphs, but had never sent one herself. She had gone by the office earlier in the day and sent the following message.

Mr. Campbell I accept your offer - stop -
I will be in Columbia in two days on the morning train - stop -
Miss Stanfield - stop -

Finally, the time had come! Emma awoke in the dark, as if she had had an alarm going off in her head that only she could hear. She was not sure of the exact time, but there was no light out so she believed it to be early. She lay there for a moment, listening. She could hear the heavy breathing all around her as her sisters slept. Nothing seemed to have changed since yesterday when she had woken up to hear them sleeping. And yet, everything had changed, especially for her.

“Goodbye sweet sisters. I shall miss you,” she whispered softly, almost to herself. “Goodbye family.”

She said a silent prayer, asking God to be with her on this part of her life’s journey, as He always was before. She thanked Him for the many blessings of her family, her home, her friends, her good health and strength and for her education. She asked for strength to be a Christian and do all things with love as she went to start her new life with the Campbells. Finally, almost feeling selfish for asking, but knowing that God could do anything and has told us but to ask, she asked God to bless her marriage; to allow them to be happy together for the rest of their lives.

Feeling revived after her prayer, Emma quietly got out of bed, being careful to pull the covers back around her sister so that she would not feel the cold of the spring morning. She was moving quickly now. She dressed and gathered her bag from the drawer. She went downstairs, thinking this would be the last time after making this trek each day for her whole life.

The kitchen was dark, but Emma knew exactly where everything was. She got out the little bit of meat and bread and the apple that she had set aside for her trip. Then she was out of the house and in the barn. She gathered her large bag and walked out into the yard. She took one last look around and, as it was still dark, she could not see much. She was glad.

Emma walked resolutely down the streets toward the post. The letter was slipped into the box. There was no one else in sight up till this point. The excitement and her nerves were pushing her on toward her goal, the train station. As she got out of the more familiar territory of her part of Boston, she walked more quickly. She prayed as she walked, asking for a safe journey and hoping to soon see groups of people, all gathering to ride her train with her.

She was soon inside the train station. It was not as busy as she remembered from the last time she had been there, but enough people that she felt she could be lost in the crowds. As she approached the window, she retrieved the paper that had come with the letter from Jack Campbell. Again, her nerves were on edge. What if this paper was not enough to get her a ticket? She did not have money for the ticket herself. She would have to return home. So many thoughts ran through her head.

“Good mornin’, ma’am,” the older man behind the window greeted her.

Emma smiled, “Good morning,” she returned instinctively.

“How can I help you today?” the man continued. “Where would you like to go?”

Emma handed him the piece of paper, “I am going to Tennessee, thank you.”

He stopped to study the paper for a moment. Then looked back up at Emma.

"I believe that paper should tell you what kind of ticket I need."

He glanced back at the paper, then looked back up at Emma, "Indeed it does. You will be traveling to Columbia, Tennessee, though... it will take you a while to get there."

"Yes, sir. I supposed it would," she said with confidence.

"Are you traveling alone?" The question did not sound in any way to question her ability to be on her own, just for his ticketing information. Yet it made Emma uneasy to state that out loud.

"Yes," she replied quietly.

"Alright, then, ma'am, you are all set." The man glanced at his pocket watch. "You might want to hurry, though. Your train leaves in about fifteen minutes."

He handed Emma her paper back and a ticket. She did not understand exactly what the paper was, but she was glad that it had achieved it's goal.

"Step to the back porch, ma'am, and to station two. When they announce your train, they will call for passengers to Alexandria, Virginia. You can see the ticket master at that station for further instructions, but I believe your train will continue on to Decatur, Alabama before you will have to change trains.

Emma thanked him and lifted her bags. She turned to survey the station. It was a busy place now, more people arriving every moment. Emma walked toward the back of the large room and out onto the platform. This was even busier. The trains made lots of noise and their steam filled the air in places. People were busy saying 'hellos' and 'goodbyes'.

She spotted the sign marked 'station two' and went to stand in that area. A train was already sitting on the track there, but Emma was not sure if she was to board or wait.

Soon a man in a uniform came walking along the platform, yelling, "Train for Alexandria now boarding on platform two! All aboard for Alexandria." He noticed Emma standing near the train with her bags in her hands. "You goin' to Virginia, ma'am?"

"Yes, sir. Should I board here?" she replied.

"Yes, 'em. Here," he said taking her bag and her hand, "let me help you." He carefully loaded her on the train and handed her back her bag.

"Thank you," she smiled at him. He tipped his hat and was off down the way, yelling again, "All aboard!"

Emma entered the train car and noticed many of the seats already filled. As she wandered down the aisle, she glanced from side to side, trying not to be too nosy. She finally found a seat near the window and sat down. She stared out the window at all the hustle and bustle of the platform. The car was just as crazy, with people putting bags away, finding seats, wiggling around in the cramped space of the train.

She was soon joined by a seat-mate, an older gentleman. He tipped his hat and asked to sit. Emma smiled slightly and gestured for him to take the seat.

"So where are you heading, young miss?" he boomed.

"I am going to Tennessee. And yourself?"

"I am heading back home to Virginia. A beautiful place, Virginia," he answered without taking a breath. "Have you ever been there, Missy?" He continued on without really giving Emma a chance to answer his questions, much less make comments. He talked about how cold Boston had been and how glad he would be to get back to a warmer climate.

Emma was glad to let the man go on without much participation on her part. She had too much on her mind for good idle conversation, but it was nice to have something to keep her mind busy, as well. Before she knew it the train was pulling out of the station and Boston was soon a memory. She glanced a few times out the window at the familiar sights of her home, then finally turned and gave her full attention to her riding partner.

Chapter 11: The Journey

Emma awoke and it was dusk. It had been a long day. She had spent the morning listening stories from Virginia. That had kept her mind busy. They stopped in the afternoon in Alexandria and she had said goodbye to him as he left the train. She, too, got off at the station and stretched her legs a bit. She had brought some snacks and she had a small bite to eat and some water. She had gotten quite hungry, but wanted to ration her food for the whole trip, since she was not sure exactly how long that would be.

The train left about half past three, headed on to Alabama. Emma was excited about getting to see so many new places. During this afternoon trip, she had no one sitting with her. She stared out the window and began to think.

"What am I doing?" Emma could not keep that thought from her mind. "Three days ago I was home, and I knew everything about my life. Now here I am in this strange part of the country, and I have no idea what my life has in store. And tomorrow..." she almost gasped out loud at the thought of tomorrow... "tomorrow I will be married!"

Emma had made up her mind, but now she was very nervous about her decision. She had agreed to marry a complete stranger! She knew nothing about this man except what he had written in the letter. She got the letter out from her bag and opened it slowly and carefully. She read it through again, concentrating on each word, as if it would give her insight into Jack Campbell's heart and soul.

After rereading the letter several times and feeling no closer to Mr. Campbell than before, Emma fell asleep, exhausted from the long day on the train and the overwhelming feeling of anxiety that she had felt since first reading the letter.

She had slept well and was enjoying a peaceful dream of some story she had read in a book about an adventure. She was awakened abruptly when the train changed speed and began to slow down. Emma looked out the window in the darkness around them. She could see lights up ahead. They must be coming to a town. They soon came to a station with a sign on the building marked 'Lynchburg'.

Emma was disappointed as she remembered her geography lessons and realized they were still in Virginia. She had hoped that she had slept longer than that and that they were, perhaps coming into Decatur.

She brushed her disappointment aside and gathered her things to depart the train. As she exited onto the platform, she was greeted by a delightful surprise. It was quite a bit warmer here than it would be this time of year in Boston. They often got snowfalls in the early Spring at home, but here it was pleasant and balmy. She wondered if this was typical weather in Tennessee as well.

The attendant offered her a hand as she descended the stairs to the platform. "Thank you," she offered him a tired smile.

"I hope you are having a pleasant trip, ma'am," he asked Emma.

"Yes, thank you!" She stepped away and looked around for a place to sit down. The night was so nice that she thought it would be good to get some fresh air. She enjoyed more of her food, this time allowing herself enough sustenance to get her through the night. She saved just enough for the end of her journey. Emma did not want to make a bad first impression on her new husband by coming to him hungry.

Soon they left the station and Emma was feeling quite refreshed. She thought she might sleep, because the train was dark, but she could not. The darkness beckoned her to travel deep into her thoughts. Again, she wondered about her new life. She thought about Mr. Campbell, and his children. The letter had said he had two young children. How old were they? What were they like? Quite? Wild, like their home? And would they accept her as a 'replacement' for their own mother?

And Mr. Campbell, would he see her as an understudy? Or could he ever love her for herself? Would she always be competing with a woman whom he had loved and lost? Emma became agitated and could no longer get comfortable in the chair. She tossed about, trying not to disturb those about her, mostly sleeping.

And what of Jack Campbell's character? She thought about the letter again. He had spoken of honor and pledged to be faithful to her. Emma had thought many times about her life as a married woman, as many young girls do. She knew that God required fidelity and commitment until death parts you. She had made this pledge to God and to whomever her future husband would be, as well. She understood about love, and how hard it could be sometimes, but that it was what bound two people together, through whatever may come to their lives.

Emma realized that Jack Campbell may never love her with the passion she had heard so much about from her sisters, but she what she wanted was commitment.

The night dragged on, as did the thoughts in Emma's head. She was becoming less excited about the adventure and more apprehensive about her new life. Emma closed her eyes and squeezed tightly. She took a deep breath and began to say a prayer to herself, asking God to bless her in her new life. A calmness came over her as she let go of the worry over things that she could not know were true. Her faith had always helped her to cope with difficult situations and now she called on it for strength, perseverance and contentment.

Emma finally drifted off to sleep with a smile on her face as the train raced through the darkness toward her destination.

Chapter 12: Jack Campbell

The train had made an early morning visit to Decatur, Alabama. Emma had had to exit the train and re-board another, headed for her final destination of Columbia, Tennessee. She had enjoyed hearing the sweet southern voices that sounded so different to her than what she was used to in Boston. Though she enjoyed listening to them talk, it also made her a little homesick.

She pushed these feelings from her mind as she enjoyed her last bit of food that she had brought with her. She purchased a cup of tea from a small restaurant located across the street from the station. They had small tables that were busy with customers. She sat at the table and drank the warm drink as quickly as she could without burning her tongue, not wanting to be late for her connecting train.

Back on the train and leaving the station at eight o'clock, Emma felt refreshed from her short stroll about the station and from the hot cup of tea and the last of her food. She had her bags put away and was sitting quietly by herself. A young couple and their children were sitting across from her. They were all talking to each other and the girls were giggling about everything. They were going to Kentucky to visit their grandparents. Emma would only be going part of the way with them.

Emma watched them. She wondered what it would be like to have children of her own, laughing and enjoying happy times as a family. She knew that the family, at least, would be an experience she would not have to wait too much longer to experience.

As the train approached Columbia, Emma was on the edge of her seat in anticipation. It had only been four days since she had first read the letter and decided to make this trip, but it now seemed like ages.

She smoothed her hair and pinched her cheeks; a habit her mother had always felt necessary when meeting someone new, especially a young man. She mustered her best smile and tried to look excited and happy to be there. She was ready!

The train stopped at the platform. Emma had not looked out the window. She was now afraid to look into the face of the wild frontier man whom she had come so far to see. She waited until several people passed her by, exiting the train. Finally, it appeared that she could not delay any further. For a split second, she almost stayed on the train, but then, she got up and walked to the door.

The station was busy this morning, people rushing to and fro. Emma stood in the middle of the confusion, looking all around. She was almost dizzy with all the activity. Many people entered the train, others were embracing loved ones and eventually left through the station or down the stairs at the end of the platform.

Emma began to wonder, had Mr. Campbell received her telegraph? Had he been able to come and pick her up? As the area emptied and the conductor began yelling, "All aboard", Emma questioned if she should re-board the train before it left, before it was too late!

She looked around frantically. Then she noticed an older gentleman, who appeared just younger than her father, sitting alone on a bench. He was staring at her. She glanced around to see if, perhaps, there was someone else around her that he could be giving his attention to, but she was alone.

She looked at the man and smiled a faint smile. Could this be Jack Campbell, just sitting and watching her in her obvious confusion? Finally, as she felt she had no other options, Emma began to step toward the bench, contemplating what to say.

She opened her mouth to speak, not sure if words would actually come out, when she heard a voice from behind her, "Are you Miss Stanfield?"

Emma could hardly move. The voice sounded much younger than the man sitting in front of her. She slowly turned to face him.

"Yes..." she hesitated, "I am Emma Stanfield." She just stood and looked at him, not sure what to do next.

The man smiled a warm smile at Emma, giving her an instant of comfort. He was very tall and dressed distinctively different from most of the men in Boston that Emma knew. He was wearing worn, but clean trousers and a plain brown cotton shirt, both neatly pressed. He wore boots and a large brimmed hat, which he held in his hand now. As he removed the hat, Emma noticed his somewhat wild blonde, curly hair. He ran his free hand through it in an attempt to straighten it, but it instantly fell back to its original place. His skin was tanned from obvious hard work in the sun and his hands were rough, but clean. Most of his face was covered with a thick beard, also trimmed and neat.

The whole picture of him was exactly what Emma had always seen in pictures of farmers from the west. All except his eyes! His eyes were soft and blue and seemed to almost have a mischievous spark in them, like a young child who had been caught fishing on a school day.

"I am Jack Campbell," he smiled at her through his thick beard. "I got your telegraph just yesterday. I am so glad you have come... Welcome to Tennessee."

Neither Emma nor Jack had moved from their original spots. They both tried to smile, but were equally nervous and unsure as to what to do next. Finally, Jack stepped forward, reaching for Emma's bags, "Beg your pardon, ma'am, let me get those bags for you."

Emma complied, handing him the bags. She was still just standing and staring at the strange young man. Jack, however, seemed to have recovered more quickly from their initial presentation. After taking the bags, he stopped, giving her a second to say something. When she did not, he stood and glanced down at his feet and around him for a moment, then back up at Emma. He smiled again, as if he knew exactly what she was thinking.

Jack did realize that this was extremely hard for Emma. He had been prepared to offer her any allowances necessary so that she might have time to adjust to this new life.

Finally, Jack interrupted her silence, "I suppose we should go now."

Emma realized that she had been standing still and staring, not her normal practice upon meeting someone new. She tried to quickly compose herself, "Yes," was all she could manage to say. She tried to smile, but knew that it looked forced.

Jack smiled back, then, in order to let her have a moment to herself, he turned and began to walk slowly off the platform, down the side stairs. He glanced back periodically to make sure that he was not leaving Emma behind.

Emma thought how courteous he was being. He seemed to be looking out for her like a young child on her first outing. In a way, this was true. Emma had never been too far from home or from her parent's watchful eye. To her, this was like starting off in the world for the first time, again.

Chapter 13: Columbia

As they walked around to the front side of the station, Emma saw the town of Columbia. There were lots of people coming and going up and down the street. She had wondered what type of place her new home would be. This was, of course, much smaller and very much 'younger' than Boston, but she rarely wandered far from her small section of town back home, so, in a way, this was comparable to what she was used to.

Emma felt as if they would be a spectacle, walking down the street together, yet not together. She just knew that everyone would know that she was that girl who had come from way up North to marry a stranger. Yet, as they walked, no one spoke to them, except for the occasional, "Good day," or a smile or tip of the hat as you would get from strangers in a large town. No one seemed to know Mr. Campbell, either. She supposed that he was the type of person who was not very social.

Jack had continued to stay just ahead of her, giving her some time to process things, yet ever watchful of her as to not lose her. He had walked them around to the street, then down the block. The town had crude buildings, all made of wood. There were no stone or brick buildings anywhere, as in Boston, and the entire town looked new, except for the dust and dirt that covered each surface. Emma supposed that dust would be her constant companion here in the wild west as she noticed each shop had someone sweeping the dirt from the porches.

The roads were also just dirt, though packed down. The street where she lived had had lovely looking cobblestones paving the path, with old trees lining the sides of the road that almost seemed to have a history of their own. She did notice that these dirt roads had already kicked up enough dirt that her once lovely shoes now looked brown. However, this smooth dirt road was easier to walk on. Emma tried to file away that positive thought to give her strength.

Another thing that Emma noticed in their short walk were the shop windows. In Boston, the beautiful shops had large front windows, through which you could admire beautiful dresses or hats or shoes. Here in Columbia, the few windows Emma noticed were practically and efficiently filled with stock items like sacks of corn seed or rows of work boots, such as Jack Campbell wore.

Emma was strolling slowly down the street, taking it all in, when she heard that voice again from behind her. "Ma'am, I believe we will stop here, if you'd like," Jack interrupted her thoughts.

She spun around to see Jack was now behind her. She had not been paying attention and had not seen him stop. She glanced up to see the sign on the building marked, simply, "food". She slowly walked back to where Jack was standing and gave him a polite smile, "I am so sorry. I suppose I was not paying attention to where you were going. Are we stopping here, Mr. Campbell?"

Jack smiled. He was glad to have her talk to him at all, even though it was always very formal. This was progress of some sort to him. He stared at her for a moment.

"Is something wrong?" Emma broke into his thoughts.

"I suppose I am not used to being called 'Mr. Campbell'." Since their first words, he had had a very soft, smooth voice. It was not as 'southern' as some of the others Emma had experienced during this trip. But now, he sounded as though he was teasing her, using an obviously fake 'Boston' accent when he said his name.

Emma stared at him, this time with an air of disgust and dismay that he dared to make fun of her. "What should I call you, then?"

"Darlin', you can call me anything you like," Jack threw back at her, not with her same repugnance, but with a light-hearted since of humor. "But most people just call me 'Jack'." Then he smiled that warm smile at her again.

Emma was not impressed by his joking. Yet, she could not seem to stay angry at him for long. His smile was almost contagious and in a moment she, too, was smiling, almost giggling. "Please, then, stop calling me 'ma'am'. My name is Emma!"

Jack kept smiling and tipped his hat at her as if to say, "tux shay". "Shall we go in then, Emma?" He emphasized the last word.

"Yes, thank you..." Emma hesitated, still feeling uneasy around this man that she now remembered she is about to be married to, "...Jack." She ended her words with a soft voice that said she was through with sarcasm, for the time being.

"Do you have business here?" Emma continued their conversation as they entered the small restaurant.

"I thought you might be hungry, after such a long journey," he returned very matter-of-fact. Jack looked at her questioningly, "Aren't you hungry?"

Emma thought again of her plan to ration her food so that she would not appear to be starving on their first meeting. "I am fine," she lied, knowing that her food had not been enough and that she was indeed hungry now.

Jack knew that this could not be true, as he had done some research and knew what a long journey this had been for her. He did not want to embarrass her, so he replied, "Well, I am starved. I got an early start this morning and did not have much breakfast." He looked at her from the corner of his eye, "Do you think you could, perhaps, eat a small bite with me..." he hesitated, then smiled again, "...just to keep me company while I eat?"

Emma was glad to consent!

Jack picked a small table in the corner and offered her a seat. Emma noticed that sometimes he acted almost crude in his language or his demeanor, but at other times, Jack was quite the gentleman. In his own way, he did seem to be conscious of her and her daunting situation. A woman came to their table and smiled at them, "What can I get for you today, Ma'am? Sir?" She seemed almost distracted by all the activity in the restaurant, rather than attentive to them, as a waiter in a finer Boston establishment would have been.

Jack looked toward Emma, "What would you like?"

"Just a cup of tea for me, thank you," Emma relayed to the waitress. Jack and the woman looked at her almost dumb-founded. Emma smiled politely, and waited for Jack's response.

The woman soon looked toward Jack for a response. "I will have the breakfast special," then he added with confidence, "and the lady will have the same."

Emma stared at him in disbelief. He had ordered her a large breakfast of she-did-not-know-what that she had said she did not want. The waitress had nodded and left to place the order in the other room with the cook. Emma glared at Jack.

"I know you are hungrier than that," he defended himself almost with a laugh. Then his face got a little more serious. "You will need the strength today." Then, as if it had just occurred to him that she might not have the money to pay for the meal, he added, "I am going to pay for it. You can eat it if you want to, or not."

Emma had never been out to a restaurant with any man who did not automatically assume that he would pay the bill. Columbia was indeed a strange place, where men and woman spoke their minds so openly. She had not made her mind up whether she liked it better or not. It was so different for her, yet, that is why she left Boston, because she wanted something different.

Their food was brought out almost immediately, as if it had been prepared ahead of time. In fact, it had been, and the cook had merely scooped it out onto their plates with no fashion of neatness or style, just mounded on the large plate. Then Emma smelled the food as the plate rested in front of her. She must admit, the food all smelled delicious... and she was hungry.

She sat waiting, expecting Jack to dig into his food first. When she looked up, she noticed he was just sitting and watching her, his hands still in his lap. He smiled at her, "It does smell good, doesn't it?"

"Yes," she had to admit, looking sheepishly down at her lap. Still he did not eat. She looked up quizzingly again into his smiling blue eyes.

"If you are ready, I will ask God's blessing on the food." Emma blushed and agreed as she bowed her head.

"Dear Lord," Jack began, "we thank You now for Miss Stanfield agreeing to come here and for her safe deliverance to us and for this food which You have blessed us with. Help us to always appreciate the abundant blessings You give us each day. In the name of Jesus I pray. Amen."

Emma looked up at Jack and smiled, "Thank you." He nodded and began to eat heartily. Emma began to sort her food with her fork into definable groups.

Spending time with Jack, she had almost forgotten why she was there. It was as if she had just met this nice young man and they were at the beginnings of getting to know each other. In fact, though, their entire courtship might only consist of their walk from the station and this one meal. Once again she was apprehensive about the day.

Jack had continued steadily eating his breakfast and was well over half way finished and Emma had barely started. "Is there something wrong with the food?" He asked, noticing the contrast. "I guess you weren't hungry, after all."

"No, I am, thank you, I am just... a slow eater," Emma said pleasantly, trying to sound grateful for the food and she did not want to waste it. In fact, this was more food than she usually served, even for her brothers back home. She was hungry from the rationing of the last few days, but she was not sure she would be able to finish all that was on the plate.

"Please don't feel obligated to eat all of that. I know it is a lot of food. That is why I like to eat here when I am in town. Eat what you want, then they will put the rest in a package for us to take home. You might get hungry later on the way home." Emma felt better now about the food. She did eat quite a bit, but she did not want to be to full.

After a little while when they sat and ate in silence, Emma spoke what had been on her mind, "May I ask you, what plans you have made?" she hesitated, then continued in order to clarify, "concerning the..." Emma's brow became quizzical, as if she was not sure exactly how to broach this delicate question. She could not look directly into Jack's eyes.

"...marriage?" Jack filled in. Emma still looked strange. "...concerning the marriage?" he clarified.

"Yes!" Now she looked at him, but her eyes fidgeted.

Jack stopped eating and wiped his mouth, clearing his throat. He, too, seemed apprehensive to talk about it. Finally, he went on, "We will be having the wedding as soon as we finish breakfast."

Chapter 14: The Inquisition

Emma sat there in shock! And it was written all over her face. She knew he had said that it was a matter of urgency, but she never imagined that he meant now! ... the very day she had arrived!

"What?" was all she could say.

Jack hesitated a little, then continued, "well, I suppose we could go down the street and get you a new dress or hat or something, if you'd like to... before we go to the church." He looked at her questioningly, "Is there something else you need to do before ... we..."

"Yes!" Emma interrupted. "Yes! There is plenty to do. A wedding takes time to plan. And, there is the proper engagement period."

"Well, we don't really have a lot of time for a long engagement. I thought you understood that."

"I... I... guess I did," Emma stuttered, trying to get her wits about her, "but I thought maybe we could have a little time to..." she stopped and for the first time since she read the letter, she almost cried.

"...to what?" Jack asked softly.

"...to get to know one another better." Emma concluded. "I do not know anything about you. And I think if we are going to commit to spending the rest of our lives together, we should get to know each other first."

Jack smiled at her, but this time Emma was not comforted by it. She could hardly see it through the tear-covered eyes. She reached in her bag, looking for a handkerchief, but before she could find one, Jack had one for her. He wiped her eyes. She did think he was an incredibly patient man, but he must be more patient. She needed time.

"I agree. We should know something about each other before we go to our wedding," Jack said softly. Emma looked up at him. Finally he could see reason. She gave him a faint smile as he continued, "but the truth is, I need to be back home tonight." Emma stared at him in unbelief. Had he not heard anything she said?

"I know that seems harsh to you, but this is not an easy place. I wrote to you because I don't have time to come into town and meet someone, then visit on her porch every Saturday afternoon for a few months, then ask her for her hand and wait to plan a big wedding party." He took Emma's hand very softly. "I would do that if I could..." she looked up to see him staring intently in her eyes, "but I can't."

"So, I am supposed to just marry you, without knowing anything about you?" Emma sniffled.

Jack looked thoughtful and very sad, "No! But you have to choose. Either you get back on the train and go home, or... you can find out as much as you can about me now and marry me... then you can get to know the rest later." Emma just looked at him in dismay. "After all, how much do you really know about any man in Boston that you might marry, before you are married?"

"More than nothing!" Emma said defiantly.

Jack sat back in his chair and let go of her hand. "Well, first of all, you do know some things about me, from the letter. After that, ask me anything. Just ask me your most important questions now and later you can find out... the details." He paused for a moment, then went on, "What would you like to know about me?"

Emma sat in dismay for a moment, not knowing what to do. This is the moment when she needed her father to be here, to tell her what to do. Jack just sat and waited. Finally, the pressure of the moment began to build up in her head until she burst out, "I cannot think in all this noise!"

Jack looked about the now almost empty room. He realized the 'noise' may just be the conflict going on in her own mind. He took some money from his pocket and placed it on the table to pay the bill. Then he turned to Emma and took her hand again, this time to lead her out of the restaurant. "Come on!" he ordered in a very non-authoritative way.

"Where are we going?" Emma hesitated to even get up. She was afraid she might have pushed him too far and that he had made the decision and was taking her back to the train.

He stopped and smiled at her with what seemed to her the kind of look you would give a child who needed 'coaxing'. She did not like that either. Emma was completely confused and distressed. She did not know what to do.

"We are going to take a walk; to go somewhere where we can have a good talk." Again he tugged on her hand, this time a little more forcefully and Emma complied and got up to go with him. They left the restaurant and began to stroll down the street. Jack had soon let go of her hand, allowing her to follow him at her own will.

"OK," Jack began the conversation again, "What would you like to know about me?"

Emma was doing her best to keep up with him, his long legs walking with a long stride. She was still whirling from all that was going on in her head, as well. After a moment she realized that the fast walk was actually allowing her to stop the battle going on inside her and let herself think clearly. She considered her feelings. Over the last few days, she had been sad, scared, cautious & apprehensive, yet she had also enjoyed the feeling of looking forward to a new life, other than the one planned out for her by her parents, which she now had to confess was not the life she wanted.

Emma did want to leave home! But was she sure this was the place she wanted to go instead? She had to know more about Jack and their life here first.

Now, with that conflict resolved, she could think clearly of the questions that plagued her about this man. What did she want to know? Jack was being quiet, still walking, but slowing the pace a bit now that she seemed to have calmed down. She was not even aware of where they were going, just following him with the corner of her eye, and the rest of her sight seemed to be too introspective to realize where they were going.

Jack had led her through the grey, dusty town to a small garden area. It had several trees and benches and lots of green grass. A short path led them to one of the benches and Jack offered her a seat.

"Are you sure this is somewhere we are allowed to be?" Emma questioned.

"Yes!" he answered, with no further explanation. Emma sat down and Jack joined her. "Have you thought of anything yet?" His voice seemed almost like it was teasing her, yet he sat back and appeared prepared for the drill of inquiry.

Emma took a deep breath, and began. "I guess my first question would be about God."

Jack almost snickered, "That is a large subject. Would you like to know everything I know about Him?"

"No!" she continued, "I want to know if you believe in God." She stopped and turned to stare right at him, then waited to see what this man would say.

"Yes! I definitely believe in God!" Jack was more serious now. "When I was younger, I guess I believed in God all along. I mean, my parents taught me about God and we read about Him in the Bible." Jack took a breath and went on, "But when my parents died, I guess I felt I had to make a decision on my own. Everything I knew about God, I had read in the Bible, so I began to read and study at night. I started teaching my sister about it as well. We would read together and we went to worship together. But I made a decision all on my own. I decided that I wanted to lead a life like that described in the New Testament of the Bible, as a Christian, following what Jesus told me to do."

He stopped for a moment, as if contemplating what he wanted to say next. Emma inquired, "Were your parents not Christians?"

Jack smiled, his gaze somewhere else. Emma supposed he was thinking about his parents. "Yes, they were. But they had made that decision. I think a decision like this is something that each one of us must make on our own, not because of our parents. So I did! I decided to learn it for myself so that I could enjoy the blessings of giving my heart to Jesus."

"That's beautiful!" Emma commented. "I agree whole-heartedly and I, too, have made the same choice."

"I know." Jack surprised her with this comment. How did he know about her? But before she could ask, he answered her thoughts, "Our grandmothers have kept in touch over the years." Emma looked as shocked as she felt in her heart. Gran had never even mentioned them to her. "Your grandmother talks a lot about you." Emma thought maybe he meant June, the 'oldest granddaughter', but, as if he was reading her mind, Jack continued, "...all of you."

"I had no idea!" Emma had to admit out loud.

"Oh, yes, she is very proud of all her grandchildren, all..." he hesitated, then continued almost like a question, "all... eight of you?"

"Yes, there are eight of us." Emma replied. She looked quizzingly at Jack, "so... just how much do you know about us? ...about me?"

"Not 'everything'," he grinned a remembrance of their earlier conversation, "but enough!"

"You must tell me all you know. Have you met Gran? Did you hear this from her?" She felt like Louisa with her rapid-fire questioning, but she could not help it. She had so much now that she wanted to know.

"Is this your next question?" Jack teased, "or questions?" He shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes! My grandmother never even mentioned knowing yours, much less anything about you. I cannot believe that you know too much about us." Emma was almost whining. "Tell me," she demanded.

"OK! OK! Don't get too excited about it. It's nothing really." Jack continued on, "I just know about the 'contract'," he eyed her sarcastically, "and when she told me about that she also told me that she and your grandmother had corresponded throughout the years. She said you were in a large family and that it was a good family." Now Jack looked away, "and she told me a few... specific things about some of you."

"What kinds of things? And about which ones of us?" Emma was still stunned at this realization.

"Well... things like none of your sisters could have survived out here very long... but that you could... and that you were a very good Christian young woman who was always trying to do good things and help others. Things like that." He said all of this so matter of fact. Emma could not believe he knew so much. Then it struck her all of a sudden, "So, you were expecting me to answer your letter? How could you have known that it would be me and not one of my sisters that would have come?" She stared at him, waiting for an answer.

"Well, I didn't know. But I had been praying about it and asking for the right woman, and, well... I guess I sort of hoped it would be you. You know this was planned by our grandparents a long time ago."

Emma was dumbfounded. She thought back on the randomness of the events of the last few days. Yet, here she was and that is exactly what Jack had been expecting all along. Now she felt so much better about Jack Campbell, but there was something she felt she must divulge before going any further.

"Jack, I have something I need to tell you." She turned her whole body to look at him. She swallowed hard before continuing. Jack just looked at her, waiting, as if nothing could bother him. "I am not Retha Lindsey's oldest granddaughter." There, she had said it. She felt relieved, yet afraid of what consequences it might bring.

"I know," he replied.

Emma continued as if she had not heard his comment, which, in fact, she had not processed yet, "I know that the letter said that it was to be the oldest grandson of Harriet Campbell and the oldest granddaughter of Retha Lindsey, but..." her voice trailed off as the realization of what he had said sunk in. "You know? You know that, too? Why did you not say anything?"

"Because, I told you, I wanted you to come!" He had said this so sweetly and he was again holding her hand.

Emma could not believe all that she had learned today. She felt now as if she had known Jack all her life. She had never had such a conversation with a man before, even her father, with so much openness. Emma began to feel a warmth come over her, a happiness, yet, all of this was still very scary, too. She was coming to the realization that her objections were all being overcome and that they might actually get married.

"So, how am I doing so far on the questions?" Jack interrupted her thoughts.

"Fine. You are doing fine. Thank you for being so open with me."

"You're welcome," he replied, sitting back again and letting her hand go. "Now do you know enough for today? Enough to get married?"

Emma still had a million questions buzzing around in her brain, but she knew that she could not learn all there was to know about him in one day. She had made up her mind before she ever left on the trip and now she was here. She also knew that she had never expected a long courtship, though she had thought it might be more than one meal. He had answered her most important question so well that Emma knew now that she would marry Jack, so, she supposed there was not point in waiting any longer.

"Yes," the word came out of her mouth so quietly that she could hardly hear it herself.

“Yes...” he repeated, “you are ready to get married?”

Emma smiled, “I am!”

Chapter 15: Children

Emma had never been the type of girls to spend hours thinking about her wedding, the dress, the flowers, etc. She always knew she wanted to be married, and she had often thought of the type of man she would marry. He would be a good Christian man and a man of commitment who worked hard at everything he did. She also wanted someone who she could talk to and that she enjoyed being around. These were all important to her.

She felt like Jack was such a man. He seemed to love God and had a determination that Emma admired. He had lived in this hard wilderness and had survived. And she enjoyed talking to him. He could be frustrating sometimes, he teased her and he did not always agree with everything she said or give in to her like the men in Boston often would when they were trying to impress a lady. Emma liked that!

She might not be treated like a princess, but when Jack said something, she felt she could believe it. Or... could she? Now her mind began its usual tricks. She began the great debate with herself. Though she did feel all of these things were true about Jack, this belief was based completely on things that Jack, himself, had said to her. Was he lying? Did he just have an inflated opinion of himself? Or was he thinking he was being honest in telling her what she wanted to hear, hoping to become that man someday? Was he just trying to pacify her into marriage to get her to go and work on his farm and take care of his children? And would she just live in the shadows of his first love?

Again, Emma’s mind raced from one conclusion to the other. She watched Jack as they strolled back toward the center of town. He was a hard man, solid and rough. He seemed strong from hard work which Emma had only read about in books. But he lived a hard life and would expect her to do the same. She would be instantly thrown back into taking care of a family after doing all this to get away from the mundane life of taking care of her own siblings and growing to be an old maid. Was this what she wanted?

She hurried to catch up again with Jack’s fast pace. He glanced at her and instantly slowed down. Emma could tell, even under all his whiskers, that the corner of his mouth turned up in a half-smile of apology for outrunning her.

The debate flip-flopped. Yes! She did want this life. She had always enjoyed her life, helping out around her family’s home and being almost a second mother to her siblings. She liked that, only she wanted it to be with her own family. This was what Jack was offering her. She would be his children’s second mother, but they are young. Perhaps they could learn to love her like they were her own someday.

And all the things that Jack had said about himself, he could not have made all that up, could he? How would he have known what she wanted him to say, anyway? He had been honest with her and she knew this would be a hard life. The letter had said that. And Emma was ready for that. She could handle it and looked forward to the challenge. Jack had also stated in the letter that marriage to him was, at least in part, a practical thing. He needed help, but he had also shown today that he wanted companionship, as well.

They were well past the train station now and headed out toward the edge of town. Jack stopped abruptly and Emma spun around toward him. “What is the matter?” she questioned, surprised by the interruption to her thinking.

“We are about to leave town. This is your last chance.” He eyed her suspiciously.

“My... last chance?” Emma repeated.

“Yes. If you want me to, I can take you back to town. But I have to go on. Are you still with me? Or have you decided to go back home on the train tomorrow?”

It was early in the afternoon now. The day had gone by so quickly that Emma had not noticed. Now, with the sun on the horizon in her eyes, Emma realized the time had come for her final decision. Had she made it yet? She dug deep in her thoughts from the day. She had gone several paces beyond Jack when he stopped short. She began to walk back toward him, toward town. As she reached him, she stopped and turned around. “I am with you.” She said, but she could only give him, at best, a very worried looking smile.

Again, Jack’s whiskers curled up, indicating a smile. The deliberation was over, and the decision now made. Emma was going to marry Jack Campbell today.

Jack immediately began to walk again, still heading out of town. There were only a few sparse shacks left, one of which was a livery stable. Jack went there and stopped to hold the door for Emma. Her face scrunched up in confusion. “Are we getting married in... a barn?”

Jack laughed out loud this time. “No, I just have the horse and wagon in here.”

“Oh!” Emma responded, “Are we going back to town to get married?”

“No, not to Columbia,” Jack replied, more serious now. He changed the subject, “Let me get the horse hooked up to the wagon. It will just take a minute.” Then he was off working to get ready for their trip out of town. Emma stood there, wondering how many more surprises Jack Campbell could come up with in one day.

After a few minutes, Jack opened the large doors to the stable and was ready to pull the wagon out. He had it looking rather clean, compared to some Emma had seen in town earlier, and he had several blankets neatly folded on the bench. He escorted the horses outside into the afternoon sun. Emma followed. It felt good standing in the sunshine. In the shade it was still rather cool with the nice Spring breeze that had been blowing all day. It was still warmer, though, than it had been the morning she left Boston. Emma assumed the blankets meant it would get colder on their way home.

Emma was still pondering the idea of her new home, when Jack interrupted, “We’re all set!” He stood beside the wagon, ready to help Emma climb up. He had even found a small crate in the barn to let her step up on.

"Thank you," she said politely as she climbed aboard. She had never ridden in such a crude wagon before and was not used to having to step up so far. She was glad for the extra step so that she did not look so clumsy.

"So, where are we getting married?" Emma was beginning to worry whether or not they would be able to get married or not. What would she do if they did not get married today? Where would she go? She had so little money to spare.

Jack had put away the stool and walked around to the other side of the wagon and climbed up. He was very calm, as if he had a plan. Finally, he answered, "There is a little church building closer to home, where I go to worship. The preacher lives in the house next door. He said we could come by whenever we were ready and he would marry us. It's only about thirty minutes from here.

He paused, looking into the distance for a moment. Then he turned to Emma, "Is that alright with you?" Jack's voice was soft and sweet, sounding as though he truly cared for her opinion, though Emma knew that she really had no other choice.

She appreciated the sentiment, "Yes, that would be fine. Thank you." She turned to face the front, not wanting to let him see the emotion in her face. She had never planned on having a large wedding anyway, but she had supposed her family and some of her friends would be there. Now to get married with only strangers in attendance seemed a bit cold.

By now, it had gotten quite late in the afternoon. The trip to the small church building began fairly quietly. Emma was trying to hold back the tears that now seemed determined to come. Not that she was unhappy about things, but just overwhelmed by the entire last few days.

Eventually, or what seemed like it to her, she was able to control her emotions and turn her attention to something else for distraction, and because it was of great interest to her; the children. Jack had wrote to her about them in the letter, but she noticed he had not mentioned them yet today in person. She hoped that there was not a problem in talking about them. Maybe he was just giving her a chance to adjust to marriage for a few hours before adding children. But Emma wanted to know.

"May I ask you a question?" Emma broke the silence.

Jack glanced at her, "Yes. What would you like to know?"

"About the children..." Emma replied. "I would like to know more about the children."

"What would you like to know about them?" He was so matter-of-fact in his tone, like he wasn't sure why she would want to know about the children that by nightfall would be hers, too.

Emma went on, trying to think of the good of the children and not about the oddness of Jack's behavior. "Well... I know you have children, from the letter..." she hesitated as she talked, hoping he would chime in without her having to ask each question individually. "The only thing I know about them is that there are two of them, and that they are young." Again, no reply. "I guess I would like to know their names, how old they are... and what they are like... so that I can be prepared when I meet them."

Jack again turned to look at her. "Well, the oldest is a girl. Her name is Phoebe and she is four. She is..." Jack faltered like he was trying to find just the right word, "...she is precocious."

"Precocious?" Emma repeated the word, questioning its use for a child of four.

"Yes. I think that's right. She is curious about everything. And she can drive you crazy with questions about all kinds of topics. She has to check everything out for herself and wants to be right in the middle of... well... of everything." During this description of Phoebe, Emma thought she saw a sense of appreciation in Jack's voice for this 'precocious child', along with the normal frustrations. After living with Violet and especially Louisa, Emma knew about precociousness.

Jack continued, "Oliver is the youngest, he is almost three years old. He is nothing like Phoebe. As a matter of fact, he rarely talks at all."

Emma looked thoughtful as she glanced carefully toward Jack. "Is he... alright?" She tried to choose her words carefully.

Jack smiled a very broad smile and almost began laughing. "Yes. I think he is alright. He is just quiet. And I am not sure if he can get a word in, since Phoebe rarely takes a breath."

Emma laughed softly. As she continued, her demeanor turned more serious. "I suppose they... miss their mother." It was a matter-of-fact comment, but also an inquisition to get Jack to open up about his first wife.

Jack did not take the bait, but simply agreed, "Yes. I suppose so." This was the first time Emma had seen this face on Jack. The look of sadness almost closed in on him, letting Emma know that she should not pursue the matter any further for today.

Emma was quiet for a few minutes more, giving Jack time to recover himself before she continued, "When will I get to meet them?" she went on, "the children?"

It was just then that Emma saw a well lit area in the distance. She glanced toward it.

Jack answered her question both about meeting the children and her unasked query about what the lights were, "You will probably meet them in just a few minutes."

Chapter 16: The Wedding

They arrived in almost exactly thirty minutes at the church. It was a lovely, well-kept building, nothing fancy like some of the old churches in Boston. The place where her family worshipped was quite different made from stones and with trees all around. This place looked much newer and simpler. Emma had loved the history of all the old buildings in Boston, but felt this was very appropriate as it did not accentuate the building, but allowed God to be the emphasis.

They drove up beside the front porch. "I'll be right back," Jack said, jumping down from the wagon and striding down the short road to the side of the church building toward a small house, brightly lit with lamps on the porch.

The trip had allowed her time to quell the many feelings inside. Now, with the information about the children and the fact that she was about to meet them, she felt almost numb. It had gotten cold as the sun began to set in the horizon. Jack had offered her the blankets as he noticed her shivering. She gladly accepted, not only for the warmth, but to cocoon herself away for a moment. It was now almost like a dream, that she could see and feel, but that did not seem quite real.

In a moment, Jack returned with a middle-aged couple scurrying up behind him. The man was still putting on a jacket when he exited the house and the woman appeared to have been working in the kitchen. They were not dressed fancy, but looked like they would have been more comfortable in the shop behind her house than walking down the streets of Boston. Most of the people Emma had seen today had been similarly dressed. Emma took off the blanket and smoothed her hair and dress. It was the nicest dress she had, which she had chosen just for such an occasion as her marriage ceremony. But now she felt a bit overdressed, even as the bride.

Jack hurried to help her down from the wagon. He had parked close to the edge of the porch and so she barely had to step down at all. As he escorted her off the wagon, he took her hand gently and held onto it. She had been very cold, and Jack's hands were warm. This did give her a bit of comfort.

As the couple came onto the porch, Jack introduced all of them, "Emma, this is John Witherspoon and this is Mabel, his wife." He pointed to each respectively. "And this is Emma Stanfield." He looked toward the Witherspoons, but stood beside Emma, smiling.

"Oh, it is so very nice to meet you, dear," Mabel chimed in cheerfully, her voice sounded like a sweet, soft bell ringing. "We were so afraid that you had not been able to make the trip. We were expecting you some time ago and we are so glad you have arrived safely." Mabel gushed over her, smiling and happy, making Emma like her immediately. "Do come inside and warm up now!"

John led them inside to a large meeting place with long benches. There was a small isle down the middle. At the front, it was already well lit and a fire was going in a large pot-bellied stove which gave the whole area a warm cozy feeling. The rest of the room was dark, adding to the ambiance of the small area in the front. They quickly made their way to the front.

"Would you like a moment to freshen up before we begin, dear?" Mabel was still cheerful and very thoughtful.

Emma looked at Jack, who was waiting for her answer as well, then back to Mabel, "Yes, thank you."

"Well come with me," Mabel had turned to walk into a small side room, also lit and warmed by its own smaller version of the stove out front. She shut the door behind them.

"I will just be a moment," Emma commented.

Mabel took a seat in one of the chairs occupying the small classroom. "No need to hurry, my dear. This is your special day and you just take all the time you need. A man like Jack needs to learn that women folk like us cannot be rushed." Again, Emma knew that she was going to like Mabel and hoped that Jack's farm was not too far so that she could spend time with Mabel occasionally.

She was used to having many girls around all the time and she never got to go anywhere, it seemed, without someone tagging along. She was used to this and she was already feeling a little homesick. It would be nice if she could have a friend, and Mabel seemed a good candidate.

Mabel had fixed a bowl of water for Emma to wash up. She had also brought a small hand-held mirror for her to use. Emma got her comb out of her bag and took her hair down, straightened it and put it back up in a tight bun on her head. She washed her face, using the washcloth that was beside the water bowl. She was beginning to feel a little better, but still felt numb about what was about to happen. Emma looked into the mirror at her reflection. She still felt she looked like a little girl, like someone's daughter. Yet, in just a minute, she would be a grown woman, with a husband... and children.

Mabel was being very patient, but Emma did not want to inconvenience anyone any more than she had to. She finished her preparations and stood up.

"Your dress is beautiful!" Mabel said admiringly. "I have never seen such a nice dress."

Emma blushed, "Thank you." She always thought her dresses were somewhat drab. They were always handed down dresses from her sisters, so they were just a bit out of style.

"Are you ready, then?" she smiled at Emma as a best friend about to experience one of life's most precious moments with her.

"Yes, I am."

"I do have one more thing for you," she said, looking a little shy. She reached in a box and pulled out a beautiful bouquet of tulips, tied in a pretty hair ribbon than draped down in the front. "I hope you like them," Mabel continued, looking proud of her own work, "tulips are the only thing blummin' this time of year."

Emma almost cried. The tears hung low on her eyes like a dew drop about to fall off a flower. "Thank you, Mabel. That is so very kind of you to think of flowers." She almost choked on her words. "I love tulips!" Emma took the flowers and held them in both hands.

Emma wondered if she should mention the children to Mabel. She figured that they had stayed with the Witherspoons today, while Jack was retrieving her, but she had not seen or heard about them. She decided that she must speak up. "Mabel?"

"Yes, dear?" Mabel hesitated and turned back toward Emma.

"Where are the children?"

Her new friend smiled brightly, "Oh. Those dear sweet babies. They were taking a rest after dinner. We had decided to let them sleep, not being sure when you two would be back here. Jack said he wanted to introduce us first, then he wanted to go wake them up. They really wanted to be here, for the wedding." She started back for the door. "They should be up by now. I know they are anxious to meet you."

This gave Emma a little comfort. She was not sure which made her more apprehensive, meeting Jack or meeting his children. Mabel led the way back out to where the gentlemen were waiting patiently. They were, in fact joined by two sleepy looking children, both in Jack's arms, clinging to him.

As the ladies approached, Phoebe looked up at them and gave Emma a shy smile. She looked back at Jack and tried to whisper, "Is that her?"

Jack nodded and she started giggling. She gave Jack a huge grin and added, "She is pretty."

"Yes she is," Jack returned politely. Then she giggled again and rubbed her face into his shoulder. Oliver had not yet looked up, but Emma could see him peeking from under his arm and that hid his face.

Jack walked over to Emma. "Emma, this is Phoebe," Phoebe turned now to face Emma and smiled sweetly.

"How... do you... do?" Phoebe tried to remember all the words that she had obviously practiced just for this occasion.

"I am doing well. Thank you, Phoebe." Emma responded with the same polite air. "It is so nice to meet you."

"Oh! It is so nice to meet you, too!" All of a sudden she burst out with personality. She got down and stood in front of Emma, straightening her dress and her hair like an adult woman might. Before anyone else could talk, she continued abruptly, "Can I be in the wedding too?" She paused and looked up and around at all the adults.

Emma smiled and agreed that it would be wonderful to have her in the wedding. She suggested that she could be the maid-of-honor, and she slipped one of the tulips out of the ribbon and held it out for Phoebe. "Would you like to hold a flower, too?"

"Yes!" she gushed, taking the flower and holding it as a bouquet. "Thank you!"

"You are welcome."

Jack interrupted and introduced Oliver as well. He still did not completely look up at her. Phoebe tugged on Emma's dress and explained, "He is too shy to talk to you. He is scared of people he don't know."

Mabel added, "...does not know."

Phoebe gave a frustrated look and repeated, "...does not know."

Emma looked at Oliver, "It is nice to meet you, Oliver."

He made a sound, then tried to bury his face deeper in Jack's arm. Jack put him down, but he grabbed Jack's trousers and hid behind them.

"I am sorry. He just needs a little time." Jack offered an apology.

Emma smiled and shook her head. She was now feeling overwhelmed and wanted to bury her face away, too.

After a moment, John interrupted the silence. "Well, I believe we are ready to start the ceremony, if there is no objection from anyone." Everyone nodded.

Emma could feel the trepidation building again inside her. She thought she could see apprehension in Jack's eyes, but he was smiling, too. They made their way to the front and John complimented her, her dress and her flowers, looking at Mabel in appreciation. Jack just looked at Emma, frozen, his eyes traveling up and down, taking in the complete picture. Emma did look beautiful! Her cheeks were still rosy from blushing earlier about the dress, and her dress and hair looked stylish and becoming. The tulip bouquet added just the right formality to make this a special occasion.

Finally, Jack spoke, "You are beautiful!" As he spoke, he walked over to her and took her hand. How could such a rough, wild-looking man, whom she had only known for one day, put her so much at ease? It was all like a dream as they walked up to the front together. Mabel had lit several candles in hurricane glass lanterns for a striking affect. Emma could not have imagined a more stunning, or a more perfect wedding.

The ceremony was short. Emma heard the words, and she knew in her heart that she had already agreed to them, but they were still a blur. John stood across from them and Mabel stood beside Emma as they all listened to John recite the standard wedding vows.

"Do you, Jack Campbell, take this woman, Emma Stanfield as your lawfully wedded wife, to have and to hold, from this day forward, through richer or poorer times, in sickness and in health and until only death parts you?"

Without hesitation, Jack confirmed, "I do."

John then looked toward Emma, "and do you, Emma Stanfield, take this man, Jack Campbell as your lawfully wedded husband; to have and to hold, from this day forward, through richer or poorer times, in sickness and in health and until only death parts you?"

Emma could not breathe. It felt like she stood there for hours, each of the others looking to her for her answer. She knew the answer, but she could not get her mouth to say it.

Finally, John said quietly, "you may say, 'I do'."

Dutifully, Emma agreed, "I do."

John went on, "Now, by the power vested in me by the state of Tennessee, I now pronounce you to be husband and wife, Mr. and Mrs. Jack Campbell. What God has joined here together, let not any man divide."

The ceremony was over. They were legally married. Emma thought to herself, 'the rest will come later'. She almost felt a sense of relief at the conclusion of what had been troubling her for almost the past week. She was now a married woman. She looked at Jack. He was smiling at her, or at least she thought so. It was sometimes hard to tell through the beard. It was not a huge smile, but small and equally as anxious looking as hers.

Chapter 17: A New Home

John and Mabel gave congratulations all around. They were used to small ceremonies like this and knew how to be the 'entire crowd' when necessary. Emma told them how much she appreciated all their hard work making everything look so beautiful. She talked almost too much, as was her habit when she was nervous. Jack did not seem to say much at all, but shook John's hand and gave Mabel a generous hug.

Finally they started for the back door. Jack picked up Oliver who was still clinging to his leg. Without notice, Phoebe reached up and put her hand gently in Emma's. Emma looked down and smiled at her. On the way, Mabel picked up a large basket. It was filled to the brim with all kinds of goodies to eat and it smelled wonderful. Emma had not realized how late it was and was feeling a bit hungry. She was glad not to have to go to a new house and prepare a meal so late.

Jack helped all of them up into the wagon and loaded the basket in the back. It was almost dark now and getting cold. The children both climbed over into the back of the wagon and sat down. Emma helped them get covered by the thick blankets to keep warm. They snuggled together and were back to sleep almost before the wagon left the church. They waved goodbye to the Witherspoons and they were on their way home.

As Jack hopped up effortlessly onto the seat, he looked at Emma soulfully for a moment, then turned his attention toward the horses and started the wagon. Emma sat quietly for a while, looking off into the darkness looming ahead and only occasionally looking back to check on the children in the back. She was a little colder because she had given them the blankets, but she hardly noticed because her mind was too busy.

They rode on for about ten minutes, then turned down a short dirt road. At the end of the road, in the middle of what appeared to Emma to be a farm, was Jack's house. The house was not huge, and it was older than Emma thought it would be. It was built from logs, with a porch all across the front and through the middle, dividing the house in two almost equal sections. As they approached the yard, Emma could see by the moonlight that it looked very neat, but plain. There were no flowers or plants growing in the front. There were small grassy patches occasionally, but the rest seemed like just dirt to Emma.

The wagon stopped just in front of the porch. Emma waited. Finally, Jack spoke. "It isn't much to look at, but it's a nice place."

Emma felt as if he had been reading her mind and that she might have offended him. She looked as cheerful as she could manage, "It... looks very nice."

Jack jumped down and came around to help her off the wagon. Then he retrieved Oliver and tried to rouse Phoebe. She looked out over the side at Emma. "Now this is your house, too!" she said encouragingly. Jack grabbed her as she almost fell to the ground trying to get out on her own. Phoebe hardly even noticed, but gave Emma her full attention. She grabbed her hand and began to pull her toward the house. Emma felt uneasy going into their home. It would take her a while to make it her own, as well, but Phoebe was determined to help her along.

Jack grabbed the basket with his other hand and hurried up to the porch to open the door for the ladies. "Thank you," they recited together.

Inside there was one large room. In the back was a large kitchen. A table took the middle of the room and in the front was a very plain room with several large chairs and an old rocker. There were no curtains on the windows, no table-cloth, no sign of the type of décor that Emma believed even a woman of this savage country would have managed for her home. Emma was surprised by this. Did Jack prefer it this way? Or had he gotten rid of every sign of her because it was too much to bear?

"Are you hungry?" Jack interrupted her thoughts.

"Yes, we are!" Phoebe chimed. She sounded sleepy, but she insisted that she was not going to bed. "We need to have a wedding party." She continued. "There is cake in the basket."

Jack picked her up and spun her around, "and just how do you know that?"

"Because I helped make it!" she laughed.

He put her down on the table and opened the basket. "Then cake it is." He saw Oliver was awake now, sitting on the hearth. He looked to Emma who was still standing close to the door. "Please, come in and join us. Make yourself at home here." And then more seriously, "This is your home now. I hope you will see it that way."

Emma joined them gratefully. They enjoyed the pieces of meat, the biscuits, the jar of milk and the cake. It was certainly a happy house tonight. Phoebe talked a lot, leaving Jack and Emma the opportunity to just listen.

Finally, though, both children began to yawn and it became obvious they were finished for the day. It was now very late. This side of the cabin had warmed up considerably from the roaring fire that Jack had lit in the large fireplace in the middle of the room. There were two large pallets in the corner of the room that Jack dragged out into the center, next to the fire. They got the children to settle down on one of them and covered them up with several quilts. They were soon fast asleep.

Chapter 18: The Proposal

As Phoebe and Oliver drifted off to sleep, Emma was silent. She knew now what was expected of her and she was scared. She had never even been kissed by a man, and now she was married, and this was their wedding night. In all the excitement, she had almost lost touch with that reality, until now. She tried not to even make eye contact with Jack.

Jack got up and went to sit on the large stone hearth. "It has been a long day," he commented lazily, "especially for you. I know you must be tired."

"Yes." It was a whisper so quiet that Emma herself almost did not hear it.

Jack went on. "The other cabin is cold. It would be more... private for you, but... cold." She did not respond. "I usually don't sleep over there except in warmer weather, ...or when I have company."

Emma winced and a small sound came out against her will.

Jack was looking at her. He could see that she was scared of him. He wanted her to be comfortable and possibly even like him someday. Suddenly, his tone seemed to change, "I have an idea."

Emma was still looking away.

"I thought maybe you could sleep in here with the children tonight... to stay warm. Then tomorrow I will fix your room."

After a moment, Emma looked up at him slowly. Was he offering her her own room? He had gotten up and was walking toward her. She tensed again. Jack sat at the table a few feet from her.

"Look, Emma, I know this is all... hard for you. It is hard for me, too. I know that you really wanted to be... courted, at home, but that you came here and got married to me quickly instead. I appreciate that because I couldn't go and court you in Boston." He hesitated, then went on because of her silence. "But I would like to... take the time now to... get to know you... the way I would have if I could."

He was still looking at her, but she still gave no response. She was looking at her lap again, shaking all over so badly that she was sure it must be obvious to him as well.

He continued, "I thought maybe... maybe we could... wait until we spent some time together before..." He broke off. Jack's voice showed that he, too, was scared and maybe even embarrassed to talk about such a delicate subject with a lady, and one that he had just met that morning. He did not really finish the thought, but the long silence did it for them both. Jack was fidgeting and finally got up and walked around the table, pick something up and put it down again, then went to check the fireplace.

After he was assured that the fire was burning hot enough to keep them warm for the night, Jack walked to the door. Emma was still sitting, frozen in position in her chair. Jack began again, "There are plenty of blankets in the front corner. I hope you will be comfortable." Then he was gone.

Emma continued to sit and stare at her hands, folded neatly in her lap, for a few moments. She had felt the cool wind blow in when the door was open and heard the click as the door shut behind Jack. He was gone. Emma could not move, but sat thinking about how relieved she was by Jack's 'proposition'.

Finally, she glanced slowly up at the door, to be sure he was gone. Then she got up and began to walk around the room. She was still not sure how well she trusted Jack Campbell. She felt so alone and exposed. She looked down at the children, sleeping on their bed so peacefully. Surely he would not change his mind, after such a speech. And she felt safer being here with the children so close.

After a while, she could not hear any activity outside, except for the rustling of the wind and the call of wild dogs in the distance. As she stood quietly, she could recognize many sound from nature, but all was still on the other side of the cabin. She began to undress and prepare to sleep. Emma moved quickly and was soon hidden under the blankets. Trepidaciously, she finally fell asleep.

Chapter 19: Morning on the Farm

The next morning came almost instantly for Emma. She was used to getting up early; to being the first one up. As she awoke, she lay in the bed, letting her mind catch up with her body, which was ready for the day. Her eyes opened, taken aback by the site. She had been dreaming of home and of waking up in her own bed, as she had for most of the days of her life. Instead, she was faced with the reality that the last week was real.

She was in the middle of the large room, on a pallet on the floor. The first thing she noticed was that the fire was burning brightly. It must have gone out during the night. How was it still lit? She would have thought it still night, but then she realized that not all the light was from the fire. There was light coming in the windows, lots of light.

Immediately Emma sat up, clutching the coverings around her. She glanced around the room. The children were gone. She was alone. Their pallet was still there, with the blankets folded neatly on top, but they were nowhere to be seen. Then she noticed the smell. There was a plate of food, wrapped in a towel, sitting on the table nearby. It smelled wonderful of hot pancakes and fried ham. It was accompanied by a cup, and a coffee pot was steaming on the stove top.

Emma struggled to get herself going. She got up and peered out the window from where she stood, too afraid to go to close. Finally, her senses came to her and she began to move faster. She dressed quickly and put away her night cloths. She worked hard to drag the pallets back to their original corner from the night before and folded all her coverings, replacing them as well.

She was hungry, but she was not sure if the food was for her, though she guessed it was. She still felt so out-of-place here, like an intruder in the Campbell's home, and being in the house by herself on helped solidify the feeling. She did take the cup and fill it with some of the delicious hot coffee and gratefully sipped it, even piping hot. Finally, she made her way to the door, carefully opening it and looking outside.

Even outside, there seemed to be no life. Where were they? Had they left? Emma's mind began to race in wild accusations. Could they... have been taken by savages in the night, as she had read about in a book about the west? And why would savages take them and not herself? Emma began to calm some at this thought? She even chuckled to herself, scoffing at her own wild imagination. Would those savages have left her a plate of breakfast as well? She almost laughed out loud.

By now, she was standing in the middle of the courtyard on the side of the house outside the kitchen. She saw a large barn that she had not noticed the night before in the darkness. One of the doors was open on the front of it and Emma could hear animals calling out in their particular voices.

Emma was not completely unaccustomed to animals. She had not lived on a farm, but they did have a cat and a dog. She had often visited the small farms just outside Boston and seen their livestock as her father purchased eggs or milk. She remembered thinking they were somewhat dirty animals, but not completely without charms.

She wandered to the door and peeked inside. The smell was overwhelming and she leaned on the door to catch herself from fainting. The door squeaked as she moved it, calling the attention of the two children just inside.

Phoebe ran over to greet her. "Good morning!" she rang out as cheerfully as she had been the night before. "I am so glad you are finally up. Did you sleep alright? You sure were tired. I thought you might be dead 'cause you were not movin', but then you moved and I knew you were goin' to be alright." Phoebe finally took a short breath and was about to continue the rapid fire of morning comments when Emma heard footsteps behind her.

"OK 'Phoebes' let her alone." Emma spun around to see Jack standing behind her. She had regained her composure and gave him a shy nod. "Good morning," he directed to her.

"Good... morning..." Emma finally got out, "to both of you." She looked around to Phoebe. "Where is Oliver?"

"Oh," Phoebe was off again, "'Oli' is hidin' in the barn. He is scar'ed of you. But don't you worry, he is scar'ed of ever-body... but I ain't."

"You are not," Jack corrected.

Phoebe stared at him, questioningly. "I ain't... what?"

Jack just shook his head and walked past Emma to the barn. He ruffled Phoebe's hair and laughed. In a minute he came back out of the barn, with Oliver slung over his shoulder, laughing. "Look what I found," he teased her. Then he dropped Oliver to the ground and he ran back to his hiding place inside.

Jack directed his attention to Emma now. "Are you... alright?" Emma tilted her head and looked at him quizzingly. "I mean, I know you were tired and... well, I think yesterday was a rough day for you... and... we figured you needed some rest."

"Yes," Emma had to agree. "I suppose I did need a little extra sleep this morning." She could not tell if his look was one of concern or annoyance, so she added quickly, "I will not require that much sleep every night."

Jack shook his head and leaned up against the barn door. He was very tall and could almost reach the top of the door. He looked at the ground, then up at Emma with the corner of his eye, "You can sleep as much as you would like." He looked at her for a second, then seemed to have a sad look in his eyes as he turned to go in the barn. He yelled back over his shoulder at Emma, "Come on..." then he peeked back around the barn door at her with a sarcastic look, "that is, if you can stand the smell."

Emma followed quickly, wincing at the smell again, but trying not to let it show so much. She was afraid she was getting off on the wrong foot here and she wanted to show them that she was well able to earn her own keep.

Inside, the barn seemed much smaller than it did on the outside. It was fairly dark and there were animals in many different stalls. Considering the smell, it was much neater than Emma had imagined. Bales of hay were stacked carefully in the corners. Tools of all sorts were hanging on nails on the walls and pillars everywhere. Jack had walked into one of the stalls, with Oliver sitting on the half wall dividing it off. They were both stroking a single cow that was its occupant.

Emma had taken a long moment to look around and had just realized that they were both staring at her. "Have you ever been in a barn?" Jack questioned her.

"Yes!" Emma chimed in, excited to have what she thought was the right answer.

"Have you ever 'worked' in a barn?" He continued the interrogation.

Emma looked down and tilted her head. "No," she replied quietly. She felt she could do nothing right here. She was not used to that feeling. She was also not used to feeling so shy. She mustered her courage and continued, louder this time and without provocation, "but I have worked!" She looked squarely at Jack. She had brothers and she knew that with them she had to face them with audacity.

"Great!" Jack responded in a way that seemed to take the wind from her sail. "...but today, I thought you might like a little more time to... settle in... and get to know things around here, before you really get to work."

Emma appreciated the gesture, but she was also afraid of where this might be going. It was just her first real day here and they were all busy at work. Had she really been invited here to become a hired hand for Jack's farm and a sitter for his children? She did not mind working and she had expected it, but now she was wondering how this was any different than the life she had before. She stood there, while Jack disappeared outside the barn again. She could hear him giving Phoebe instructions, probably about her.

Emma came to herself and turned on her heels and marched out the door to the courtyard. "I am ready now," she announced.

Jack looked up at her with little to no expression in his eyes. "OK," he agreed, and then he walked off.

Emma stood there shocked. She was used to the gentlemen of Boston. They would have never just walked away from her as Jack had just done twice in the last few moments. She stood there staring after him, then she realized her hand was being pulled.

Phoebe was dragging her back into the barn. "He busy," she whispered. "He always busy."

Emma thought about what Phoebe had just said. She remembered the letter that had brought her here. "Yes..." she mused, just barely audible. She was lost in thought about how hard life on a farm must be, far from any of the conveniences that she took for granted. She began to wonder if maybe she was the wrong one for this 'job' of being a farmer's wife.

"You busy thinkin'?" Phoebe broke into her thoughts. Emma almost didn't notice. "Miss Emma, you alright?"

Emma squeezed her hand gently and smiled in reply, "Yes, thank you." They were standing in the middle of the barn. She was already getting used to the smells, somewhat, and was ready to go to work. "What shall we work on this morning, Phoebe?"

Phoebe giggled. She was to tell the grown-up what to do? Emma guessed this and continued, "You know, I am very new to living on a farm. I came from a large city. We did not have animals to care for." She looked at Phoebe admiringly, "YOU will have to teach ME!"

The young girl stood up as straight and tall as she could. "Well... I guess I will then! Come with me." She began to walk to the stall where Jack had been earlier, with the cow. Emma had never milked a cow before.

Phoebe began to work like a pro and, Emma found to her delight, was a very good, and patient teacher. They spent the early morning with Phoebe teaching her how to milk the cow, gather eggs from the chickens, and tend the kitchen garden, which was already showing many signs of growth because of the somewhat warmer temperatures of the south. They also fed all the animals in the barn and in pens outside.

Sometime during their 'class', Oliver had shown up. He was still not talking, but Emma noticed that he was always nearby. Phoebe took that opportunity to include him as one of her pupils, teaching him as if she were twenty years his senior, instead of just two. Oliver went right to work at whatever task he was given, though that was not much. He was a strong child for his age and could help carry things that seemed larger than himself.

Most of the work was done by Emma, though Phoebe and Oliver did try, but she would not have known 'what' to do and in some cases 'how' to do it, if not for Phoebe. Phoebe was a very bright girl for four years old. She spoke with a strange accent that did not seem to match Jack's, and she did not seem concerned about learning proper grammatical sentencing, but she knew a lot of words and seemed to understand what they meant. She also seemed to have a genuine grasp on reality of farm life.

Chapter 20: Fitting In

They all worked very hard and it was close to mid-day by the time they reentered the house. Jack had come back to the house and was first to enter. He saw the plate of food on the table, untouched. He began to fix lunch without speaking. Oliver had followed him in. He always followed Jack whenever he was allowed. They had a connection that seemed to not need words from the young boy and he appreciated that.

As Phoebe and Emma entered, they were discussing a story that Emma had recounted to Phoebe that morning. It was from a book she had read back in Boston at the library. Phoebe seemed truly interested in learning and Emma had hopes of teaching her to read soon. Emma liked having a purpose. It gave her a feeling of belonging.

They were both in a good mood, talking and laughing, but it all stopped as they saw Jack. He stared at Emma for a moment, then asked Phoebe to wash up. At this distraction, he turned to Emma, "Did you not like your breakfast?" he asked her, scowling.

Emma was taken back. Her mood suddenly became serious, like his. "Oh, I... was not sure if that was for me." She was not sure why he was so upset.

He lowered his head and looked at her from the top of his eyes, like a disapproving parent might do. Emma did not like that look and would have responded, but Phoebe was already back. "I... am... sorry," she managed through clinched teeth. Then she put on a fake smile. "I was not too hungry, anyway." She was glad for the buffer that Phoebe presented between her and Jack's wrath. He was obviously controlling himself for the girl's sake.

After a moment, Jack shrugged and went back to work in the kitchen. Phoebe, not realizing anything was wrong, changed the mood back to a happy one with her cheerfulness. "We worked very hard this morning." She directed at Jack, proud of her work as a teacher.

"Yes you did," he smiled at her and stopped to give her a small hug. She clung to him almost as if she realized he needed it as much as she did. His face had seemed to soften as he looked over her shoulder at Emma. "You all did."

Feelings of confusion rushed over Emma. She always seemed to have strong emotions and was not quickly swayed from them. Jack, however, seemed to be able to be furious one moment, and loving and tender the very next. This confusion did help to put Emma in a state of flux that allowed her to soften as well. She wondered if Jack was generally an angry man or loving? Which was his true personality? Or was it both? She felt as if she may never figure him out and she was not sure she liked that possibility.

Emma nodded her thanks for the compliment, then began to look around the room. She did not see an apron, so she rolled up her sleeves to be ready to work.

Phoebe continued, "I was a good teacher."

"Why don't you continue the lesson and show Emma where things are for making biscuits." Jack added pleasantly. He had brought in some meat from the smokehouse and some wood from outside the back door. He opened the small stove and began to light a fire.

"Come on, then," Phoebe was pulling on Emma. She led her to the counter and pointed to a large drawer. "OK. Open the drawer," she commanded in a pleasant voice. Emma obeyed. Inside there was a mixture that looked like flour. Phoebe continued, "now get some of the cream from the milk we just brought in." Emma could tell that this is exactly how Phoebe had been taught. As she complied to her wishes, Emma wondered again about Phoebe's mother. She must have been a good teacher, too.

Phoebe went and got a large ladle and gave it to Emma for the milk. After adding a small amount of milk to the middle of a well of flour in the drawer, they worked it around until a soft dough formed. "Now take a little flour and put on the top," Phoebe slapped her hand on the counter top above the drawer. Soon they had the dough rolled and cut and put in a small pan that would fit in the oven.

Jack had the oven hot and he had put a cast-iron skillet on top that had the ham slices frying in it. He asked the girls to get out whatever was left from the dinner basket the night before, if anything, and they could have that as well. Oliver began to set plates and forks on the table, then got four cloth napkins from a stack and began folding them carefully beside each plate as if this was his normal job at meal time.

Emma tried to watch everything that each of them did in order to become more accustomed to their routines. She was also trying to learn where to find things and what chores she herself would need to do. She helped pour a glass of milk for each of them and Oliver delivered them to the table. Phoebe had retrieved some fresh churned butter in a dish and placed it on the table as well.

Finally, they sat down to eat. Jack said a prayer and asked God to bless their food and their farm. He also mentioned his thanks for their new addition, Emma, and prayed for her family. As they began to eat, Emma thanked him for that. He was a very spiritual man who seemed grateful for all that he had. Emma decided to try to be the same.

The Campbells all began eating quickly, as if in a hurry. Emma sat and nibbled at her food, wanting to make conversation. In Boston, her family enjoyed sitting down to a meal together and they often talked for a long time. Here, dinner seemed to be simply for gaining nourishment for the body. After a while, Jack looked up at Emma, his brow wrinkled at her again. "You need to eat," he said simply.

"I... am," Emma finally got to speak, "and might I say it is all delicious." She smiled at everyone as they all just looked up at her. Emma cleared her throat to clear the tension she was now feeling, then went on, "Phoebe, you did a fine job teaching me to make biscuits."

"Thank you." This was such a short reply for Phoebe's usually chatty self. She went back to eating.

"And Oliver, I like the way you folded the napkins." She smiled pleasantly at him. She almost thought he was going to smile back, or say something, but he just stopped eating for a moment, then went back to it.

Now Emma noticed that they were almost finished and she had barely eaten. Jack was staring at her. She ate the rest of her meal without speaking. At the end of lunch, they all got up and cleaned up. There was no food left to be put away. Soon they were headed back outside for more chores. Jack had already gone out to the barn while Emma and the children did the dishes and put them away.

As they reached the yard, Phoebe and Oliver ran off into the barn. Emma was walking across the yard after them when Jack appeared around the corner of the door to the barn. He stopped and leaned against the barn. Emma almost winced at the look on his face. She felt like a child about to be chided by her parent, instead of a wife. She approached him and stopped in front of him, trying to seem confident.

He eyed her for a moment, then began, "About the meals... we eat because we need to... because farming is hard work." He always seemed to be short and to the point, with little discussion. "You ate like you were at a 'social' at lunch... and you did not even eat your breakfast."

Emma began to feel tears in her eyes. She would like to think it was the sun, or Jack's harshness, but she had to admit, it was her own guilt. They had gotten up early and fixed her breakfast and they seem to eat every bit of their food, even the children. She finally found her voice, "Jack, I am sincerely sorry if I offended you. I was not sure that was my breakfast, or I would have eaten it. Tomorrow I will be up with you and the children and I will eat all of my meals..." she was rambling faster and faster as the tears began to roll down her face, "...I am sorry! I am just not used to it here yet and I am trying."

Jack's face had softened and he was now the one looking a little sheepish. He stuttered, "It is OK." He walked over as if he was going to give her a hug as he did the children so often, but he stopped just in front of her as if he was unsure if it would be welcome.

Emma wiped her eyes and tried to pull herself together. "I am sorry I am crying."

"I am sorry I made you cry." Jack's voice was soft again. So soft, in fact, that Emma leaned toward him, but he just steadied her with his hands out-stretched. "Will you be... OK?"

Emma stood up straight and cleared her throat. "Yes," she said definitely. Then Jack went on out of the yard. Emma took a moment to compose herself before joining the children in the barn. She felt ashamed for being so forward as to try to be that close to Jack. Something about him seemed to make her want to be close to him, but he did not seem to want to be that close to her, as he had just shown her. She cleaned her face with her sleeve and went to find Phoebe and Oliver, determined not to cry again!

Chapter 21: So Much to Do

The afternoon work was equally as grueling as the morning. Emma always thought of herself as a hard worker, but she was not sure she had ever done so much in one day... and this seemed to be everyday for the Campbells.

She and the children finished up with the animals and the barn. Everyone was fed and cleaned. Oliver especially seemed to like to get in the pen with the animals. He was small and they took him in like one of their own. Phoebe was very industrious, but at times her actions reminded Emma that she was only four years old. Emma felt she was getting the hang of things and was looking forward to finishing a job well done.

As they left the barn in the mid-afternoon, Emma spoke up, "So Phoebe, what shall we do now?"

Phoebe looked around and shrugged her shoulders.

"I think we should take a stroll around the premises," Emma continued, "to see what needs to be done."

Phoebe looked at her funny, "what is a 'prem'isis'?" she asked, looking to Oliver and he was also shrugging, in imitation of his beloved big sister.

Emma laughed. "It just means let us walk around the house and the yard, the premises." She emphasized the last word, saying it slowly to help them learn it. Emma realized by Phoebe's imitation that she was not used to hearing words pronounced quite like Emma did, with her Boston accent. She laughed again at the thought of how funny she must sound to them. "We need to make a list of a few things that... well..." Emma did not want to offend them so she chose her words carefully, "things that might need to be done."

"OK." Phoebe sounded just like Jack as she was short and began immediately to walk around, looking at everything.

Emma and Oliver caught up and she began to point out a few things to the children. First she noticed that they had a small garden in the back by the kitchen door. It was not full and needed to be weeded. "Perhaps we should put this garden at the top of our list," she noted, and Phoebe shook her head strongly in agreement. "I think this should be our herb garden."

"What is an 'ub'," Phoebe asked.

Emma laughed again. She very carefully pronounced the word again, trying to sound out each sound without an accent. "'H..e..r..b..s,'" she finally got out, "are plants that you grow to put in your food... for flavor!" Phoebe nodded, but Emma was still not sure if she understood. "We will need to pull all these horrible weeds and let the 'good' plants grow better."

They continued their walk, with Emma pointing out several tasks that she noticed. The porches all needed to be swept, as did the inside of the house as well. The flower gardens, or so they appeared to have once been, were completely overgrown, but with mostly dead shrubs and flowers. They would need to be cleaned up. There were several small repairs that could possibly be done, even by a city woman.

Then there was just the general organization. Emma had been used to having things put together with their other necessary parts. They spent a few hours putting all the wash things together near the pump and gathering and cleaning the gardening tools and stacking them neatly in rows on the front porch, along with other small tasks.

Finally they were able to start on the garden. It was completely overrun from the winter of weeds. However, Emma did find a few perennials that she thought she could salvage, mostly herbs. Back in Boston, Emma had taken great pride in her kitchen garden. Her father had given her a book about gardening that listed plants of all kinds, along with a very detailed description. She had brought this book with her and now she brought it out to look through their garden.

Phoebe was completely captivated by the book. She acted as though she had never seen a book before. "What is that?" she asked.

Emma handed her the book, but she was hesitant to take it. "It is a book about gardens." She pushed the book forward a little more toward Phoebe. "It is alright. You may hold it." Emma had always taken extremely good care of her books, because she had so few that were her very own, but her father always said that books were to be used. She could hear him now, "a brand new book that is never touched or opened is no better than a doorstop!"

Phoebe took the book carefully and looked at it. "Inside that book it tells us all about plants and how to grow a wonderful garden."

"May I look inside?" Phoebe asked as though all the wonders of the universe were held within the binding of the book in her tiny hands.

"Absolutely!" Emma replied. "Please do."

Phoebe cautiously opened the book and as she did, several small envelopes fell out to the ground. She looked shocked and immediately closed the book, scrambling to pick up the contents. "Oh, Miss Emma, Oh, I am so sorry!"

Emma smiled and reached to help her retrieve the suspicious packets. As she did, she remembered that she had collected seeds from many of her favorite plants last fall and that she had dried them and stored them in the pages of her book. She had forgotten all about that. "May I?" she asked, reaching for the book again. She thumbed through the pages and found more small envelopes. "Oh!" she sounded excited, "I had forgotten all about the seeds. I put these here last Autumn." She looked at Phoebe and smiled. "These are the seeds from my garden. We can plant these in your garden and they will grow wonderful things for you."

Phoebe looked less worried and soon they were all laughing and smiling, though the children were not really sure why. They carefully collected up the packets and Emma put them in the pocket of her apron that she had also brought with her. She always wore it while working at home to protect her dresses and it had several large pockets that allowed her to carry what she needed with her around the house and yard.

Now that Emma had new hope for their garden, she began to look through the book to remember all she had. She decided they could make a picture tonight of how to lay out the garden and what to put and where. She found the 'good' plants and taught Oliver and Phoebe how to pull the rest of the weeds. Then she retrieved the hoe from the front porch and began to loosen the dirt. This seemed to appeal to Oliver and, though he could hardly hold up the hoe, Emma let him work on that as she joined Phoebe.

As they worked, Emma's head began to spin with lists of all the work that she knew needed to be done, both inside and outside the house. All of this was making her feel more like home. She had always been the one that made plans ahead.

She was deep in thought about home and wondered how her family was doing. Not that they could not make it without her, but if they were missing her or wondering where she had gone. She felt guilty in a way, but did not know that she could have done much different. She prayed that they would forgive her for any hurt or frustration she might have caused.

Emma got a glimpse of the sun in her eyes on the horizon and realized that it was getting ready to set. This day was almost gone. Her stomach began to ache a little and she realized she was truly hungry. She remembered her conversation earlier with Jack and realized that she had so much to learn about farm life.

"What do you usually eat for supper?" she asked the children, who were both busy working as hard as she was.

Oliver looked up, obviously ready for his supper. Phoebe shrugged, "I don't know? Whatever we have left from earlier I guess."

Emma immediately stopped. "Well, we need to clean up here and get started fixing something." She smiled at them both, "You two have worked very hard and I am proud of you. We are going to have a wonderful garden and then we can have more variety for our suppers."

Phoebe and Oliver were beaming from the praise. Oliver even got up and came over and gave Emma a small hug before running back to his spot. "That means he likes you." Phoebe interpreted. Emma's smile was huge.

Chapter 22: ???

They quickly cleaned up the area they had been working on. Emma put the tools away and they took the mounds of weeds and put them on the large fire pit nearby that Emma assumed was used for wash day. She surveyed the area once more, proud of all they had been able to accomplish on her first day here. She tried to ignore all the things that she was constantly noticing that still needed to be done. She wanted to enjoy their job well done for a while... until tomorrow.

Inside, they got out all that they could find leftover. Emma noted that tomorrow they would probably have to work inside and do some baking. She also wanted to survey all that was available in the cool room. Springtime on a farm was usually sparse, until the first crops began to come in, because all from the fall harvest had been used up during the winter.

In Boston, they had had a nice, plentiful garden, and they did preserve some for winter, but they did not have to do everything. They got their milk and eggs and even their meat from small farms on the edge of town that came in with their wagons or from butcher shops. They bought dresses from the shops and even the ones they made, they bought the fabric ready-made. Emma had taken all this for granted, and now she had to think when she would have time to do it all for them herself, and watch two children.

At dinner, Emma ate quietly, trying to assimilate into the Campbell's way of doing things. Jack, on the other hand, seemed to be doing the opposite. He asked them about their day and commented on how good the garden was looking. Still dinner went quickly.

It was dark by the time they cleaned up and the children were ready for bed. Jack had a warm fire going in the large fireplace and several lamps lit in the front part of the room. A large lantern hung from the ceiling in the kitchen area. There was a cord that was used to lower and raise the lamp for lighting.

Emma found a box in the corner that had what looked like scraps of fabric and old cloths. "May I look through these?" she asked as they were about to settle in and read the Bible before putting the children to bed.

"I suppose so," Jack agreed with a quizzical look on his face. "What are you looking for?"

"I thought there might be something I could... salvage... for work cloths... or play cloths for the children," she replied, smiling politely, "or maybe I could start a quilt."

Jack looked embarrassed now. "Those are all their cloths," he said bluntly.

Emma was horrified, partly at the fact that what she mistook as a box of rags was really all that these children had to wear and partly at her shame for embarrassing him and the children.

Jack seemed to realize how she was feeling. "I... have been meaning to get them some more cloths." He hesitated, then continued, "They do have a nicer church outfit, each of them." He indicated a few pegs on the wall in the back that housed several nicer pieces of clothing. "I... would appreciate anything you can do with what is in the box. We will go into town and get more cloths or fabric if you need it."

Now he had made Emma really feel as if she had a mission here. She looked at Phoebe and Oliver, dirty and worn from hard work on the farm, and then of the list of chores forming in her head. The room they were sitting in even needed work. And Jack... maybe she could even make some improvements there, too.

Emma sat down on a low stool beside the box and began to take things out and fold them, sorting them into piles. Phoebe sat on the floor beside her and tried to help, but she was so tired that she could hardly keep her eyes open. Jack was in one of the large chairs and Oliver was curled up in his lap. He took the large Bible from the table beside him and began to read to them from it. It was a pleasant evening and soon they had the children tucked warmly under the covers on their pallet in front of the fire.

Jack noticed that the bucket of firewood was almost empty. He got up to walk out and get more. He stopped for a moment on the porch and leaned against the wall of the house, gazing at the bright moon. He looked worn out and just a bit sad. He obviously had a lot on his mind, a burden he was carrying. His face was hard and his brow furrowed. He closed his eyes and was praying as Emma joined him on the porch.

She had noticed him going out and wanted to talk to him away from the children. As he did not come directly back in, she took a chance that he might not have gone to his side of the cabin already. There was so much on Emma's mind. She had so many projects brewing in her head. But Emma was realizing that there was much she did not know about farm life. She wanted to talk to Jack and be sure she would be alright with these ventures.

As Emma walked through the door, she realized that Jack seemed to be having a quiet moment and that she might be interrupting. "Oh," she exclaimed quietly, stepping back through the door, "I am so sorry."

Before she could reenter the house, Jack's low voice caught her, "Come on out." He looked up at her without moving. She, again, came onto the porch and shut the cabin door.

"I... did not mean to bother you. I just thought I might have a word with you, sometime." Emma stayed near the door, still not sure if she was welcome.

Jack stood up straight. He was so tall that his head almost reached the roof. Emma had noticed this because she always saw him stoop to go through the doorways. He walked over to the large set of steps leading to the yard and sat down on the side of one. He patted the step beside him, almost as if calling the pet dog to come and sit down. Emma tried not to be offended, but she had not sat on a step since she was a young child, at least not in front of a gentleman. And she certainly had never been invited to do so.

Jack patted the dusty floor again, looking up at her, "Come on," he teased, "sit down and 'have a word'."

"I prefer to stand, thank you." Emma glared at him.

Jack stood up slowly, never losing eye contact with her. Emma began to wonder if she should be afraid of him. He had never shown any reason to think he might harm her, but his rough appearance did lead one to believe he might have a rugged personality to match. Emma was still standing by the door, now backed up to the wall in defense.

She tried to show no fear as he slowly walked over to her. His eyes seemed to be boring holes right down to her soul, but as he neared her, he stopped, almost face to face. Emma had never been an emotional girl. She had never seemed to have reason for real strong emotions of any kind. But Jack Campbell seemed to be able to make her feel everything, one strong feeling after another. Her fear from just moments ago now turned to another feeling. She was not sure exactly what it was. Her breath caught in her lungs and seemed to hang there, not able to exhale. She wanted to look away, but her eyes were trapped by his.

Then, finally, as she had seen him do before, he instantly softened. His whiskers curled up with a faint smile and his once forbearing eyes became like twinkling lights. Emma knew that this must be his ploy to confuse her. Those few moments seemed like hours before Jack spoke again.

"Alright," he nodded to her, then turned on his heel and stood beside her, also leaning on the wall. He was so close that his sleeve was touching hers. Emma was not sure she would be able to speak. "Alright, we are standing," he smiled, "now what would you like to talk about?"

Emma had almost forgotten what she wanted to say. She stared out at the moon, trying to regain her composure, still unable to breathe properly and just as unsure why not. "It is about the children, about Phoebe and Oliver." She glanced sideways at him. He was looking directly at her. Emma unconsciously took a step back away from him. Jack reached out and took her by the arm, steadying her, then immediately took his arm away. He was facing her again now, with his shoulder leaning against the wall.

Emma was not used to feeling so overwhelmed by a man. In her house, she had always been the level-headed one, always in control of herself and her situation. She quickly stood up straight and began to wander about the porch to get farther from Jack's menacing figure. Fortunately, he stayed where he was.

"I believe that Phoebe could begin to read soon." She began rambling as fast as the words came into her mind. "She is a bright girl and I have some books that we could use. I am not sure what age children begin to go to school here..." she paused, trying to not sound condescending as a snob from Boston, "I would just like her to get a head-start. I think she would enjoy it." Emma glanced at Jack, who seemed to be listening, then she continued, "I would also like to make them some new cloths. The things in the box seem to be worn out and, though I might be able to use some of them, I do think some new fabric would be appropriate," again, she looked up, wondering if this affronted Jack.

Jack simply nodded his head and mumbled, "OK."

Emma thought she might go ahead and lay all her cards on the table now, instead of trying again later. "I would also like to get some fabric to make curtains for the cabin,... and a few plants or seeds for the garden... Would that be alright?"

"Yes," Jack answered curtly again. "Anything else?"

His tone sounded sarcastic to Emma. She calmed her voice and replied, "That is all I can think of right now."

Emma was sure that she must have offended Jack, but instead, he smiled and stood up again, taking a single step toward her. "Tomorrow we can go into town and get what you need. Please feel free to let me know any other... suggestions... you might have." Then he was gone down the steps and around the corner to the wood pile. Emma waited on the porch while he reentered the cabin and filled the large can with wood and restoked the fireplace.

After a moment, the door opened and Jack walked out across the dog-trot style porch toward the other cabin room. He paused and gave her a weary smile before continuing inside, "Good night, Emma."

"Good night."

Chapter 23: Buttons

The second morning for Emma was quite different from the first. She awoke early, hearing a soft creaking sound outside the door. She assumed that was Jack, but it sounded as though he might be barefoot. She glanced out the window and noticed that it was still partially dark. Jack and the children had been up much earlier than her the prior morning, so Emma was not sure when they did get started. Today, Phoebe and Oliver were still in bed.

Emma supposed it was her nerves that were waking her up so early today. She had had so much on her mind as she fell asleep last night that she had dreamed about it and her sleep seemed to her to be restless. Yet, all the hard labor from the day before had actually helped her to sleep quite soundly. She lay on the pallet, looking around the small cabin, or what she could see of it in the darkened room. She began to make lists in her mind again, thinking of what she might need in town.

A breeze blew over her and she felt a slight chill, that was also a little refreshing. It woke her up even more. As she glanced out the open windows, she thought of the beautiful curtains hanging in her bedroom back home in Boston. She always loved spring-time and how the curtains danced in the breezes. That would definitely be one thing she must get, curtains.

And, of course, some fabric to make the children each a new outfit. The cloths in the box were thin and worn, but would make perfect play cloths for the spring and summer, with a little mending and alterations from herself. But they needed at least one more outfit, something to wear into town when they went, for example. Yes, she thought, new cloths.

Then there was the house. It could use a fresh coat of paint, inside and out. The porch also had a few spokes that needed repair, so add some nails or wood. Emma's list began there and continued to grow, adding the garden and flowers for the yard.

Finally, she realized she might be overdoing it for just her second day. Emma quietly got up and slipped on her work dress. It was a thinner dress that felt much cooler when she was outside working in the garden. It had done nicely yesterday. She would wait until they had finished their chores before putting on her 'town' dress. Emma had not brought much, but she had managed to pack a nice dress for Sundays and two work dresses. She had worn her fourth dress, a plain one that was pretty enough to wear on a trip or going to town. She had also worn her good shoes, a short boot-shoe that laced up in the front. She had brought an older pair for working in the garden or around the house that was much smaller and easier to pack.

Emma was now in her old routine. She had filled the small stove with wood and it was beginning to heat up. The kettle was on top, filled with water. She was just about to hunt for something to make for breakfast when she heard the footsteps on the porch again.

Without thinking, she was at the door and pulled it open. "Oh no!" Emma screamed! Right there in front of her was a large black bear. As it saw the door open, it lunged for her and she immediately began pushing the door back closed on top of it. Emma had read about bears, but

this was her first experience seeing one. It was all happening so fast, that she felt she was done for and all she could do was fight to save the children.

The bear seemed to be scratching the door down. Emma screamed again. Now Phoebe and Oliver were awake and running around the room.

“Run! Hide! A Bear!” Emma shouted at them. “I cannot hold it off much longer!” The strain on the door was digging into Emma’s shoulder. The children were screaming now, too. Emma’s mind was whirling around her. Then she heard Jack’s voice on the other side of the door.

“Get down!” he yelled in a deep, commanding voice. Images flashed through Emma’s head of Jack being attacked by the great creature from the wild, but she could not open the door and expose the children.

The door slammed shut as the animal left its attack on her door and turned on Jack. Emma rush to the fireplace and grabbed the large poker, then she was back at the door. Phoebe was helping Oliver up on the table and, without thinking of herself, she opened the door, ready to attack. The porch was now empty and quiet. She looked around for Jack or any sign of the bear; nothing.

“Wait here!” she told the children, “and keep the door shut.” She shut the door behind her and crept to the edge of the porch. All of a sudden, the bear was back. It came bounding around the corner and up the stairs toward Emma. She was sure this was it; the end of her life. She closed her eyes and through up her hands, screaming again, tears flowing everywhere.

Next thing Emma knew, she felt it touch her and she began to swing wildly with the poker. “Stop!” she heard Jack’s voice and opened her eyes. Jack was there with her, trying to stop her attack.

Emma froze in her tracks. “Where is it? The bear? Oh, I am so glad you are alright!” She threw her arms around Jack and cried uncontrollably.

After just a moment, Jack pried her lose and set her down on the porch. She looked at him in surprise, her eyes darting around the yard. “We need to go in!” She grabbed him by the arm and pulled toward the door. As she turned, she saw it there, lying calmly in front of the door like a doormat. It was a dog!

As soon as she saw it, it was up and coming toward them again. She realized now that what she mistook for a bear was actually a very large, shaggy dog. It bounded over and jumped up on them.

“Down!” Jack commanded again, pulling Emma around behind him to shelter her from the assault.

By now, Jack was laughing, a strong, hearty laugh. He used one hand to protect Emma and the other to push the dog away. As they heard the commotion and recognized the sounds, Phoebe came peeked around the door and then came bounding out toward the canine. Oliver, followed, timidly at first, then by the time he reached them he jumped on the dog.

Emma, still in shock from the whole experience, her heart racing so fast, she thought it might never stop, clung to the rail of the steps, ready to run away. The children offered the dog the distraction it needed to leave her alone long enough to regain her composure a little. Jack was still laughing and holding the dog down on the porch. The children were rolling all over the large, thick-furred animal.

As Emma came to herself, she became indignant. Here she had risked her life to help him and he was laughing at her. What they must all think of her, screaming and crying and ready to beat the intruder to protect them. She stormed down the stairs and around the corner. She reached the barn and went in. In the protection of the stall housing the cow, she knelt down in the corner and curled up in a ball and began sobbing. What was she thinking, coming here to this wild place. She was scared and felt very alone.

Emma looked up when she heard footsteps on the straw. Jack stood looming over her, calmer now, trying hard to conceal his delight in her misunderstanding. He was wearing a pair of winter underclothes and appeared to have been awakened by the noise. Emma could tell it was still quite early.

“It is alright.” Jack said, still amused. “It’s only our dog. He won’t hurt you... unless he knocks you down,” he chuckled, “he just likes to jump on people... because he likes us.”

Emma stared at him, not wanting to move. Jack walked over and put out his hand to help her up. She turned away from him, not sure if it was still fear or if it was now just embarrassment that kept her still. How could she face Phoebe and Oliver after scaring them so much over a dog. They must think she is such a prude and a baby.

Jack stooped down beside her. He was not laughing at her anymore, though occasionally he seemed to not be able to help a chuckle. “His name is Buttons,” he went on, calmly, “I’m afraid he is not very well trained.” He paused again, then with no response from Emma he went on. “He likes to run off and is sometimes gone for several days... then he comes back... full of energy!” he tilted his head to look at Emma, now glaring at him, and Jack got a big smile on his face. She felt as if he was always making fun of her, but she was learning that was just his nature.

Jack sat all the way down and stayed with Emma until she finally regained her composure. Emma had been used to always having someone around at home in Boston, but they never paid her this much attention. She was usually ‘lost in the crowd’. When something was bothering Emma, she was quiet about it and went off by herself, and only her father ever seemed to notice. Here, with Jack, however, she could not get away. He noticed everything and seemed relentless in staying with her until it was solved. Emma was not used to it, but she was not completely convinced that she did not like it.

Finally, Emma and Jack rejoined the children in the house. Emma had skirted by Buttons on the porch as Jack held him off. Phoebe already had biscuits made and sitting on the pan. She had also made pancake batter. These were her favorites.

Jack laughed when he saw it, and the huge mess of flour all over Phoebe and Oliver. Emma had to laugh, too, in spite of herself. Jack filled and turned on the stove, then volunteered to go out and get some meat, while Emma began working in the kitchen.

“Thank you for fixing breakfast, Phoebe,” she said, trying to smile at the young girl.

Phoebe was beaming. “I’m sorry Buttons scared you.” She came over and hugged Emma. “He scared me some, too... before.”

"Well, thank you. He did give me an awful fright." Emma shivered, then giggled at herself. "I am sorry I woke you up so early for nothing."

"It OK, Miss Emma. I like it 'cause I get to fix breakfast'," again, Phoebe was beaming.

Emma felt a tug on her skirt and looked down to see Oliver, also covered with flour. He had obviously started putting jelly on something as well. "And thank you, too, Oliver, for fixing breakfast with Phoebe." Oliver beamed, then walked off to 'spoon' more jelly into his mouth. Jack, Phoebe and Emma all laughed out loud.

Jack was still laughing when he went back outside to tend to things in the barn. Emma stayed and helped finish the breakfast and clean up the mess. Before long, they were finished eating and had completed their morning chores. Emma and Phoebe had checked on their garden work from the day before and seemed pleased with the progress they had made. Emma had a list written on a small piece of paper Phoebe had shared with her. She included items needed for the garden. Soon they were all ready to go to town.

Chapter 24: Going to Town

Emma was not sure how things would go in town. She did not know yet if Jack was more the type that was reclusive and no one knew him or if they made their way into town quite often and had an active social standing in the community.

It was a good ride to town, stopping at the Witherspoon's house on the way to see if there might be something they could pick up for them. It was good to see Mabel and John again, though just a little awkward still. They were not there long, chatting politely, and then they were on their way. As the Witherspoons had been to town recently and did not need anything, they would not be stopping there on their way home.

As they got into the wagon, Mabel reminded them, "Jack, you did tell Emma about the pot-luck we are to be having on Sunday after worship?" Emma glanced at him. He shrugged his shoulders. "Well, you be sure to stay. There will be plenty of food, so you don't have to worry about bringin' anything."

"Thank you," Emma replied, still not sure about Jack or whether he was a pot-luck kind of man. She realized she had a lot to learn.

They all smiled and waved as they pulled away. It was such a nice day for a ride. Soon they were arriving in town. The town seemed smaller today than it had on her last visit, and yet, there were so many things that she had not noticed before that were now catching her attention. They passed the barn where Jack had kept his wagon on their wedding day. Emma thought about what he had said to her, about her last chance. She was still dazed and confused, but Emma was a decisive person. She tried to think things through, then make a decision and go with it. Emma did not like being wishy-washy.

"Are you not going to park the wagon in the barn today?" she inquired.

"No." Jack was also very decisive sometimes, and this could be very annoying.

"Where are we going?" Phoebe chimed in, excited about a visit to the town. Her actions made Emma believe they might not come here often.

"Where would you like to go?" Jack replied to Phoebe, but he was looking at Emma.

Phoebe looked at Oliver. "We want to go to the candy store!" she replied emphatically.

Jack looked puzzled and wrinkled his brow at them, obviously teasing. "I don't know that we have a candy store!"

"Oh, yes! You remember the last time we were here. We went to a store and got candy!" Phoebe did not seem to hear the sarcasm and seemed genuinely worried that Jack would not remember where the candy was. "Please think! Maybe we could just ride around and I would see it." She began to carefully spy out each building.

Jack and Emma both laughed out loud. "You should really be on a stage somewhere, Phoebe," Emma finally commented. Phoebe did not notice their teasing, but was completely absorbed in her exploration.

Quietly, Jack spoke more directly to Emma, who was sitting in the front on the wagon on the seat with him. He was still chuckling a little. "Where would you like to go?"

"Well," Emma began, "I would like to find a store that sells fabric, so that I could make some cloths for the children, and..." she looked up at him, then down at her lap, "and maybe for you." Emma could not believe she had said that. She had thought about it, when she had not seen anything nice for Jack to wear and all his cloths seemed worn, but she had not meant to say it out loud. "I mean,..."

In her hesitation, Jack finished her sentence, "You mean you don't think I dress very well." He was staring right at her and Emma felt like he could burn a hole in her.

"I... I am... sorry," she peaked up at him, afraid she had ruined their beautiful day, but Jack was grinning at her.

"It's OK. I do need some new cloths," he said, raising his eyebrows at her, then looking back to the front, "but we can just get some cloths ready-made. It's a lot of work to sew them and I think you are busy enough for now. We will go to the general store. They have everything there."

Emma did not want to argue with him, but she felt as if she might become a burden if Jack thought she was going to change everything and that he would have to pay for it. "I really do not mind," she almost whispered.

"I know," Jack looked at her again, as if studying her to find out what made her tick, "but I do! We can purchase one outfit a piece for now, and some fabric for you to use to make another when you have time. How does that sound?"

"That would be very nice, thank you," Emma replied.

By now they had arrived at the store and Phoebe and Oliver were itching to get out and go into the store. They had recognized it as 'the candy store', not noticing anything else they sold. "You two go on in and pick out a piece of candy," Jack instructed as he helped them out of the wagon. They were happy to oblige.

Jack then helped Emma down. His fingers tightened around her waist as he lowered her to the ground, as if effortlessly. She was standing on the ground now, but she was face-to-face with Jack. His hands lingered for just the slightest moment around her and Emma blushed deeply. She had been helped from buggies before and it had never produced such an effect on her. Jack was looked right into her eyes, his own eyes twinkling like pools of blue water. She was sure that he could see her blushing, but she could never read his expression because his face was so hidden by his thick beard.

Finally, Emma gave him a curt smile and thanked him, using her hands to brush her dress smooth and in the mean time, knocking his hands from their perch. She turned quickly away toward the steps, hoping he had not noticed her face. After a moment, Jack followed her into the store and they found the children.

Emma was surprised at the stock that such a small store could hold. There were so many shops in Boston that each could sell very specific items. Here, their 'general' store had a little sampling of just about everything you could need. There was a section at the front where the children were, that had candy jars lining the shelf. It also had jars with tea, coffee, tobacco, spices, etc, and several small scoops in front beside a stack of small canvas bags. To the right of the door, there was an area with tables that contained bolts of fabric and clothing for every member of the family. The dresses were simply hanging on hooks to the side, not particularly displayed. In the back, they had everything from dry goods to farm implements and seeds. There was even a small area with several pieces of furniture for sale.

They wandered about the store, taking in all the items for sale. As Emma glanced at the clothing tables, an older woman came over and asked if she could be of assistance.

"Yes! Thank you!" Emma smiled at her. "I am looking for a shirt and some trousers for the young man at the counter," she indicated Oliver, "and a dress for his sister. I will also need cloths for..." Emma hesitated. She realized she had never really had to refer to Jack as anything yet, and it was odd for her to say, "for my husband." The words came out slowly and she pointed a limp finger at Jack.

The attendant did not seem to notice, but quickly began pulling out items she thought Emma might be interested in. Soon, Emma was busy looking and found all that she needed. She even got some fabric for curtains. The woman had helped her scoop out seeds for her garden that she needed and all of the grocery items from her list. Jack had gone to the back and was discussing a farm tool with the proprietor of the shop.

Finally, they were finished and Jack paid the man. Emma had never really paid for anything in her life. She shopped at places where her father was known and had an account. She would simply ask for what she needed and they would load it up for her. As Jack paid the man in cash, she wondered where he got his money, and if this shopping was a hardship on him financially. Emma would never ask, though, as her mother had taught her that men did not like to discuss things of this nature with women.

Emma was deep in debate with herself over these financial issues, when she realized Oliver and Phoebe were tugging on her skirt. She had been daydreaming and had not noticed that Jack and the owner had loaded everything in the wagon and Jack was standing in the doorway, waiting for her. She smiled and followed, and Jack held the door for her.

The rest of the day went quickly, they had lunch in the same restaurant they had eaten in when Emma first arrived. It was good and filling and Emma thankfully ate every bite. Emma and the children wandered the streets as Jack took the extra horse, which he had brought along, tied to the back of the wagon, to get a new shoe. People were walking everywhere, but it was not as crowded as in Boston. The people seemed to be friendlier, too. Even strangers would tip their hats and say 'hello'. Emma liked it here.

After a while, Emma noticed Jack down the street. As they approached, she saw he was speaking to the constable.

"Hello there," the friendly man blurted out to them, "you must be Emma."

"Yes," Emma replied politely, smiling at the man.

"This is Aaron Delaney," Jack interceded. "He is the deputy sheriff." Jack pointed to Emma, "and this is my wife, Emma."

Again, Emma had the realization of being married, something she was still not used to. Jack seemed so comfortable with the idea. She smiled at Mr. Delaney and gave a slight curtsy.

Aaron Delaney was a downright jolly fellow. "It is so very good to meet you, ma'am... and congratulations and best wishes to you. I know Jack here has been anxious for you to arrive. I hope you are settlin' in OK."

"Yes, thank you," Emma replied, Aaron's good nature rubbing off on her as well. "Are you and Jack... friends?" Since Jack was not one to volunteer information, Emma decided to ask for herself.

"Oh, yes!" he replied, looking toward Jack. "Jack here is like my own little brother. I guess I have known him... well... forever, it seems like."

Jack finally spoke up, "We met at church. Aaron goes to church with us."

"Oh," Emma concluded. "Well, it is nice to get to meet you here in town."

"And it is nice to meet you. You will be stayin' for the pot luck on Sunday, won't you?" he directed this comment more at Jack than Emma.

The children picked up on this and began to appeal to Jack. Oliver tugged on his pant leg and looked at him with pleading eyes. Phoebe started begging, "Please, please, please, oh please can we stay."

Jack strung them along for a while, finally giving in, which was his intent all along. "Ok! Ok! I guess we could try..." the children jumped all over Jack like he was a playground. He was laughing out loud and letting them chase him around.

Aaron stood near Emma and whispered to her, "He always stays."

Emma glanced at Aaron, then back at Jack. He was very hard to get to know, but always seemed to end up as just an amazing man.

Finally they finished playing and talking to Aaron. They all waved goodbye and went to shop in a few more stores, mainly browsing, though they did pick up a few more things. A few carts were parked at one end of town selling early farm produce, seeds and small plants. They purchased some fresh vegetables to eat now and a few trays full of starter plants, along with seeds for things they could grow easily

themselves. Emma could imagine her garden, lush with plants to produce hearty meals with endless variety. She was already tired of eating biscuits and ham and the like at each meal.

As they went about town, several people seemed to know Jack and stopped to speak to him. He was always polite and introduced Emma, usually giving her some piece of information about them to help her have a conversation with them, as well. What was so unusual to Emma was that so many people seemed to know, and like Jack, but she noticed he would also introduce the children to most of them. Emma wondered if maybe Jack's wife did not like to go into town much and kept the children with her. Some of them even seemed surprised that he had a wife or children.

Their wagon was loaded full as they left town. Phoebe and Oliver were in the back, lying on their backs, watching the sky as they sucked on their candy canes. Jack had let them each pick three pieces, but two would be put away for another special occasion.

Emma sat in front, beside Jack. He was quiet and she was, too, thinking about the day and all the curious behavior. Jack never seemed to surprise her. She had also noticed Jack's behavior toward the children more today than before, because they had all spent most of the day together. He was so good with them, playing and talking and teasing them good naturedly, but also strict enough to keep them out of trouble. She supposed he felt he had to be everything to them, as he was their only parent left.

Emma wondered if he could ever trust her to be their mother.

Chapter 25: The Watering Hole

Now Emma could not clear her mind from this topic. Jack had not talked at all about his wife. He had no pictures of her in the cabin. Even the children did not seem to mention her, or at least they had not so far. She thought long and hard of exactly the way she could bring up the subject, but just as she was about to start, Jack pulled the wagon off the road. They were on a small dirt path that seemed to lead down into the trees.

"Where are we going?" Emma asked, trying not to look worried.

Jack smiled, "It's a surprise!" His eyes twinkled and his eyebrows bobbed up and down like he was up to something.

The children were now asleep in the back from their exhausting day and did not seem to budge. Soon, the end of the woods seemed to open up and Jack pulled the wagon to a stop. He was out and around to help Emma out. As she got out, they walked over to the top of a small hill and she gasped at the sight of the most beautiful waterfall she had ever seen. The water toppled over the small cliff and then continued downstream in small ripples that looked like diamonds in the sun.

"Oh, Jack, this is beautiful!" Emma exclaimed. Jack smiled broadly and walked over to the edge, but Emma was a little concerned and held back.

"Come on," Jack coaxed her. "I won't push you in."

Emma laughed a nervous laugh at the thought. Then she slowly walked over toward the edge of the river, almost on her tip-toes. Jack had sat down on a large boulder, almost out in the stream of water.

He patted the rock beside him, as if to say, 'come sit down here', but Emma shook her head. "No thank you. I believe I am close enough."

Jack laughed, then he laid back on the rock like he was taking a nap. Emma found another rock, farther out from the water, and perched herself on it, watching the water trickle downstream. It was a beautiful afternoon and they enjoyed soaking in the warm sun for a while, listening to the gurgle of the water.

It was so peaceful there. As Emma sat quietly with her thoughts, she felt as if they were alone in the world. All the worries of her past life, or what the future might hold seemed to be washed away by the rolling river. They sat there for so long that she was beginning to think Jack might have gone to sleep. Emma began to get up to stretch her legs, intending to stroll down the bank of the waterway.

"Where are you going?" Jack interrupted her thoughts without warning.

Emma looked over at him, his eyes still closed, he had not budged. "I was just going to walk a little... Do we need to go now?"

"No," he replied, "we can stay as long as you want to."

Emma walked down the stream a while, enjoying the view and the peaceful afternoon. After a while, she could hear the children talking and laughing and she headed back. They were sitting out on the rock where Jack had been. Phoebe was stretching her bare toes out to see if they could touch the water. Oliver was lying on his stomach with his entire arms in the water. He was so close that the small sprays of water hitting the rock were getting his hair damp. Jack had gotten out his fishing pole and was sitting near a small pool of water, fishing.

Emma walked up to the children. She was a little concerned that they might fall in, so, against her better judgement, she climbed partially up onto the boulder within arms-reach of Phoebe and Oliver. "Are you not worried they might fall in?" she tried to whisper in Jack's direction, hoping Phoebe would not hear.

"We won't!" Phoebe answered. Emma realized that Phoebe, like Jack, was always listening, even when seeming to be oblivious of your very presence.

Emma glanced at Phoebe with a weak smile. "Oh! Alright." But Emma stayed right there until they decided to get down. Jack did not seem in the least worried. He was very laid back and Emma supposed he had brought the children here to fish many times. She figured that he could just jump in and save them if they fell in the water.

"We thought maybe you had gotten yourself lost." Phoebe continued. She bounced up and gave Emma a hug. "I am glad you are back OK!"

"Thank you," Emma replied. "I just walked along the water, so it was easy to turn and walk back."

"Are you two helping catch dinner?" she continued in their light-hearted conversation.

Oliver looked up at her now and shook his head, then he turned back and stuck his hands back in the water.

Phoebe giggled, "I do not know how to fish."

"Oh!" Emma was surprised. Phoebe was such a curious little girl and Jack would have had to had taken them with him after his wife died. She wondered why Phoebe had never found an interest in fishing. Emma herself had never been fishing. They would occasionally go down to the harbor in Boston and watch the water lap at the shore, but a lady would not have stood on the docks with all the men and gone fishing.

They talked about the water, the fish and the beautiful Tennessee foliage for a while. Phoebe was inquisitive about what Boston looked like and how it was different from their own current surroundings. The sun was beginning to hang very low in the sky. Emma was having so much fun that she hardly realized it was getting late.

Finally, Jack got up and pulled a stick out of the dirt. Attached was a rope with several fish hanging onto the end. He had started a fire earlier, while Emma was gone, and he went to the wagon and got out several things. He had a long, sharp knife that he used to scale the fish. Then he tossed them into a large pan and was ready to cook their dinner. Emma realized that Jack must have planned this excursion ahead of time, as he came so prepared.

"Can I help you?" Emma called over to him.

"No thanks!" He looked up at her with a pleasant smile at first, then he smirked at her, "You're doing a great job protecting the kids."

Emma did not like it when Jack made smartalike comments to her. She was still not sure when he was kidding or making fun of her or when he was serious. Still... in a way, it did make her feel more comfortable around him, like she could also be herself and say what was on her mind or be silly with him. This is the way she had always joked with her brothers and it sort of made her feel at home.

They were soon eating dinner off the tin plates that Jack had also packed in the basket. He seemed to have thought of everything. The children ate heartily, as did Jack and Emma.

"This is delicious! What kind of fish is it?" Emma commented between bites.

"Trout," Jack answered. He continued eating.

"Thank you..." she went on, "...for all of this... I mean for the trip to town... and the wonderful afternoon here at the river... and... the dinner."

Jack did not comment, but looked up at her slightly and smiled a quick smile before going back to eating. They finished eating and Emma helped clean up the dishes in the stream. Jack had several fish left over that were cooked and several still alive. He wrapped up the cooked fish and put the swimmers in a barrel in the back of the wagon, making several trips to the water to fill it up. He intended to smoke them and put them in the cool room for later use, as Emma found out later.

After all was ready to go, Jack again took something from the wagon. It was an old worn-in Bible. The children were still sitting by the fire, relaxed and happy. Jack went back over to the fire and sat down, prompting Emma to follow. Jack was sitting next to Phoebe and asked her to help him find the particular passage that he was going to read. This seemed to be his habit, helping Phoebe with her reading and encouraging her to become accustomed to reading this, the greatest book ever written.

They turned slightly toward the fire in order to see the words on the yellowing pages. Emma had glanced at the book in the morning, when she first got up, and had seen it had Jack's father's name in it, as well as his own. It was obviously well used and Emma realized more and more that it was also well lived. Jack read for a while, using his finger to guide Phoebe along with him in the Book. Occasionally, she would come across a word that peaked her curiosity and she would ask what it meant. Jack patiently explained. At length, he carefully closed the book and set it down.

Next, Jack prayed, thanking God for their many blessings and for their safe trip, asking for His continued help in all they do. He also prayed again about Emma. Emma felt blessed to have a husband who put God first in his life. As they finished the prayer and Emma opened her eyes, she noticed that Phoebe had fit her tiny hand into Jack's. His hand was so large in comparison, yet they seemed to fit each other. He gently raised her hand to his mouth and kissed it before helping her up.

The sun was now almost completely set as they loaded things up and got in the wagon. The moonlight was bright enough to see them home safely. They were only a few minutes from home, Emma learned, but the children were almost asleep by the time they got there. Jack carried them inside, one at a time, while Emma busied herself carrying in their packages from town. They worked well together and soon Phoebe and Oliver were asleep, the shopping was stored away and the fish were even cleaned and hanging up to dry in front of the fire.

Emma had gone to the well to fetch clean water for the basin so that Jack could wash up after finishing the fish. She waited for him, busying herself with organizing and reorganizing the fabrics for her projects. She even held the curtain fabric up to the window, though it was too dark to really see how it would look. The only light was the faint glow in the large fireplace that Jack had built for them. It had gotten quite chilly since the sun went down, but Emma had hardly noticed for the wonderful time they were having.

After he was cleaned up, Jack turned walked over to the front room. Emma turned around, still clutching the curtains in her hands. He stopped a few feet from her. Emma wondered if he had changed his mind about... about giving her time to... adjust. She pulled the fabric up closer in unconscious defense. Jack took another step toward her. He looked at her intently, or so it seemed in the shadows of the room.

Emma held her breath. It had been such a wonderful day and she was beginning to wonder, even with their many differences, if perhaps she wanted him to change his mind. A shudder ran down her spine as she waited in anticipation.

Then, very suddenly, Jack simply said 'good night' and turned sharply and walked out the door, closing it gently, but firmly behind him. Emma stood frozen for a moment. She waited to hear him walk away to the other cabin, but heard nothing for what seemed like an eternity. Finally, she could hear his footsteps as his boots marched across the porch and into his room. Then it was silent once again.

When Emma could force herself to move again, she quickly dressed for bed and slipped under the covers gratefully. She felt relieved to be snuggled up alone in her own bed. She lay there for a moment and thought about the day. It had been a good day and she realized that Jack

could have been working, but he had taken the day off to take her to town and had even added their nice picnic expedition. He was a very thoughtful man and a good man, from what Emma could see so far. She felt good again about her decision to come to Tennessee and she went to sleep content.

Chapter 26: The Lord's Day

Saturday night came and it was time for cleaning up. Life on a farm was not only hard work, but dirty. Emma felt constantly covered with dust from head to toe. She was sure that she must not smell very good either. In Boston, they had a small bath room that had a large cast-iron tub in it. It also had its own small fireplace. They were able to pump water into that room directly and heat it over the fireplace to take a warm bath much more often than allowed here. Emma could not imagine how it would be when the hot Summer weather came.

This particular evening Jack pulled a crude looking version of her tub out of the corner into the main room, just in front of the fire. It was smaller than the one at home and made out of wood, lined with a black substance. Emma examined it carefully.

"It does hold water," Jack interrupted her thoughts once again. She was beginning to get used to this.

"Oh," she stammered, "I am sure it is..." Emma searched for a word that would sound positive and not offensive, "perfect!" She tried to smile.

Jack began bringing water in and they heated it over the fire in the tea-kettle. They had another pan on the stove and they stove and fireplace were both going strong. Jack would put one or two buckets straight into the tub, then add the boiling water to come to some compromise of luke-warm. This was not too bad in such a toasty room.

Emma began to wonder if they all just bathed right in front of each other. She debated which was worse, being filthy or being naked in public. Soon her questions were answered.

"All right, you two climb in," Jack ordered Phoebe and Oliver.

They were ready and in the tub in no time at all. Obviously, they did not mind public nudity. Emma was not sure but that they enjoyed it. They each had a small wooden boat that they played with in the bath.

Jack continued to make trips out to the well and Emma tried to man the two hot water containers, pouring them carefully into the tub as they got hot. A stack of old, soft blankets were available for drying and after a little play time the children were out and dry. They put on their nightclothes and curled up in the big chair in the front room. Jack emptied part of the water, pouring it out in the yard and replacing it with heated well water again.

While waiting for it to get hot, he sat down and read to all of them from the Bible. After they prayed, the children went straight to their beds. The warm water had made them drowsy and they went to sleep quickly. Jack made another trip for a large refill of water.

"Um...", Jack did not know exactly what to do, his eyes darting around the room, trying not to make contact with Emma, "I suppose you can go next."

Emma was frozen. The children were asleep and she and Jack were alone, for all practical purposes, in the cabin. Did he really expect that she would take a bath right here in front of him, as he came and went, watching her? She almost started to cry and she was glad to have the darkness to camouflage her misery.

Jack finished pouring the hot water in the tub, then turned quickly and walked out onto the porch. Emma was partially relieved. The well was out the back door, so it might be that he was not coming back. Yet, she could hear that he was still on the porch.

She waited to hear the door to the other cabin close before even moving. As soon as it did close, Emma went to the door and peeked out; Jack was nowhere to be found. She hurried to the tub, stripped her cloths, keeping a close eye on the children to see that they were still asleep, then slipped into the tub.

Emma had every intention of taking a short bath, but the water felt so good and warm that she stayed longer than expected. She even closed her eyes and relaxed for a few moments, not moving until the water began to cool. She washed all over, including her hair, which had never looked so dirty. After drying off and dressing, she felt so much better. She giggled to herself as she let the side of the bath win the debate over the possible embarrassment of earlier. It was worth it!

Emma awoke extra early on Sunday morning. She was excited about the chance to go and worship with others of like faith. She already knew John and Mabel Witherspoon and Aaron Delaney, the deputy from town. It was going to be a wonderful day to meet more friends. She lay in bed for a moment, wondering about the people she would see and how different it would be here from the way they worshipped in Boston. Everything in Tennessee seemed a little less formal than she was used to and she liked that.

She had spent the afternoon yesterday ironing her best dress and Jack, Phoebe and Oliver's new cloths. They were hanging neatly on the pegs in the corner, ready to wear. Jack had killed a chicken for her and she had cut it into pieces and fried them in hot oil. They were wrapped in a clean cloth in a basket in the cold room, ready to go. She had also made a bowl of salad greens from one of the heads of lettuce that Mabel had given them the day they went to town and from some things she had found growing wild in their own kitchen garden.

This morning she made extra biscuits and after they ate breakfast, placed the rest in another basket. She had also made a pie. The pie crust ingredients came from their trip to town, but the berries were picked near the house by Emma and the children. Emma felt proud of her accomplishments, preparing for worship and the pot luck. She had done this so many times at home, but everything here was new and that made it harder.

Jack helped get the children ready and hitched up the wagon, loading it with all their goodies. After doing the morning chores, he had disappeared into the other cabin and came back looking very clean and orderly. His beard was trimmed up neatly and hair combed, though the

curls kept popping back up. He looked amazing in his new shirt and trousers that he had allow Emma to pick out for him. He reminded her of the men back in Boston all dressed up.

Emma wondered when he had taken his bath, as she did not see him come back into the cabin last night. She did not know that he had come in long after they were all asleep and had taken a bath right at her feet.

Emma uncurled the strips of cloth she had used the night before to roll Phoebe's and her own hair. She had brought a few pins with her from Boston and used every one to pin both their hairs up. She assumed that Phoebe's mother must have straight hair, because neither child had even the slightest amount of wave in their hair, unlike Jack, who had so much he could not control it. Phoebe looked in the small mirror on the wall of the cabin. She turned this way and that, trying to see all of her hair.

"Do you like it?" Emma asked. "If not, we could comb it out some more."

"Oh... no!" Phoebe patted her hair. "I love it!" She twirled around in her new dress, smoothing the skirt as she had noted that Emma did quite often. "I love my new dress, too!" Phoebe smiled. "Is this the way you dress in 'Buttons'?"

Emma laughed at her mispronunciation. "Yes, this is the way I dressed each Sunday for going to worship." Emma looked over at Oliver, who was standing quietly to the side, watching them. "I think you look very handsome, too, Oliver." Oliver beamed and ran over and hugged Emma's skirt, then he stood back up very straight, like they had practiced, being a gentleman.

"Well, I think we are going to be the best lookin' family at church..." Jack interrupted, holding the last of the food and the Bible and holding the door open for all of them, "...and the latest!"

They all hurried out the door and got in the wagon. They drove the short distance to the church building and got out. Emma noticed all the people busying about with their food baskets and placing them on picnic tables in the side yard. Jack came around and helped her and the children down. Emma instinctively smoothed her skirt, then noticed that Phoebe was watching her carefully and did the same. She wondered if Phoebe had never had a nice dress like this before.

People began to notice her, the new stranger, and several made their way to greet them as they crossed the yard to the tables. The first was a young couple with several children of their own running around them. They seemed to know Phoebe and Oliver.

"Hello there!" the woman spoke first, very friendly. She came right up to them and put out her hand to take Emma's. "I am Isabel Morgan." Emma smiled back at her. "You can call me 'Izzy'. This is my husband Charlie." Izzy reached over and pulled her husband over to meet Emma, too.

He shook her hand. "It is so nice to meet you... and congratulations."

"Yes! Congratulations," Izzy chimed in, then turning to Jack, "to both of you!" Emma and Jack both gave their thanks and smiled.

"This was... rather sudden. We just heard about it this morning when we arrived. We... did not even know that you had planned to marry, Jack."

She seemed friendly enough to Emma, yet it made her feel very uncomfortable to find out that Jack had not told anyone. Then she remembered, she had not even told her family she was leaving. Izzy seemed so friendly and sincere that it was hard to feel bad or embarrassed around her for long. She chatted with Emma, taking her by the arm and leading her over to another group of ladies standing nearby, waiting their turn to meet Jack's new bride.

Soon there was a large group of well-wishers surrounding them, shaking Emma's hand and patting Jack on the back. Most of these people seemed very young. Emma did not notice many older folks outside. She thought they might already be inside, out of the sun, but there was also the issue of how hard life was here. She wondered if anyone lived to be old in this wild country. When they finally entered the building, she saw several more people, including some who were more elderly. Emma was relieved.

Inside, she also found Mabel who made her way to the back as soon as she spied Emma. Everyone was very friendly and practically escorted them to their seats before leaving to take their own. They all seemed genuine and welcoming and Emma immediately felt as if she had known them and loved them her whole life. Emma also noticed how much affection they all seemed to have for Jack. This made her feel even better about her decision.

As they began, a man got up and led the congregation in acapella singing for a while. The songs of praise to God were beautiful and loud. These people seemed to truly be making melody from their hearts. Emma knew some of the songs, but others were new to her. They had small hymnals, but there was no music written in them, just words. She listened and tried to follow along. She loved to sing, especially at church, and it was nice to increase her repitoui.

They continued with prayers, passages of scriptures being read aloud, and more singing. After a while, John Witherspoon got up and spoke to the congregation about peace from God and how to have it in your life. Emma hung on every word. She loved to hear God's Word spoken of with such love and passion. They finished with all of the baptized believers participating in the Lord's Supper together. Emma thought about Jesus and the great sacrifice he had made for her and for all of those here. As she listened and prayed, she felt like she was part of a larger family than the Stanfields, the family of God.

The service was concluded with more singing and prayer. Afterwards, before the people got up, John got back up to talk to them.

"I would like to take this opportunity to introduce you all to our newest addition. Our own Jack Campbell is now married to Emma Stanfield... from Boston, Massachusetts. I hope you will all get a chance to meet Emma and get to know her better and make her feel welcome in our community. Congratulations Jack and Emma."

This announcement brought the rest of the group, that had not already met Emma, to their side. Others came to crowd around and find out more about her. It took half an hour for them to make their way outside and the food was already prepared. People were beginning to go

through the line and fill their plates, sitting everywhere on the lawn that they could find space. The afternoon went quickly. Emma met so many people she was afraid she would not remember any of their names.

Everyone seemed to like her and to be genuinely happy that she was there. Emma did not get the impression at all that they thought ill of Jack for marrying without anyone even knowing about her. In fact, they seemed very happy for both of them, and for the children. Emma was invited to come to a quilting 'bee' soon. Many people asked them if they could come to dinner sometime. Several ladies asked if it would be alright for them to drop by the house for a visit.

Emma had spent her lifetime watching her mother 'socialize' with the ladies. They got together and had tea and did needlepoint. They visited on the streets and in the shops. But Emma had always just been her child. Now, at only sixteen and a half, Emma was being treated like the lady of the house. She had been more sociable today than in her entire life before this.

They arrived home that afternoon late and unloaded the wagon. They had been given much more food to take home than they had even brought this morning. Everyone wanted to do something nice for them, it seemed. They finished up their evening chores and had their Bible reading out on the porch, since it was such a nice evening. Emma went to bed early along with everyone else. Tomorrow would start another hard week.

They had enjoyed a wonderful day of rest and fellowship. Emma felt her spirit was renewed and ready for her new life. She could not believe how much her life had changed in the last two weeks... and how much she liked it!

Chapter 27: April Showers & May Flowers

During most of April, it rained, at least a little, each day. Jack was pleased by this, as it helped some of the earlier crops to grow and the young seedlings to become established. Most of the showers were light and they worked right through them, almost appreciative of the cool, clean water, yet also staying mostly wet. Cloths were hung out on the line whenever possible to dry them, but they also had to spend a lot of time walking through cloths-mazes in the cabin.

Emma knew that April showers would bring May flowers, but she did grow a little weary of the soggy feeling. When the sun did come out, it was bright and strong and they quickly wished for the relief of the showers. The wind also blew. Emma had put up curtains in the cabin and they flittered in the breeze most of the day. She had been used to rain and wind in springtime in Boston, but they had not had to work outside in it much. Emma actually loved stormy days because she was usually left alone, after her chores were finished, to read. She had not been able to find time to read much since coming to the farm.

The children seemed to love the rain. They would go out and get soaked, frolicking in the showers or splashing in the puddles. They worked very hard; all of them, even Oliver. Emma felt sorry for the children at times, as if they were missing their childhood, but they had learned to enjoy every chance they had to play and that seemed to help.

She had worked hard as a child, too, but nothing like this. Spring on a farm was one of the hardest working times. They got up early, trying to avoid the heat of the day, and went outside to work. Later, when the sun was up, they would work in the barn or in the house. Jack even went out to work at night from time to time, preferring the cooler moonlight. They ate their meals on the porch between the cabins as it got a cool breeze most of the time. Otherwise, it almost seemed too hot and muggy to eat.

Each night, they would go to bed tired and usually very dirty. Emma spent much of her washing time trying to get mud out of everything. She thought about Boston. It would be cooler there right now and rainy. She had occasionally gotten her boots or the hem of her dress in a puddle and had mud on it, but here on the farm, she felt like they rolled in it.

Emma and the children worked together much of the time, with Emma giving them each appropriate tasks that they could handle and she did most of the rest of the house, garden and barn work. She knew that Jack was working so hard in the fields that he needed her to handle it. She felt like she was part of the team and she was good at doing her part. There was very little time, nor did they have the energy, for socializing.

The only break they seemed to get was for short runs into town for supplies and going to worship. When they arrived home on Sunday afternoon, they had to work just as hard. Emma realized in her conversations with the other ladies that they all were in the same boat. Mabel and Izzy, her closest friends in the group, told her that afterwards, when the crops were in and the spring work was done, that then they would get together. It made them all feel better to talk about it and plan for the 'rewards' of a job well done.

Emma had tried several times to talk with Jack. She was interested in what he did and wanted to know more about him. He went to the fields early, taking his lunch with him. For a few weeks it seemed he was never back at the cabin until after dark. Those weeks seemed very lonely for Emma. She was used to always having her large family around. There was always someone to talk to. Now she was at the cabin for the long days with only Phoebe and Oliver, and Oliver did not really talk.

They took care of the gardens and the animals, cleaned and made meals. Emma began teaching Phoebe how to do some basic sewing, while she worked on their new outfits and the curtains for the cabin. She also repaired the few things she found for the children. She also read to them and was teaching them some beginning reading skills. Emma was surprised that Phoebe could not read, even a little. It seemed that Jack would always encourage her to sit with him and follow along as they read their Bible at night. Emma thought she would have picked up on this more by now.

One night in May, Jack got home in time for dinner. He had told Emma that morning that things were going well and that he might be able to spend more time at home. Emma, Phoebe and Oliver decided to make an extra special meal for dinner. Over her time here, Emma had mastered the art of killing and preparing a chicken for dinner. They decided to roast it, using some of the herbs that were now flourishing in

the garden, to flavor it. Emma added some vegetables to the pan. She made a fresh loaf of bread and they took out some butter, which they had churned a few days ago.

They even had some tea. Emma had discovered that in this part of the country, they would allow their tea to cool and sweeten it with honey or syrup, adding mint leaves or other fruits and spices to add to the flavor. Up to now, Emma had only drunk her tea hot, but she could see how that would not be popular here where the weather would not cooperate.

The table was set with their ordinary dishes, but Emma had found a small jar and filled it with beautiful wild flowers that they picked earlier. They also had a bowl of berries, washed and ready to eat, decorating the table. Just when the dinner was all prepared, they heard Jack ride up outside. The children ran out to greet him, giving Emma a chance to check her cloths and hair, trying to look presentable for their festive family meal. She was beginning to grow very fond of Jack and was hoping they could spend more time together, now that the work was not so all-consuming.

Emma heard them come up on the porch. Jack was laughing as Phoebe and Oliver tried to act as though they had a big surprise for him inside. He walked in, ducking down as he usually did to get in without bumping his tall head. The children were holding his hands, leading him so that he could keep his eyes closed.

“OK!” Phoebe pronounced, “Open your eyes!”

Jack peeked through his squinted eyes, then smiled broadly. “Wow!” he exclaimed, “What is all this?”

“We made you dinner!” Phoebe was so proud of their accomplishment and Jack played his part well, gushing over every detail.

“It all looks beautiful,” he went on, glancing at Emma and smiling sweetly, “and it smells even better.”

“Emma is teaching us to cook like she did in Buttons!” Phoebe had come to call Boston by her new nickname most of the time.

“Well, thank you for this. I believe I am very hungry.” Jack picked up Oliver and Phoebe and ran them around the room, both of them giggling crazily, and finally landed them on their chairs around the table. Then, to Emma’s surprise, he came over to her chair and pulled it out, holding the back.

Emma walked over and sat down, allowing him to push her chair in. “Thank you, kind sir!” she said, playing along with the jovial mood.

Dinner was so pleasant. They all ate and talked and laughed. Emma took the opportunity to ask Jack about his farming. He began to talk and seemed to get very passionate about it. Jack was not just a farmer, but he was somewhat of a scientist. He had been working on altering some of their plants to help them grow stronger or be more drought tolerant. He really seemed to like to talk about it and was so proud, almost as though his farm was his third child. The others did not understand everything he was saying, but they loved hearing him talk about it.

After eating and cleaning up, they read for a while. The children were tired from all the festivities and were more than happy to go to bed. They were all tucked in and Emma told them a short story from a children’s story book she had once read. They both fell asleep before she finished.

Emma had been looking for an opportunity to spend some time alone with Jack. She wanted to find out more about his family. She wondered why he was not living near them. Jack had gotten up after the story and gone to the door.

“Good night,” he whispered, reaching for the door.

“Jack!” Emma stopped him, almost waking Phoebe as she rose and stepped toward the door, “Can I... talk to you for a little while? Are you too terribly tired?”

Jack looked at her. “No... I mean, no I am not too tired. What do you want to talk to me about?” He let go of the door handle and turned back toward her.

Phoebe began to budge again and Emma tip-toed over to him. “Can we go out on the porch?”

Jack rubbed his head, his curls tousling about. “I guess so,” he replied, eyeing her suspiciously, “is something wrong?”

“No.” Emma walked toward the door and Jack opened it for her. She liked being the one with the curt answer for once. It made her more confident for her task or prying into Jack’s life.

Out on the porch, there was a nice breeze blowing. It had been very hot all day and this was a relief. Emma went over to the stairs and sat down on the top one. In Boston, she would have never been allowed to sit on a step, especially outside, but she was getting used to the more easy-going life here on the farm. Jack followed, sitting opposite her on the far side of the same step.

Emma looked out at the night sky, mesmerized by the huge amount of stars visible tonight. She did not realize how long she was just staring until Jake interrupted her thoughts.

“It’s beautiful, isn’t it?” He, too, was staring out to space.

“...mmm,” Emma made a sound of response that was barely audible.

Jack looked over at her. “Are you alright?” His voice was so sincere and thoughtful. Emma liked talking with Jack like this. He seemed to really care about her.

“Yes,” she mused, still lost in thought.

“Would you tell me if you weren’t alright?” Jack’s sarcasm was not mean, but light-hearted.

Emma looked over at him and smiled a big, deep smile of happy contentment. “Probably not,” she went on, “but it is... everything is fine.”

Jack nodded and went back to eyeing the stars. Emma also looked away again. After a pause, Jack started again. “Did you... have something you wanted to ask me?”

Emma seemed startled by this. “Oh! Yes! I am sorry. I did say I wanted to talk to you.” Emma was blushing in the dark.

“It’s alright,” Jack said soothingly, “I’m OK with just sitting here with...” his voice trailed off as if he did not want to finish the thought, “... with just sitting.”

Emma composed herself. She had gotten too good at being quiet and not talking for the last weeks. She did not want to miss this opportunity to ask Jack some of her questions.

"I was just wondering... about your family."

Jack looked at her with a funny look. "What about them?"

Emma could not help but look shocked. What did he mean, "what about them?"? Did he not realize that over the almost two months that they had been married that he had never mentioned them?

She began again. "I do not know anything about them. You never talk about them." She waited. She could not read his face in the dark. "Did you run away from home? Where are they? What are they like? I just want to know about them... so I can know about you." Emma was almost crying now, but she choked back the tears.

"What would you like to know?"

"Anything you want to tell me."

Jack looked thoughtful for a moment, something that Emma was getting used to. She waited for him to collect his thoughts. "You know a little about my father from the letter I wrote you. His name was William. His mother and your grandmother had arranged for him and your mother to be married long before they had even thought about it themselves. From what you have told me about your mother, and what I know about my father, they were probably better off the way it turned out."

Emma felt a little more composed. "I am glad our parents weren't married to each other." After she thought about it, Emma chuckled at her comment. Jack smiled at her so warmly that Emma's heart began to soften. He always looked at her that way when she said something silly.

"Me, too!" he looked at her with a twinkle in his eye and they both began to laugh outloud.

Finally, their laughing died down and Jack continued, "My parents wanted to 'Go West'! It was always my father's dream to own land of his own and to find success as a rancher or farmer out in the wild new territories."

Emma broke in, "I cannot imagine my mother doing that. I cannot even imagine her ever living anywhere except Boston."

"Yet another reason it is good that things turned out the way they did." Jack smiled again and Emma smiled back.

"So, what about your mother? Did she want to go with him?"

Jack continued, "Oh, yes! My mother thought of herself as an adventurer... and she would have followed my father anywhere, because she loved him so much." He paused and looked at Emma with almost a sad look. She knew that he wanted someone who would love him the same way. She surmised that he thought he had found that in her, since she was also willing to leave everything and move to Tennessee to be with him, even without knowing him. But there was that sadness in his eyes whenever he looked at her, as if he still was not sure.

Jack continued his story. "They made it as far as Tennessee the first year before it got too cold to travel. By Spring, they were expecting... me," he gave Emma a childlike grin and his eyebrows flickered, "...and they decided to stay here for a while. Eight years later, they were still here when my sister was born. My mother had had a rough time, even just this far west. I think my father figured out that she would never be able to go on, so he got some land here and began farming and started raising dairy cows." His voice trailed off as if he was having a fond memory flash through his mind. Emma knew that they now only had one milk-cow, so she assumed this did not last. "I think he decided that he loved my mother more than he wanted to go out west." Jack paused again, deep in thought, "and they had quite an adventure right here."

Emma hesitated, not wanting to interrupt these pleasant memories with bad ones, but she had to know, "What... happened?" Jack did not even look up. "Are your parents...?" she could not finish.

Thankfully, Jack responded. He looked at her with a mixed look, sad, yet also happy at great memories of his parents. "They are both gone."

Emma got up and walked over and sat beside Jack. She was very close, but she was still not sure if her sympathetic touches would be welcome. "I... am sorry, Jack," she almost whispered.

Jack nodded slightly in acknowledgement of her sympathy. He turned more toward her, also unsure as to what was appropriate. Though they were a married couple, and they had become very close since Emma had arrived in Tennessee, there was still a barrier that neither of them seemed to be able to cross. It seemed to Emma to be like magnets with opposite poles that can get close, but then seem to almost push each other away.

Jack leaned in closer to Emma, but then they heard the door handle move. Immediately, they both froze and as the door opened, Jack stood up and moved away from her. He quickly came to the door and pushed it open to find Oliver, sleepy eyed, standing in the doorway.

Chapter 28: A Little Bit of Life

The month of May seemed to flow by effortlessly. They were still just as busy, but in a different kind of way. There was still a lot of work to be done on the farm, but it did not seem as bad to Emma because she was getting used to it. Their time was freer and they were able to spend some time with their neighbors.

One night, the Witherspoons had them to dinner. They had four children and Phoebe and Oliver loved to play with them. They were not fancy people, but they had a way of making anyone feel welcome in their home. When they arrived, Mabel was busy in the kitchen. She came outside to greet them still in her apron. Emma followed her back into the kitchen and offered to help. She was quickly put to work preparing vegetables for a salad. This made her feel more comfortable, having something to do. Emma enjoyed talking to Mabel. She was very sweet and easy to talk to.

Mabel looked over at Emma and smiled, still working. "So how are things going?" she asked non-shilantly.

"Oh! Fine... things are going well," Emma replied politely.

Mabel eyed her and let out a little giggle. Emma felt as if something was 'going on' but she was not sure what.

"Are you getting on well with the children?" Mabel continued.

"Yes. Phoebe and Oliver are great. I am enjoying getting to know them. Oliver is even beginning to talk, just a little, and Phoebe..." Emma was on a subject she liked and it prompted her to talk a lot, "Phoebe is so special, too. She works with me in the kitchen and the garden, picking up everything I teach her almost effortlessly. She is even learning to read a little."

"Really?" Mabel prompted, "That's great! Are you a teacher?"

"No," Emma laughed. "I just had several younger brothers and sisters and I used to 'play' at being a teacher to them. Then she added thoughtfully, "I do think I would have liked being a teacher."

Mabel turned around to face her, whipping her hands on her apron. "So what is stopping you? Why do you say you 'would' have liked to be a teacher?"

Emma thought about it for a moment, then she went back to chopping carrots to keep from having to look Mabel in the eye. "I suppose I just have not thought much about it since I have been in Tennessee because... I have had too many other things to think about."

Mabel, too, went back to work, taking a large pan from the stove and placing it on the counter to serve the meat onto a platter.

"Well, I think you should think about it!"

Emma smiled, "Maybe..."

They both got busy, finishing up the work and soon they were ready for dinner. The Witherspoons house was not particularly large and they barely had room for their family to fit at the table, much less another family. They had an older daughter who seemed to know the routine when company came. She helped the younger ones with their plates, then took them outside where they had a picnic-style table set in the yard under a large oak tree. All of the children were served and sent outside and then the adults sat down to eat inside.

John said a beautiful prayer, thanking God for the food, for their families and for the blessing of having the Campbells for neighbors. All of the food looked and smelled wonderful. It was simple food, not fancy, but good, and there was plenty. They enjoyed some pleasant, light-hearted conversation about the farms and how they each were doing. John asked Jack about his experiments with the plants and Jack told them a little more about it.

Then they seemed to turn the conversation to Emma. "What about you, Emma? Are you adjusting to Tennessee alright?"

Emma finished her bite and smiled. "Yes, thank you! I love it here." She glanced around the table, landing on Jack, who was looking back at her. He did not seem as sure about it.

"I am glad to hear that," John continued. "This is not an easy life and I am sure it was not easy for you to adjust to it."

"Jack has been very helpful in... letting me adjust in my own time." Emma said this, then she immediately wondered if it came out wrong as Jack seemed to almost be scowling at her.

It was as if Mabel realized her embarrassment and came to her rescue. "Jack is very sweet that way," she laughed. "When we first moved here, he was very helpful in our adjustments, too."

Emma was curious, "How long have you been here?"

Mabel told the story of how they moved to Tennessee about ten years earlier, a young couple with one baby daughter. "Jack, who was a very young man at the time, had come over to cut firewood for us. His mother had sent him to help us because we were a bit overwhelmed with starting up a new household and farm and with John preaching as well." She smiled, remembering how it was then and how blessed she felt to be here. "We loved it here, but we had so many new things to learn and people to meet. Jack would come over and I would bake him cookies and he would sit and talk to me, telling me all about... about everything I wanted to know."

Emma felt as if she was getting new insight into who Jack was. She felt proud of her husband. She loved hearing these stories. Jack, on the other hand, seemed embarrassed at the attention.

"I just loved the cookies!" Jack said, finally, breaking up the moment. Everyone laughed.

Mabel continued, "Tell us a little about life in Boston, Emma. I am curious about life in a large, busy city, and about your family."

They all looked again at Emma. This was a topic that she liked to talk about. "Well, I come from a large family; my father, Howard Stanfield and my mother, Samantha, and four sisters and three brothers."

"Wow!" John exclaimed. "I had no idea."

Emma smiled, think about her family, then she continued, "We live on the southern part of Boston, almost out of town. We can walk to some shops, though, and we have our own post office and library. It is really like a small town all to itself, just on the edge of Boston. I liked it that way. We could have all the benefits of living in town, but we could also have a larger house and yard and gardens."

"I know you miss those gardens, don't you?" Mabel interjected.

"Yes, I do," Emma admitted, "but, thanks to you and some other people from church, my garden is starting to expand."

"I am glad to hear that," Mabel continued, "because I would like to come and borrow back from you." They all laughed.

"And what does your father do?" John brought the conversation back to Emma's life.

"My father is a carpenter. He builds beautiful furniture that is sold all over Boston." They could tell that Emma was very proud of her father.

"And were you and your father close?"

"Yes," Emma smiled, thinking about her father and about the last conversation they had together. "I am a lot like him and we got along very well."

"Are you and your mother close as well?"

Emma thought these were very personal questions, hard questions for her. Yet, it made her feel closer to them because they were willing to ask her. Jack just sat quietly, watching her so closely, seeming to hang on every word. At this last question, he rolled his eyes up and smiled, choking down a laugh. Emma was sure that if he knew anything of her mother, from his father or grandmother, that it would not have been good.

"I... love my mother very much..." Emma tried to find the right words to say. "However, she and I were very... different." Emma looked down at her plate, carefully cutting a small bite and putting it in her mouth.

Jack was sitting beside her and he gently put his hand up on the back of her chair, lightly touching her back. He smiled sympathetically at her, then immediately changed the subject.

"Emma's grandmother and mine were friends." Emma was not sure this was a great new conversation either.

"Really?" Mabel sounded curious. "Is that how you two met?"

"Well, you know we met the day of our wedding. I told you that." Jack went on.

"Yes, I remember that," Mabel said, "I meant... is that your... connection? I mean, Emma came out here already knowing you, right?"

Emma knew the day would come when she would have to talk about this, to actually explain it to someone else. It had made sense in her own head, but she was not sure it would be something that others would understand. Would they feel like she had sold out in coming here and marrying a man she did not know? She wished she had thought more about this moment already. In a way, she was glad that this came up, so that she could get it out in the open and then be able to move forward.

Before Emma could catch up with her thoughts, Jack kept talking. "We did have a very strong... family connection," he continued, "I had heard a lot about Emma from my grandmother."

Emma could not help but look shocked. She had no idea that Jack even knew she existed before getting the telegram from her. She did not know what to say. Fortunately, before the conversation could continue, some of the children came back in. They were loud and this allowed the adults to put an end to their talking without further details.

The rest of the evening was filled with laughing and light-hearted conversation. Emma tried to seem 'normal' after this revelation, but it was hard. Finally, the group decided to have a short devotional period together with both families. John read a passage to them and they said a prayer, ending the evening. They packed up in the wagon and hugged their hosts goodbye.

As Mabel gave Emma a hug, she looped her arm into Emma's for a moment. "I hope we were not too... nosy," she smiled at Emma. "Sometimes we ask very personal questions, but we just like to get to know you better."

Emma smiled back at her, a sweet, genuine smile. "It is fine," she said, squeezing Mabel's arm closely, "I am glad to have you as a friend."

Mabel smiled brightly, walking her to the wagon and letting her go. Jack helped her up, spying both woman and wondering what they were whispering about. Soon they were on their way home and Emma sat quietly, happy about the evening and about feeling closer than ever with Mabel. Emma had always had her sisters as friends and it was hard for her to have a close companion, one she felt she could talk about anything with. She felt this with Mabel and it made her very happy.

On the way home, Emma wanted to ask Jack about how he knew so much about her, but Phoebe was so excited about their visit and she talked the whole way. When they got home, it was very late and as soon as the children were in bed, Jack said good night and went to bed.

Chapter 29: The Swimming Hole

Emma had enjoyed being in Tennessee the past two months. The weather was much milder than Boston. She could get outside and work and play and go for walks. The garden was already in full bloom and they were even harvesting early, cool-weather vegetables. She was enjoying the variety that offered her in preparing meals.

Back home, Emma had benefitted from a wonderful herb garden, just outside the back door. They had traded and cultivated for many years and were very careful to take the plants in during the hard winters. They had so many spices and Emma missed that when cooking. Here, she did not have as much variety, but liked the fact that many of the plants could stay outside and survive during the colder months. All that she had here was from snippings from the Witherspoons' and other friends' gardens.

Emma was really fond of spending time with Mabel. She felt they had become close friends. She was able to talk to her about some of the difficulties of this very different life. Also, John and Mabel enjoyed a very happy and close relationship with each other. Emma tried not to envy this and was glad for any advice she received to help make her a better wife and mother.

The days were getting longer and hotter. Emma had found a 'secret' place that she kept just for herself. It was in a place where the river turned and created a small inlet of water. She had been out walking one day when it was still a bit too cold to get in the water and had found a small clearing that sloped down to the water's edge. She had spent a few afternoons sitting there, reading one of the few books that she had brought with her.

She refused to share this place. It was her place to be quiet and by herself when she felt she needed that. Today, John had come to help Jack with a project in the early morning. Afterward, he had offered to take the children home with him to play with his own children. They said they would bring them home later and they were invited to stay for supper.

As Jack was still working on his project and Emma was not needed, she decided to take advantage of the day and go to the river and read. After an hour or so, the sun had shifted and was streaming down on her face. At first it felt good, but soon Emma got too warm. She decided to test the water and see if it was cool.

She had intended to just put her feet in, or splash some on her face, but it was just the right temperature and Emma had been dying for a good bath. She glanced around her several times. She had never seen anyone else around when she had come to this secret place, but she wanted to be sure.

Finally feeling secure about her privacy and thoughts of the cool water racing through her mind she decided to get in. She quickly stripped off her clothes and laid them neatly on a low branch. Emma scurried into the water and kept going until it was deep enough to cover her.

She was exhilarated! She had not felt this good since she had arrived in Tennessee. She splashed and laughed, then finally settled on bobbing and floating through the water. She was completely relaxed and she closed her eyes and enjoyed it.

She had been in the water for quite some time and was enjoying the peace and quiet of being alone. All of a sudden her silence was shattered by an all too familiar voice looming just above her.

"You know there are snakes in this river."

Emma was so startled that she began to flounder in the water. She opened her eyes wide and looked up to see Jack, seeming to float in the air above her. In fact, he was sitting on the small dock where he fished and kept his boat tied up. Emma had felt the water floating by her, but did not realize how far down-stream she had gone.

In her surprise and embarrassment, Emma began to scream, "What are you doing here? You could have drowned me!"

"I was just sitting here watching you float by," he laughed. Then he got a mischievous look in his eyes and added, "Do you need me to jump in and save you?"

Emma was indignant. "No! No!" She was still screaming. She looked at him as if to dare him to try. "You had better not."

"Not what?" He continued to tease her. "Not jump in... or not save you if you were drowning?"

He leaned back and began to laugh out loud. Emma had been trying to stay vertical and inch her way back up stream, but to no avail. She actually seemed to be going farther away from her goal.

"What are you trying to do?" Jack asked, calmer now.

"I was trying to take a bath." Emma was still working hard to move away from him. She had floated farther out into the middle of the stream, for which she was glad.

Jack began to get up from the end of the dock. She thought he might be leaving and took it as an opportunity to rest her arms. But Jack did not leave. Instead, he stood up and began taking off his shirt.

As Emma noticed, she blurted out, "What are you doing?"

Jack smiled. Emma turned away, not willing to look at him anymore. She had never seen a man with his shirt off before and she did not like the way it made her feel inside.

"I think you have a good idea." Jack answered her. Then she heard the splash. Jack had jumped into the water. She turned to see him just a few feet away. "I need a bath, too. We can both look our best when we go to dinner tonight."

"No!" Emma kept finding herself saying, though, this time with a lot less emphasis. She could hardly breath, thinking of him being in the water with her. She began to work on swimming away again.

"Where are you going?" She noticed Jack was completely relaxed and at ease in the water. He was just circling around her like a shark, patiently awaiting his prey.

"I am trying to swim back to my cloths."

"Where are they? Didn't you get in here?"

"No." Emma was putting all her efforts into getting to safety now and couldn't speak much. "You need to get out and go away." She stopped and turned around toward him, needing another rest.

"Are you saying you don't think I need a bath? ...or are you saying you just don't want me to take one with you?" He was smiling widely, enjoying her obvious insecurities. "I don't see any reason why two people who are husband and wife," he emphasized that point, "can't bathe together in the same river."

"Well," Emma tried to think of something to retaliate with, but could not. "Well..." she was fuming now.

Jack saw that he had upset her more than he meant to. He was used to good natured teasing, but realized sometimes he went too far. He circled on around her toward the dock and began to swim away. "OK," he yelled back over his shoulder, "It's all yours."

She began to swim swiftly toward her secret entrance as he was occupied with his retreat.

He stopped and turned once again, paddling to stay afloat, and asked her, "Would you like me to go get your cloths and bring them here?"

She could see that he had given up and was allowing her the victory, and this seemed to be a goodwill offer, but she refused. "I will just swim back to where I got in and get dressed there," she said, waiting once again for him to turn so that she could swim away.

Finally, she reached the area where the river turned and she would be out of his sight. As she turned, she glanced back over her shoulder to see if he was watching. She was also just a bit curious to see him again. There he was, just getting out of the water. She could see he did not seem at all ashamed about being naked. He had lived here all his life and was used to it. At that moment, he turned his head and looked her direction. She realized that she was staring at him and she blushed and held her breath and went under the stream. She instantly began to swim for her beach area and did not come up until she was well around the corner.

It was about an hour later when she could finally bring herself to come back to the house. She was fully dressed and dried, even her hair. She did feel really refreshed and was looking forward to an evening with the Witherspoons. Jack was thoughtful enough not to bring up the subject of their meeting at the river, at least for a while.

Jack had stopped on the way home and caught some fish, his original intent in coming to the river. They were now roasting over the fire outside, but Jack was not there. Emma went into the house and found him setting the table. She had gathered flowers on her way and put them into a jar on the table. Earlier, she had made a special strawberry cake for dessert and a large salad from the garden.

They worked quietly, not talking, and soon they were ready for the company. Jack had gone back outside to check on the fish and it was ready. He put it on a large platter and was carrying it up to the porch. Emma had come outside to sit on the porch and cool off.

Jack stopped as he reached the top step and broke the silence. "I do want to apologize for my behavior today at the river." He seemed truly repentant. "You are just so much fun to tease." He grinned at her, but with sad, sorry eyes like that of a small puppy who just couldn't help getting into trouble.

"I am sorry, too." Emma said as they saw the Witherspoon's wagon pull into view. "You..." she looked away to hide her true feelings, "You have every right to take a bath whenever you want to." As the wagon full of laughing children pulled up to the house, she looked at Jack and added, "Jack, you have been very... patient with me. You have let me have time to... figure things out for myself, and to be... ready... to be married. Thank you." She finished with a very quiet voice that seemed to trail off. Jack smiled and it made her heart melt. Then he turned to greet their guests.

They had a good evening and John and Mabel stayed very late, sitting on the porch and watching the children catch fireflies. They talked and laughed together about mostly trivial things. Emma was much quieter than usual but when Mabel asked her if she was OK, she just nodded and smiled, changing the subject. Mabel looked at her, then at Jack, whom she had caught several times this evening staring at his wife.

Finally, the guests left and Emma took the children in to put them to bed. They were exhausted and she was, too. Yet she could not help but hope that she and Jack could talk some more after Phoebe and Oliver went to sleep. Jack did not seem to be wanting that, as he said goodnight there on the porch and went into the other side of the cabin without another word.

Emma felt strange and wonderful and yet scared and nervous, all at the same time. She was not sure she understood what she was feeling, but Emma could tell that things were different now.

Chapter 30: Blackberry Pancakes

The next morning, Emma woke up early, and very happy. The others were also all up early. It was getting harder to sleep when the sun was already up and shining in the window. The days were getting very hot and long, so they had taken to getting an early start and taking a break during the mid-day, then working on into the late evenings sometimes, just to escape some of the heat.

The house was getting more unbearable and so they also spent most of their time outside. Emma had never cooked over an open fire before, but she was learning and was even becoming quite adept at it. They had one very large, cast-iron skillet that served as their 'stove-top' for most of their meals. Even Phoebe was not quite ready to be too close to the fire, so Emma let the children work as 'go-fors', retrieving items needed from the kitchen and putting things away.

This morning, since they were up quite early and had finished their chores quickly, Emma took the children to a patch in the woods near the house that she had found. It contained a huge patch of blackberry bushes. She showed them how to carefully pick some of the luscious fruit without scratching their hands too much. Between them they soon filled a small bucket with berries and headed back to make breakfast.

"I think we will go back right after breakfast and pick some more blackberries," Emma said cheerfully. She looked at Phoebe, then Oliver, trying to camouflage that she really wanted to look at Jack. She wished she could know what he was thinking. She quickly tried to push all these feelings and thoughts from her head, concentrating on today.

Phoebe interjected, "I could just eat these right off that bush, all day long!"

"Well," Emma smiled as she continued, glad to have something to talk about, "there are a lot of other things we can do with them." She looked at them all as if she had a huge secret she was about to spill.

"What?!? What?!?" both children chimed in.

"I think I could just live on these pancakes!" Jack stated, getting up from the stairs and heading back to get another pancake from the pan near the fire. "Anyone else want seconds?"

"Yes! Please!" they all agreed this was a special treat and they were going to enjoy it.

"So what else can we make?" Phoebe brought the conversation back around again.

"Well..." Emma acted as though she was deep in thought, then her eyes twinkled with excitement, "we could make blackberry dumplings..."

"What is that?" Phoebe interrupted.

"It is like a cake, but you boil it."

"And it is delicious," Jack said, walking up and dolling out more pancakes.

"I like cake!" Oliver made a rare comment, making them all laugh.

Emma hugged him and continued, "Oh you will like this cake, and we could also make jam to go on the cake or on our pancakes and bread. When you make jam, you preserve it so that it will be good for later, after the berries stop growing on the trees."

"I don't want them to stop growing!" Phoebe said, "I want to go pick them every day and have blackberry pancakes every day!" She smiled.

"If we had them every day, they would not be so special," Emma contradicted her, "but today, we can enjoy them."

"Well, if they are going away, I am ready to finish breakfast and go pick them now and make jam before they are all gone."

They all laughed again, still filling up on the wonderful cakes. Soon, though they were finished and cleaned up and ready to go berry picking again. Jack helped them gather the dishes, then headed out to work in the fields again.

"I will be back for lunch today," he said before leaving, "it will be too hot to work out in the open in the afternoon."

"OK," Emma waved to him without stopping her work.

Emma, Phoebe and Oliver took larger pails this time and put back on their old gloves to go back to the berry patch. They worked until the buckets were filled, then took them back to the house and washed them. Emma put the large black pot on the hook over the fire that Jack had fixed for cooking. She sent the children to fetch some more wood as she began to scoop the berries into the pot.

It was not easy work, standing near the fire and stirring all morning, but Emma knew it would be worth it. Between stirrings, they went into the cellar under the back stairs and found the jars that Jack had told them about earlier. One by one they carefully toted them up and outside. Then they began pulling water up from the well to wash the jars and sterilize them. Emma had put some water on to boil in the large skillet over the other side of the fire pit.

After a full morning, Emma and the children were all sticky and hot, but they had several dozen jars of jam to show for their work. Emma sent Phoebe inside to prepare some biscuits and she began to clean up, lining the jars up to cool on a bench near the fireplace.

As they finish up and have the biscuits are in the pan, Jack shows up with some fish on a stringer. He stops a little ways out and takes out his knife to clean them. Oliver decides to run out and help him and Emma sends a plate with him.

"I help Jack!" Oliver said as he hurried away.

"This was not as much fun as I thought," Phoebe says, a little pouty, "It was hard work making jam."

Emma smiled at her, wiping the hair and the sweat from her tired face, "Yes... but look at that beautiful row of jars we have to show for it!" Phoebe smiled and went over to the bench. She very carefully touched the side of one of the jars, then, on seeing they were cooling, she carefully touched each one, like she was taking inventory.

Emma looked at her across the fire. "Phoebe? Can I ask you something?"

Phoebe continued her count, nodding vaguely to Emma.

"Why do you and Oliver call Jack... Jack?"

Phoebe looked over at her as if she was an adult, looking at a child asking wearying questions. "Because... that is his name," she answered matter-of-factly, going on with her task.

"But... why do you not call him... Father?" Emma asked.

The little girl laughed a little, without looking up at Emma, "because he's not."

Now Emma was confused more than before. "Not... what?"

"Not my father!"

Emma's eyes almost bugged out of her head. What did she mean, 'not my father'? How could that be true? Could Phoebe be Jack's wife's baby from another marriage? Or maybe both Phoebe and Oliver were not Jack's children? But that did not make since. Oliver is only three years old. Could this woman have had two children and married Jack and then died in such a short period of time?

Emma stood there with a million questions for Phoebe, but just then Jack and Oliver arrived with the fish. She held off and went to work and they soon had lunch prepared. The plan was for them to eat, then for them all to take a rest in order to be ready for working into the evening. Emma planned to do some washing, and since she was already dirty, to finish up the 'spring cleaning' inside the house.

Lunch was quiet. It was almost getting too hot to talk and they seemed to just want to finish eating and go lay down. The sun and the work had zapped most of their energy. Emma, however, had found a renewed source from the information Phoebe had told her. She sat there, hardly able to eat, or sit still, trying to think of a way to bring it up again.

Jack looked up at her from his plate. "Aren't you hungry?"

Emma tried to smile, but she knew it looked fake. "No... I mean... well... it is very hot." She knew she did not make sense.

Jack did not seem to notice, but just nodded his agreement and went on eating. Finally, he put his plate down and looked up again. "The jam looks good."

Phoebe decided to chime in, "Yes," she looked at it as if it was presents on Christmas morning, "Yes it does, doesn't it." Jack smiled at her.

Emma decided this was her opportunity to get some answers. She directed her comments to Oliver. "Oliver, did you like making jam?"

He shook his head 'no'.

"Really?" Emma continued, smiling at him, "I guess you would rather be out fishing with your *father*, right?" she emphasized the word 'father'.

Oliver, Phoebe and Jack all looked at her with a variety of faces. Emma began to feel guilty, like she had caused a problem, and she regretted this whole conversation.

"Well," Jack took the opportunity from the fact they were all about finished to end it, "I think we could all use a nap." He got up and began to clean up quickly, telling the children to go on up to the porch and lay down. They went, leaving Emma standing there feeling like a child about to be punished. Jack did not look happy.

Emma began to help clean up. As she worked, she regained her composure a bit. She wondered what it was that she had done wrong. As far as Jack had let her know, these were his children. She had no reason to ever doubt that until now. If anyone was to blame, it was Jack for not being forthcoming with talking to her and telling her what she should be allowed to know. After all, she had agreed to come here to be their mother. She had a right to know! She had almost worked herself into a frenzy, thinking of all this, by the time one of them spoke.

They finished cleaning up, then Jack came over to her and almost whispered, "Take a walk with me for a minute." Emma followed him as he strode away from the house with large steps.

"What is the matter?" Emma questioned Jack, not appreciating how abrupt he had been.

"I... have tried to talk to them... but they are still too young to understand everything."

"Understand what?"

"That..." he looked up at her with the saddest eyes she had ever seen, "that their parents are dead."

"Their... parents?" Emma was shocked and confused. "But, you are their father." She blurted this out based on past knowledge, still unsure of what Phoebe had been talking about.

"No, not really."

Emma was astounded by this revelation from Jack. She had been so confused by all that Phoebe said, and now it made more sense, if Jack was not their father, but she needed to know it all. "What are you saying? You said in the letter that YOU had two children."

She stopped and waited for an answer. Jack's sadness was now turned to almost a guilty look. He stopped walking and slowly turned around toward her. "They are my children, now. Their mother..." Jack's face turned sad and hard and so filled with emotion that Emma could not even tell.

"What about her?"

Jack straightened up and was all of a sudden serious. "She is... was... my sister."

Emma's eyes were wide with surprise. "I... did not know you had a sister." Emma waited for Jack to say something, but he seemed to not know what to say. "What happened?" Emma whispered.

"My sister's name was Abigail," Jack finally spoke. "Abigail was a bit... wild. She married a man who wanted to travel the untamed territory in search of adventure." Jack looked at her to try and judge her response, but Emma was still in shock, blank-faced. He continued, "Ilan was a good man, but just too ambitious for his own good. He wanted to go out west and have a big place of his own. He was Irish and he had been poor his whole life. He wanted to prove himself to her. He meant well and she would have followed him anywhere. She loved him and I suppose she loved... the adventure, too."

Jack stopped. He looked as if it was hard for him to talk about this, as if he never had before. Emma felt sorry for him. What horrible thing could have happened to his sister? "What happened to them?" she prompted him.

Finally he continued, his voice sounding shaken. "One day, when Ilan was out working in a field, Apache Indians came to the house and took Abigail and Phoebe. Abby was pregnant with Oliver at the time. They took them out to their camp and they set the house and barn on fire. Ilan saw the fire in the distance and came as fast as he could, but it was too late." Again, the pain showed on Jack's face as he thought of his sister and the horror of her situation. Emma waited patiently.

"Ilan was a very strong man, a hunter, and very good with a gun. He rounded up some men who were willing to help him and tracked down the Indian camp. That night, they entered the camp to take the girls back. On their way out of the camp, they were discovered. Shots were fired... on both sides... and Ilan was killed. Abby and Phoebe got away with the other men who took them back to a Calvary fort nearby."

Emma thought about what Jack had just said. She was horrified. She had heard stories about Indian attacks, but never so personal. Jack seemed almost worn out just telling the story. Emma was worried that it might be more than he wanted to say, but she went on, "So your sister was alright?"

Jack looked up at her and shook his head. "She had been through so much, and she started to deliver the baby... Oliver. She..." he stopped again, a small tear came from one of his eyes. Emma stepped closer to him and put her hand on his arm. "She did not make it."

They stood there for what seemed like forever. Emma was not sure what to do, but she wanted to comfort Jack, to take away some of the pain that she had caused in bringing this up. She was standing beside him and she put her head on the side of his arm. His other hand came up and was on her head. After a moment, his hand slid down and gently caressed her face. He lifted her chin up so that she was looking at him.

"I am sorry I did not tell you before." He looked deep into her eyes. "It has been very hard to talk about." He was so emotional and Emma was grateful that he was willing to open up to her like this. He bent his head over toward hers and kissed her gently on the forehead, then his arms were around her. She felt as if she was swimming in his embrace. He needed her now for support and she was glad to be there for him. Jack was such a strong man and very rarely had he shown her much emotion, but now, Jack cried, unashamed.

Emma had so many questions. She knew that Oliver was three, so some time had passed. Had Abigail lived for a while after his birth? Did the children not come here right away? That would fit since so many in town seemed to know Jack but did not seem to know the children. Perhaps, with the children coming here to live with him, he had never felt he was... allowed... to cry. Emma stayed quiet and put her arms around Jack's waist and squeezed him tight. She felt she had never been so close to anyone in her life.

Chapter 31: Visitors from Boston

The rest of the day was very mellow. Emma was not sure if it was because of the heat, or from all the emotions they were feeling. She felt numb all over. She went to lay down and went sound asleep. Later, she awoke to the sound of thunder. They were all on the porch and it was about four o'clock in the afternoon. Dark clouds were approaching their cabin with what appeared to be a typical summer storm.

Phoebe woke up with a start and began screaming. She had had a similar reaction during other storms this spring, but now Emma wondered if it was related to images of the horrible things that she had experienced. Jack seemed to be able to console her best and she climbed up in his lap and snuggled in close to him like a kitten curling up beside its mother. She was crying uncontrollably and every time she seemed to calm, another clap of thunder would make her scream again.

Oliver, on the other hand, did not make any noise at all. It was obvious by his face that he was scared, but he did not scream or cry. He came over to Emma and stood beside her, then he slipped his hand into hers.

“Would you like to get in my lap?” Emma asked him quietly.

In lieu of an answer, he climbed up, just in time for the next loud clash and a bright flashing light. He hugged her tightly and she put her arms around him, whispering, “It will be alright.”

The storm lasted for over an hour. They finally went inside as the wind was blowing the rain onto the porch and they were getting wet. Afterwards, there was an eerie glow to the sky and they all went back out on the porch to look at the sky. In the distance they could see bright blue skies with fluffy white clouds. They had survived another storm and they said a prayer together on the front steps in thanksgiving for their safety.

This had been such an emotional day that Emma felt tired, even after their nap. They checked on the animals in the barn and made sure the wind had not done any damage. Some of the items left outside in the rain had to be retrieved or dried. It was a busy time and dinner came quickly. They ate leftover bread and they go to eat some of the jam, which they had fortunately moved up to the back porch before their naps. It was late before all the work and clean-up was finished, the animals fed and the cow milked. Jack decided to go and check on things out in the field. Emma and the children went inside to clean up the mess in the house from all the wind before it got dark.

That night, the children were wide awake until long after dark. Jack lit a lantern and they had a time of Bible reading. They sang several songs that they knew from worship. Finally, Jack said a prayer for all of them, being thankful for God’s care.

The children still did not seem ready to go to sleep. They were in bed, but they wanted to hear stories. Emma told them a long story that she remembered, one that she had not told them yet. She was running out of good stories and this one was not from a book, but from her grandfather. It was a little bit scary and they both decided to curl up in the chair with Jack instead of staying in bed.

At the end of the story, Oliver was asleep and Jack carried him over to the pallet to stretch out. Phoebe was still wide awake and she had all kinds of questions about the story and about Emma’s grandfather.

“Will we ever get to meet your grandfather?” she asked.

Emma had not given it much thought. She did think of her family quite often and occasionally mentioned it to the children, but they had never asked about meeting them before.

“I suppose... sometime.” She responded.

“In Boston?” Phoebe continued.

“I do not know... maybe.”

Phoebe curled up beside Emma in the chair and continued to question her about her family and her life in Boston. It made Emma happy to be able to talk about them. Jack sat across the room watching them without speaking. He seemed to be just as curious as Phoebe. When they finally decided that it was her bedtime, Phoebe did not want to go. She went and lay down, wide-eyed and still asking more questions.

“You will not be able to get up in the morning if you don’t go to sleep,” Jack scowled at her, then smiled.

“I don’t care. I am not tired and I want to know about ‘Buttons’ some more.”

Jack seemed to know that he was beat and got up to leave. He glanced at Emma and winked, then he left and went to the other cabin. Phoebe went on for what seemed like a long time. Emma got dressed for bed and lay down across from Phoebe on her own pallet. She was not sure if she fell asleep first or Phoebe.

The next morning came early, the sun shining into the window to wake them up. They had biscuits and jam for breakfast, along with fried eggs. Emma worked hard to get her chores done as Jack had agreed to let her travel into town today by herself. She had several things to buy and she also wanted to go by and see Mabel, and Jack had too much work to make up from yesterday to go with her.

Finally they were ready and packed in the wagon. The children were to go with her and they were dressed in their new ‘town’ outfits that Emma had made for them. When they stopped at the Witherspoons, Emma was invited in for a quick cup of tea and the children went to play.

“Would you like to go into town with me?” she asked Mabel.

“Thank you, but I things already started to wash today and I should stay and finish.” Then she continued, eyeing the children playing and having so much fun, “Why don’t you let the children stay here and play?”

Emma thought about it. It would be much faster to get her shopping finished by herself, but she knew they enjoyed it and she did not want to take that from them. “I will ask them,” she replied.

Phoebe and Oliver were having so much fun playing stick ball with Mabel’s children, that they quickly agreed to stay. Emma thanked Mabel and said she would be back in a few hours.

“Take your time,” Mabel said as she headed back to the large pot of water over the fire in the yard, “I am not planning to be anywhere all day.” She smiled.

Emma told them goodbye and they barely stopped long enough to acknowledge her. She rode away, waving, happy that they were going to have as nice a day as she had planned for herself.

She arrived in town and it was still early. The train whistle let her know that the train was arriving for its daily visit. Merchants were starting to come out with carts and the café, which served food out-of-doors in the summer months, was set up and serving breakfast. Emma felt exhilarated. This reminded her of Boston, at least a little. She had to admit that a part of her missed home and family; a small part. She was mostly happy, though.

As she parked the wagon, she thought about her list of items she needed. She would go toward the far end of town and work her way back to the wagon to unload her packages. She disembarked and began to stroll down the street. Emma loved watching the people. They were beginning to bustle around and get their business done. It would be much harder to be out and about in the afternoon so Emma kept up her pace.

As she neared the train station, she noticed several people coming from the platform area. She was so happy enjoying her time in town that she did not even see who was with them until she heard her name called in a heavy Boston accent.

"Emma! Emma!" It was almost a scream. "There she is! It is Emma!" Emma looked up just in time to see Howard and Samantha Stanfield coming right at her.

She froze in her tracks. Could this really be her parents? At first she did not believe it. She thought that she was seeing things because she was tired and had spent the whole prior evening talking about them. She was sure she had even dreamed of home last night.

But it really was them. Samantha was almost running and was the first to reach her daughter. "Oh Emma!" she cried out loud, "We found you!" Emma stood still like a statue, still in shock from seeing her parents here. She could feel a tear come to her eyes and she was not sure if it was joy or fear.

Now both of her parents were with her, both of them holding on to her as if she might disappear. Her mother shook her, "Emma! Emma, are you alright? It is us!"

Emma could not speak, but hugged her parents back. They were making such a scene that Howard finally led them back to the train depot. They all sat down inside the station and Emma finally took a breath.

"What are you doing here?" she finally got out.

"We came to find you, of course! And now that we have, we are taking you home immediately!" Samantha went on about the ordeal they had been through locating her and riding the train. She seemed to be ranting with excitement and frustration.

Emma could not speak. All of the last few months was flying through her head as if in reverse motion until finally she reached the moment this all started. She could see that the impact on her parents was much worse than she had imagined. They had truly missed her and had spent time and energy looking for her. This made her feel good, not that she did not think her parents loved her or would have missed her, but she thought they would have just been sad, not come looking for her.

As her mind raced, she saw all that had happened to her, then it was as if the shock was erasing it. She could feel her mind going completely blank. She could not think and she could not speak. Finally Emma realized that her mother was speaking to her.

"Emma! Are you alright darling?" Emma nodded, but no words came out.

A station manager had come up to them and was speaking to her father. Emma could hear them, but it was as if they were far away or in another room. She could only catch bits and pieces of what they said.

"Is everything alright here, sir?" the man asked Howard.

"We have found our daughter!" Emma could hear the excitement in her father's voice that was so uncharacteristic of him. "She was taken from us and now we have her back! Everything is wonderful, now!"

"That's fine, sir. Is there anything I can do to help? Could I retrieve the sheriff?" Emma was unsure why the sheriff would be necessary for her parents to visit her, but she could not move or contradict this.

Howard Stanfield looked at his daughter with all the love and affection of a lifetime. She seemed in good health and unscathed. His only thought was to get her home and away from whatever had been holding her here. He was afraid from her actions today that she might have been brain-washed. She had always been such a level headed girl, able to communicate freely, and now she seemed not to be able to speak.

"No," he continued to the station manager, "I believe we will just need three tickets on the train, if you could be so good as to procure them for us."

"You mean for today?" the man looked at Howard strangely. "Didn't you just arrive?"

"Yes. But we will be leaving immediately." Howard's voice was stern and demanding.

"Yes, sir," the manager agreed and began to walk away. He looked back and went on, "but you will be leaving in just a few minutes."

"That is fine." Howard was now looking back at Emma, comforting her.

Emma had heard the whole conversation, but by the time it sank in, she had been helped up and rushed to the train. They were seated and Emma found herself staring out the window of the train onto the platform. The world was spinning so fast. All she could think is that she was dreaming and it was because she had stayed up so late last night talking about her family.

That was it! She was dreaming and she just needed to wake up. Was it because of her fear of Jack? She could not believe that. He had never given her any reason to fear her. He had gone out of his way to be particularly nice to her. She could hear the train engines begin to huff and puff. A cloud of steam floated by the window. Emma felt she was on a cloud.

Images of Jack came to her mind. She could see them yesterday, his arms around her. She could see his smiles and his laughter, even when he was teasing her at the river that day. Phoebe and Oliver were in her dream as well. They were curled up in her lap, listening to Jack read from the Bible. Emma smiled wistfully. All the excitement, and the lack of sleep from the night before, had caused her to daze into a dreamy sleep.

She was dreaming about the last few months. The train whistle took her back to the first time she had seen Jack on the platform. She had thought he would be older, and he was, or so she thought. She was not actually sure how old he was. The shaggy beard and longer hair, along with dressing like what Emma thought an old man would wear made him seem closer to her father's age. But the way he acted, the way he sounded, seemed much younger. And his eyes... the only part of his face not covered by hair sometimes... Jack's eyes were beautiful.

When Emma awoke, she felt the gentle rumble of the train. She had been having such a nice dream that she thought she was still asleep. Her eyes squinted at the bursts of sun flickering through the fast moving trees. She stared at them. Why were they moving? This was so familiar. Then she remembered her train trip to Tennessee. This must be part of her dream, coming and starting over on her grand adventure...

...but it was not!

Chapter 32: Disappearing Act

Emma's eyes came wide open, her body frozen with fear. She let her eyes move, rolling around, taking in the scene. She wasn't dreaming! There, right beside her, her hand resting on Emma's arm, was her mother. Emma slowly turned her head. Samantha was gently sleeping, lulled by the train like her daughter. Howard, sitting across the aisle, was reading a paper that covered his eyes from seeing Emma.

She turned back to the window. What was going on? What was she doing here? ...on this train? ...with her parents? Emma could not remember. It was all a daze and she was not able to make sense of it. She remembered yesterday, and last night. She thought about the children and how she had left them at Mabel's house on her way to... where? That is where it all seemed to go blank. Emma could figure out what happened. In her confusion, she closed her eyes and eventually went back to sleep.

Emma woke up again much later. As she opened her eyes ever so slightly, there were no longer trees flashing by her. Instead, the sun seemed to just be coming up. She blinked several times, still unsure of her surroundings, and supposing she was in her bed at the cabin, she thought it was first light and she had had a horrible dream all night. Instead of the fireplace and the small front room, however, she saw a piece of glass, and her own reflection staring back at her.

What was she seeing? Again, she felt she was in a catatonic state. Everything seemed so real, the sights and sounds and smells, and yet none of it made sense. There were dim lights behind her and she finally got the courage to turn and check them out.

"Well, sleepy-head, it is about time you rejoined us." Howard Stanfield's voice echoed in Emma's head. She blinked again, several times, then stared at the man sitting next to her. It was her father. And he was on a train. Her mother was nowhere to be found, at least in Emma's immediate view, but she could hear her voice in the distance.

"You gave us quite a scare, young lady," Howard went on in a low voice. He smiled at her the way she remembered him, but Emma still could not form words. "Are you alright?"

Emma could feel her head bobbing up and down in agreement, but she said nothing. She leaned forward toward her father, resting her face in his arm. He gently stroked her hair. It was as if she were a little girl again and father was taking care of everything. Could this be her subconscious acting out because she was afraid of what was to come... with Jack? She had still not completely figured him out, but she did not think she was afraid of him. Maybe this was her opportunity to go home, in her mind, and talk to her father... to explain everything that she had not been able to explain before.

They sat for a while without speaking. Emma was not sure if she went back to sleep or not. This was all so surreal. Next thing Emma remembered, it seemed to be getting darker instead of lighter. If she had been dreaming and this was now morning, that would not happen. As she was sitting with her eyes wide open, her father finally spoke.

"We really should talk, you and me. Do you not think so?" Howard smiled again at her.

Emma reached up and felt his face. She rubbed his whiskers for a moment. He seemed so real.

"Are you really here, Father?" she whispered faintly.

"Yes. And your mother is here, as well," he indicated the area behind them. "We have come to take you home." This was so firm that Emma sat up straight and looked at him. "We have been so worried about you. I hope you have not been harmed."

Emma shook her head back and forth slowly. "Where are we?" She asked, looking around.

"Why we are on a train, on our way back to Boston." He looked at her to try and read her response. "We have been looking for you for some time... since you left... and we finally got a lead that you had been on a train to Columbia, Tennessee. When we arrived in town, there you were, like you were waiting for us to come and get you. We decided not to waste any time and got right back on the train this morning to bring you home." He smiled again, like he felt heroic to have saved her. "We have been traveling all day and we will go on through the night and reach home tomorrow."

"What!?" Emma was stupefied. "What have you done? I need to go back." Emma tried to get up, but still in a daze, her father easily settled her back in her chair.

"Emma, what happened to you in Tennessee? Why did you come here?" He asked her, concerned and confused at her behavior.

Emma blinked several times. She could not think straight. "I..." she could not figure out what to say, "I... just need to go back!" She scowled at him, shaking her head.

"What is so important that you do not want to go home?" he continued softly.

"...home..." Emma barely whispered. Emma meant this as an answer to the question, but Howard took it as her coming around to reality that she was going home. Howard decided his daughter was under too much stress and confusion was clouding her mind. He stroked her hand gently. For now, he would not push any more.

They rode on through the night. Emma decided she would take advantage of the silence to get her thoughts together. She had to think. What was she to do. Obviously, her family had no idea she had run away to get married. They did not seem aware of Jack's existence, either. And what about Jack and the children? They would be wondering what happened to her. For all they knew, she had just disappeared off the face of the earth. Would they worry about her? Would they spend months looking for her as her parents did?

Emma had no money and no job. She had no way of getting herself back to Tennessee, where she knew she belonged now. She would go home and say nothing. That was it! She would keep quiet about all that had happened. She was afraid that if she told her father about

running off to marry a stranger that Howard might get angry. He might try to take repercussions on Jack. She could not hurt Jack and Phoebe and Oliver like that. Jack was all they had now and they needed him to be free to take care of them.

She began to sob quietly. She missed them already. She had spent so much time with Phoebe and Oliver, all day, every day, and she was beginning to feel like their real mother. Her heart ached at the thought that she might not see them again.

And Jack... Jack had been a harder sell, but he had grown on her. She even felt as if, maybe just because he was her husband, but she felt an attraction to him. His strong arms seemed so comforting yesterday and she was not the one even in need of comfort. She longed for those arms now. If Jack was here, if he knew where she was, would he take her home?

So many things were racing through her mind. It was Emma's way to make a plan in times like this, like the plan she had that led her to the Campbells. She needed one now to get back. She would go home and write to Jack. He would come to Boston... or send her a ticket to come back.

NO! That would not work. What if Jack did not have the money? He was, after all, a poor farmer, living in a small cabin. He had sent her money to come the first time, just a few months ago. She might be putting him in a hard spot to ask for more. So what other options did she have? She would get a job, and live at home and help out there, and save her money. It should not take long and she would be able to buy her own ticket. That was it! She would get a job!

The rest of the train trip was long and it got harder when her mother discovered she was awake. She was resolved not to talk to them, not to tell them anything about what she did in Tennessee or about Jack. But her mother questioned her mercilessly. She was only trying to be a good mother, but Emma could not wait to get away from all of it.

At home, it seemed to get worse instead of better. There, all of her siblings joined in the inquisition as well. Then Gran and Grandfather came over. They all wanted to know every detail and Emma could not say anything. She felt like she was being attacked until finally Howard stepped in.

"I believe our girl has had enough!" he said firmly to all involved. "Emma, you need to go to bed now. Girls, you let her be and give her some space. After she has had a little while to herself, then you can go up." Howard was a man of few words, but when he spoke, in his house, his word was final.

Samantha hugged her daughter once again. "It is so good to have you safe at home at last. When you have rested, we will be able to talk more then. Good night, dear." Her voice was sweet and comforting to Emma. There was something about this house and these people that had always given Emma ease, but now, there was something else. She knew eventually she would have to talk to them and tell them something. She did not want to lie to them, only to not say anything. Emma was not sure how long she could hold out, but she would have to try.

Chapter 33: Baskets

Several days went by and Emma felt she was going to burst. All of her life for the past few months, all the life changing events that had led her to being a married woman with two children, was calling her back. Her family thought that something horrible had happened to her, but she knew it was the best thing she could imagine.

It was not that she did not love her family or that she had not had a wonderful sixteen years here in Boston, living in this house with her parents and brothers and sisters. She did have many fond memories of it. She had even missed this part of her life occasionally while she was in Tennessee. But it was the kind of missing that allowed her to think of it as a happy time... a time that was leading her to where she had gone.

Emma remembered many talks with her father, sitting in the shed and watching him work on his beautiful furniture. Each piece would begin as a rough piece of wood and he would carefully craft it until it became something amazing, something that people wanted to take from him and put it in their lives and use and cherish it.

During a particular day when they sat and visited, Howard had finished a stunning armoire. It was very strong and sturdy, yet beautiful and ornate at the same time. Emma had asked him if it was hard to let someone just come and get it, and for him to never see it again. She would never forget his reply. He said, 'Emma, this is no better than a chunk of wood until someone takes it home and uses it. What really makes me happy is for someone to love it.'

This is the how Emma thought of herself and her home. This place, and these people, were the workmen that made her who she is, but until she could go out in the world and find a home to be useful in, she was no better than a cabinet that stays in the dusty old shop... and that is not what her life was about. Her life seemed to have purpose in the Campbell's house. They needed her and she needed them.

Her family seemed to have changed during the time she was gone, as well. June and Lizzy were both engaged to be married to Clayton Vance and Cedric Jordon, respectively. Samuel had also asked for Grace Porter's hand and her father had agreed. Violet, at fifteen, was as beautiful and graceful as her mother and she, too, was beginning to have suitors come and call. They all seemed to have put their lives on hold, as far as getting married, because of Emma, a fact that was somewhat distressing to her as she was already married. At least now, no matter what happened to her, they could continue on with their plans.

There was also the issue of her reputation, for which her mother and sisters were vitally concerned. Samantha was glad to have the older girls spoken for officially, so her concern was centered solely on Emma. They had allowed rumors to circulate that Emma had gone west in search of adventure and employment, as they could not be sure to the contrary. They felt that this would allow her to return, should they find her, without recourse. Mrs. Atherton, Emma's former teacher, had even requested that when she got to feeling better that Emma could come and speak before her class about life in the wilder parts of our country and tell of her adventures.

They were all being light-handed with Emma, speaking to her in kind ways and not prying too much. Louisa and Alexander, however, were not so easy on Emma. They had been told to leave her alone, but they were so curious about life beyond Boston. They wanted to know everything. They even asked her secretly if she would take them on her future exploits.

One day they were both lying across Emma's bed and she was sitting in the window-seat, staring out. They tried their hardest to get more information from her.

"Please, please tell us about Tennessee, Emma," Alexander begged, "I want to go there someday and need to know all about it."

"I am going, too," Louisa chimed in, "Is it hard for girls there? Is it scary?"

"Yes!" Alexander looked at his little sister with an evil look, "Are there wild savages there?"

Emma looked at them sternly. "Stop it!" she commanded, "It is nothing like that."

"What is it like?" Louisa pried, seeing her sister was starting to open up even the slightest bit.

"Well..." Emma thought about her vow of silence, which was hard in the presence of such eager faces, "it is not savage." She went back to staring out the window. As they began again, Lizzy and June came rushing in the room. They were buzzing about some activity to be held the following day.

"...so I believe it should be wonderful this year!" Lizzy was saying. "Do you not agree?"

"Oh, I suppose so," June threw out casually.

"Well," Lizzy continued, "of course yours is always one of the first to be purchased, usually for a great price, but as for the rest of us, it is nice to have a sure... admirer."

Louisa and Alexander stopped their questions to Emma long enough to see if this was a more interesting conversation. As they decided it was not, they began rattling off questions again.

"Oh, please do stop!" June insisted, "Leave poor Emma alone for a while and let her have some peace. Perhaps she does not want to discuss it with you." She emphasized the last word, personally offended because she felt it was herself that all her sisters should come to with all their problems. She had tried her own inquiry as to Emma's exploits and had gotten nowhere and she had grown tired of hearing these two try for so many days.

"Besides, we have other things to do just now." Lizzy chimed in, blissfully unaware of any of the feelings that haunted her big sister. "We have to prepare for the picnic."

Now the other two were interested. "What picnic?" Louisa chimed in.

"Will there be games?" Alexander questioned.

Lizzy looked at them with excitement in her eyes. "I do not know about any games. The picnic is for the whole community, at the new city park. It is going to be wonderful and they are going to have a basket sale!" She grinned and giggled with delight at the thought.

Alexander and Louisa looked puzzled. "What is a basket sale?" they asked, neither envisioning a sale of baskets bringing such excitement, even to their sisters.

They were all listening intently as Louisa sat on the bed, enjoying all the attention, and began to explain. "A Basket Sale is an activity they have at fancy picnics when they are trying to raise money. All the single ladies make baskets full of wonderful picnic food. The baskets..." she grinned again, "... and the ladies... are auctioned off to the highest bidder. The money is then used to help those less fortunate than ourselves... and... the gentleman who buys your basket gets the honor of taking you to lunch and sharing your basket with you. His is purchasing the honor of your presence for an afternoon."

"And you just go and eat lunch with some stranger, simply because he purchased your basket?" Louisa seemed stunned at such a crude idea.

"Well," Lizzy continued, "usually they are not strangers. I am sure that Cedric will be purchasing my basket this year. And Clayton will get June's and Samuel will be buying Grace's basket."

"What about Emma?" Louisa seemed concerned, "She has no one to buy her basket."

"I will!" Alexander spoke up in her defense. Emma looked up and smiled at him in appreciation. She actually had no intention of preparing a basket, or even going to the picnic.

"That would not be right, Alexander," June spoke up, "Emma needs someone to purchase her basket that is an... admirer; someone to take her somewhere quiet where they can eat the food together and talk and get to know each other better."

"But what if no one does... get her basket?" Louisa was also now concerned for her big sister's feelings. "then can Alexander purchase it?"

"Yes... I would like to have lunch with Emma." Alexander chimed in.

"Thank you, Alexander," Emma said, smiling at him warmly, "but there will be no need for you to rescue my basket as I have no intention of preparing one. I will not be going to the picnic, I do not think."

June looked at her solemnly. "Emma, dear," she walked over to her sister and sat down beside her, putting her hand on Emma's, "you need to go. You need to be a part of life and you need to have some fun to get your mind off the sad things that have happened." She was speaking of Emma's trip to Tennessee, but Emma thought the sad thing was coming back to Boston.

"Besides that," Louisa said, shyly, "I..."

Emma glanced at her, "You... what?"

"I believe there is already a basket ready for you to take," she finished. "Mother fixed it herself and it is beautiful. She would be extremely disappointed if you did not go and enter the basket in the auction."

"And it is for a good cause," June interjected, trying to divert the attention away from Emma.

Emma stared at both of them, not knowing what to say. She was not sure how long she would have to be in Boston and she could not just spend all of that time sulking in her room. Besides, she might make contact with someone that could give her a job if she went to the picnic. She was just not sure about having lunch with some man, but she would manage, just to not hurt her mother any more than she already had.

"Alright, I suppose I could go..." she began.

June and Louisa jumped up and began busying around. "We must get you ready, then," they both said enthusiastically. "The picnic is this afternoon."

Chapter 34: The Picnic

The evening rushed by, fixing hair and ironing dresses and ribbons, fixing hats and polishing shoes. Everyone worked hard to help prepare for the next day. The following morning was no different. They awoke and had a good breakfast, so as not to be too hungry at lunch. They dressed and combed and put up their hair. Everyone seemed to be caught up in the hustle and bustle of the day, even Emma.

It was soon time to go and they loaded all their baskets onto the back of the buggy, then they all boarded. Howard drove and all the girls rode with him. Samuel, who had a small buggy of his own, had left earlier to pick up Grace. The other two boys walked to the park.

The day was perfect. It was so much cooler here in Boston than it had been in Tennessee and Emma appreciated this as she was wearing her long dress and petticoats. The park looked perfect! There were people mulling everywhere, the band-stand was covered in ribbons and the band was playing lively music, the smell of good food wafted through the air.

The Stanfields arrived and were greeted immediately by Gran and Grandfather Lindsey, who had arrived just prior to them. They strolled through the crowd, stopping occasionally to speak to this person or that. The group ended up under a large oak tree whose branches would give them shade and keep them cool. Ian, a young servant of the Lindseys, had staked out a good spot and placed large blankets around for them to sit on. At their arrival, he greeted them and helped them all get situated, then he was sent to retrieve the baskets and place them in the holding area.

Emma was beginning to get nervous now about the basket auction. She had never really participated in this before, being young and uninterested. Her sisters had talked about it, telling her every detail. They would bring each basket up, one-by-one, and ask for bids from the young men standing around the stage. Because it was for charity, all the baskets always sold, but some were sold to family members or young men asked to take pity on some poor girl whose basket did not sell immediately. Most, however, were sold to a gentleman who was interested in courting the girl whose basket it was for sale.

This is what scared Emma most. She did not care if her brother had to purchase the basket. She would enjoy spending the afternoon with Alexander. She did not, however, want to engage in flirting the day away with some young man that she did not care about. She began feeling sick to her stomach at the thought. She could not be unfaithful to her husband.

As the baskets began to be purchased, Emma felt worse and worse. She asked Alexander to come and sit beside her.

"Do you think you might purchase my basket for me, Alexander," she whispered to him.

He smiled, "Oh, yes! I am ready. But Father has told me that I cannot bid until I give some others a chance first." Emma smiled faintly at him in appreciation, but her heart sank. Her parents meant well. After all, she had not told them that she was married.

June and Louisa were sitting behind them. Just then, Pauline Beaumont came up and sat down with them. She was one of their dearest friends. She was very excited about something.

"Hello!" she said, hardly able to catch her breath.

"Good morning, Pauline," they replied, all smiles, "What are you so excited about?"

"Oh, girls, you will not believe it," she went on breathlessly, "there is a new gentleman, just arrived in town last night, and he is here at the picnic."

"Do you know anything about him?" June asked anxiously.

"Well..." she continued breathlessly, "I know that he is very handsome... Jacqueline has met him and said so... and I hear he is also very wealthy... a sort of, eccentric, you know, an adventurer that goes on... well... adventures!"

"What do you mean, 'adventures'?" June asked.

"So... he is very handsome..." Lizzy mused. "Will we get a chance to meet him?"

"As to the adventures..." Pauline continued, "I am not sure... I think he goes out west and searches for gold or something. And as to meeting him, Jacqueline said she asked him if he would be coming to the basket auction or bidding on any baskets and he said he definitely would."

All the girls squealed with excitement, like five-year-olds. Pauline always had this affect on Emma's sisters.

Samantha looked at them and scowled for a moment, "Girls!" she chastised them.

The girls went back to whispering quietly to themselves. Emma and Alexander had been sitting and chatting about all the people walking by. She had only caught some of what they were saying, but she did get that there was someone special coming today that they were all excited about. Emma knew that June and Lizzy loved the men they were engaged to, but they still enjoyed hearing Pauline's 'news' whenever she had any.

The Stanfields had been late arriving this morning, so their baskets were later in the auction. Pauline's sold and she left them to go and talk with the young man. A few minutes later, June's basket came up for sale. She acted surprised when Clayton out-bid another man for her basket. Then she sauntered over to meet up with him, thanking him for his kindness. He smiled brightly at her and she took his arm as they left to eat their lunch together.

Mrs. Stanfield came and sat between Lizzy and Emma, where Jane had been.

"I am so happy for Jane, that she has found such a nice young man and that they are engaged," she smiled at both girls, concentrating on Emma. Emma gave her a weak smile, then she turned her attention to Lizzy. "And you too, dear Lizzy, Cedric is just the kind of man a mother dreams that her daughters will find."

Emma winced, knowing all these remarks were a warm up to what her mother would like to say to her, that she should be thinking about marriage herself. In fact, being married was completely occupying Emma's mind. Moments later, Lizzy left them as well, following Cedric to a nice place by the river to spread their blanket and their picnic basket out. Now Emma was alone with her mother and she could not look her in the eyes.

"Oh, Emma," Samantha began, "I believe your basket will be coming up next."

"Yes." Emma hung her head low.

"I do hope..." her mother continued, "that you will be polite enough to accept a lunch engagement with the gentleman who wins your basket." Now Emma could feel her eyes boring a hole in her. She knew that her mother would be completely embarrassed if she did not accept the offer for lunch, but Emma just felt like crying.

Instead, she simply replied, "Yes, mother," and hoped for the best.

Now they announced her basket. She glanced up to see that it was the largest one she had seen all day. Her mother had done a good job of at least making the basket look appealing. The crowd seemed to appreciate it, and the fact that it belonged to the sister of the two previous girls who had been auctioned did not hurt, either. Emma held her breath and looked over at Alexander. Their parents were also giving him the eye.

The bidding began and, to Emma's surprise, several young men made small bids. Emma recognized some of them from school. One was standing nearby and kept watching Emma. She glanced at him and gave him a faint smile of appreciation at his bid.

Emma grabbed Alexander's hand and squeezed it tight. She was just about to raise it for him, when a bid came from somewhere in the crowd for five-dollars. This was unheard of. Most of the baskets had been selling for about a dollar or two, but to jump right to five dollars, was outrageous.

Samantha gasped and began to crane her neck to see where the bid had come from. "Oh, Emma, this is wonderful!" she whispered to her daughter. Alexander gave her a pitiful look that told Emma he had already been outbid of all he had. She smiled at him in appreciation for his willingness to try. Emma could not bring herself to even look at the crowd.

The auctioneer seemed extremely pleased by the great offer. He asked for any other bids, for which he had no response from the young men in the front, and then he set his gavel down and yelled, "Sold!" Emma cringed at the sound.

Emma felt like crying, or getting up and running as fast as she could to the house, but her mother was pushing her to get up and go greet the generous man who had bought her basket. The baskets were usually left right on the front of the stage, allowing the victor to claim his spoils in front of everyone. Emma could hardly walk as she approached the stage, hearing her name being called. She could tell that her parents had gotten up to join her in meeting this wealthy benefactor.

As she made her way through the crowd, she could not look up, but kept her eyes on the feet. All at once, there seemed to be a parting of the crowd to let through the gentleman who had purchased her basket. Her mother prompted her on from behind until they were almost toe to toe.

"Hello, Miss Stanfield," the voice in front of her was deep and strong. Emma slowly raised her eyes, noticing the fine tailored suit and finally the face of the man she was to have lunch with. She kept her eyes low, not looking him in the eye at first. He was tall, so this was not a problem, even though Emma herself was also tall.

There was something familiar about him, in his voice, but Emma was simply in survival mode and was trying hard not to listen too intently. She simply stood there and gave him a faint smile and a curtsy.

After a moment, her father broke in, "I am Howard Stanfield, Emma's father. And this is her mother, Samantha."

"It is a pleasure." Emma watched hands passing around her as if she were not there. The man shook her father's hand and took Samantha's hand and kissed it lightly. "It is a great pleasure to meet you both." Emma stood there, confused. Why did this man seem so familiar. Then she received her answer. "I am Jack Campbell."

Chapter 35: Lunch With Jack

Emma looked up in shock! Jack!?! There in front of her was a man of Jack's height, but looked nothing like him. He was a well dressed, young man, like a Boston social gentleman. He was completely clean shaven and his hair neatly cut and combed. But the eyes... the eyes were Jack's eyes.

Emma was about to throw her arms up and around his neck when he gently took her hand. He raised it to his lips and kissed it.

"Miss Stanfield, may I have the pleasure of escorting you on a picnic with this wonderful basket and sharing it with you?" Jack spoke to her as if they had just met. He was staring at her hard, as if to say something to her with his eyes.

Emma held her breath for a moment then slowly shook her head to agree, gratefully.

Her parents both seemed unaware of any familiarity between Emma and Jack. They were completely enamored by this fine gentleman that seemed to be taking an interest in their daughter. They continued to make polite conversation with Jack in hopes of finding out more about him before they had their picnic.

"Mr. Campbell," Howard addressed him, "I do not believe I have seen you here in town before. Are you from Boston?"

"No sir," Jack said very politely, still holding onto Emma's hand, "but my father grew up here." He hesitated, eyeing Samantha for any sign of recognition of his name. "He moved before I was born."

Mrs. Stanfield continued, oblivious, "And do you make it back to these parts quite often?"

"In the past I have not, madam," he looked at Emma and smiled, "but I do think Boston suits me more and more."

Howard and Samantha both smiled brightly at the thought that he was interested enough in Emma to plan to come back to town often. Jack tried to politely leave with Emma, who was stunned and excited all in one.

"You must come and have supper with us at our home before you leave town again, Mr. Campbell." Samantha said as they were leaving, taking the basket and making a quick escape.

Jack looked over his shoulder at them, "Absolutely!" The Stanfields watched as their daughter dutifully walked away with this stranger. They were sure she would be miserable, but they were grateful that she was willing to give it a try.

Jack's hand was under Emma's arm, leading her through the crowds and toward the river beyond. The basket was in his other hand. Emma was staring at him in disbelief. She felt numb all over. She was so excited to see him, yet he looked so different than the Jack she had gotten used to. He could easily pass for a gentleman from Boston now, instead of a farmer from Tennessee. And he was so handsome! He had a rosy complexion and a beautiful smile that made dimples in his cheeks. Without the beard, Jack looked much younger than Emma thought he was.

"How old are you, Jack?" she almost whispered to him.

Jack began to laugh out loud. "You mean after all this, that is the question you want to ask me?" He looked at her and got very serious, "I've missed you."

"I... missed you, too." Emma replied, almost in tears now.

Jack had led them to a secluded part of the river, then they went behind a grove of trees for privacy. He stopped and turned to look at her, "So why did you leave?" Now Jack looked so sad, like he, too, might cry. "Why did you leave me? And Phoebe and Oliver? Did you get scared or bored or what?" Jack was angry and hurt and it showed on his face.

"I... I..." Emma could not believe that he would think that of her. She had come to them of her own free will and she had promised she would stay. How could he think this of her.

"What?" Jack finally prompted her, "You... what?"

"I did not leave." Emma said quietly, looking down. Jack's hand lifted her chin gently back up until they were face-to-face again.

"But you did... leave. And you appear to be looking for a new husband, as well." Jack turned away and began pacing back and forth. "What did I do that was so terrible? You knew before we started that it was a hard life. I told you that in the letter." He turned again and stood in front of her. "Is it me? Is it me that you don't like?"

Emma was shaking her head gently from side-to-side. When Jack asked this last question, she finally spoke, "No! I..." she could not finish, but stood there, staring at him.

"You, what?" Jack was much calmer and gentler now. His voice was pleading. He was standing so close to Emma that she could hardly breathe.

Emma looked up into his eyes, the eyes she recognized, and she said very clearly, "I love you!"

Jack stood there for a moment, just staring at her. Emma was not sure he had heard her or if she had even said these words out loud. Then Jack leaned even closer to her and kissed her. Emma thought she was going to melt. She had never felt anything so wonderful in all her life. She put her arms around Jack's waist and leaned toward him, trying not to fall over. After a few moments, Jack stopped and looked at her. He was smiling and Emma did not have to guess anymore. She could see his whole face smiling.

"I love you, too." He replied, and Jack kissed Emma again.

They were so caught up in the moment that they almost didn't notice the noise of someone walking toward them. At the last moment, they separated to a proper distance before being discovered. Jack had turned around and was pretending to be distracted by a nearby tree. The other couple walked out past a tree and into the clearing where they were standing.

"Good day," the gentleman tipped his hat to them cordially. Jack nodded and replied back. Emma was so glad that she did not know them because she was afraid she might not be able to speak. After they walked by, they decided to set up the picnic lunch. As they began to eat, Emma asked Jack about Phoebe and Oliver and why they were not with him. They were staying with the Witherspoons for a while. She missed them and hoped that she would soon see them again.

Emma was not very hungry now, but she liked the idea of eating with Jack. After they got settled in, Jack began, "You didn't make this food, did you?" He made a face at it.

"No," Emma snickered, "is it that bad? I think my mother made it."

"Well, now I am looking forward to dinner at her house." They both laugh and that brought an easy feeling to the rest of the afternoon. Emma told Jack about going into town and how she had almost run over her parents by accident. She explained that she was in such a fog that she did not realize she was gone until it was too late and that she was planning to work and save some money so she could go back to Tennessee.

"Why didn't you just ask me for the money? I would have sent it to you." Jack looked puzzled.

"I... did not feel... right, asking you to pay for my trip twice." Emma was very sincere about not wanting to be a burden to Jack.

Jack put his hand up and touched Emma's cheek tenderly. "Everything I have is yours now. I can't think of anything I wouldn't give up to have you back." Emma knew that Jack meant this. She felt so happy. Emma put her hand on Jack's.

"I will go with you now!"

Jack smiled at her and kissed her again. Emma wanted to spend every moment for the rest of her life right here. Jack stopped and sat back. He looked serious.

"No," he was shaking his head like he was having a debate with himself. "No, you can't go with me now!"

Emma was shocked. "What do you mean?"

"You need to go back home, for a while, I mean. We need to fix this. I need to go and talk to your father, to tell him how I feel about you and let him know that I can take care of you." Jack was very intent.

"I do not care about any of that, Jack. It is not important to me." Emma complained.

Jack looked at her and smiled. "But it is important to your parents, and it is to me, too. If Phoebe grew up and left and we did not know where she was for months, then right when we found her she disappeared again, we would be horrified. We cannot live the rest of our lives together knowing that we did that to your parents, to your whole family. It would not be right."

Emma sat and stared out to the water. She did love her family and she cared about their feelings, but she felt like they had taken her prisoner and she was angry at them. She also knew that Jack was right and they needed to tell her family everything.

"Alright, let's go now." Emma hopped up and began to collect things for the basket.

"OK," Jack laughed at her enthusiasm. She was always full of emotion around him and sometimes she did not even stop to think about what she was doing. Jack tugged at her arm to get her to stop and sit down again. "...but let's figure out how we are going to break the news to them, first."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, we cannot just walk up to them at the picnic and say, 'by the way, we got married', can we? It would humiliate your mother and your father may shoot me before he asks any questions." Jack looked as though he was devising a strategy for war. "No, we need a plan."

"What kind of plan?" Emma was a person of action, not planning. She had not even thought of how her parents would take the news. She assumed they would be happy that she was married at all.

"I think you should go back home and I will come over later and talk to your father by himself. Then we can tell your mother and the rest of the family while they are at home, away from any others." Jack's head bobbed up and down like he was sure this would be a good plan.

"That sounds like a good idea," Emma agreed. They finished cleaning up the lunch things and put them in the basket. As they stood to go, Jack turned and kissed Emma again, a sweet, flirtatious kiss that made Emma smile. She looked at Jack and took in his whole picture. "Jack," she finally asked, "where on earth did you get that suit? It must have cost you every last dime that you have. I cannot believe you bought it just to come and take me on a picnic."

Jack smiled a mischievous grin at Emma and took her arm and began to walk back to the grand-stand area.

"What are you up to?" Emma asked him.

"I would have spent my last dime coming to see you, Emma," Jack said, smiling and raising his eyebrows, "but I didn't."

"You mean you have some more money?" she questioned him, not trying to sound greedy.

Jack stopped for just a moment and looked at Emma, "Would you have married me whether I had money or not? You know, 'for richer or poorer'?"

Emma felt like she had offended him even asking about the money. "Of course I would have!" she answered, just a little indignant. "Do you think I married you for... money?"

Jack laughed and kept walking. "No," he went on calmly, "I think you thought you were marrying some poor farmer who couldn't eat unless the crop came in." He stopped again and turned to look at Emma. "I think you married me for all the right reasons." He smiled at her and she felt like she could believe him. She did not want him to think she had bad motives. "But I never said I was poor!" Jack finished, beginning to walk again and quickly reaching Emma's parents before she could say anything else.

Chapter 36: Sisters

As Jack and Emma walked up to her parents, the older couple eyed them suspiciously. They were curious as to how their daughter behaved, given her attitudes over the past few days. Samantha was afraid she might offend the gentleman who had paid so much for her basket and not speak to him during the whole lunch. When they saw the young couple, walking arm-in-arm and chatting gleefully, relief was obvious.

"Did you two have a nice time?" Samantha chirped.

Howard added, "We were getting worried about you, being gone so long."

Jack looked up at them and smiled, "I do apologize for keeping your daughter. We had a pleasant day and we must have lost track of time. Please accept my sincere regrets." He smiled politely and bowed his head to them like a formal Bostonian, showing little true emotion.

Then Jack turned toward Emma, taking her hand from his arm and kissing it gently before releasing it. "I had an... amusing day, Miss Stanfield." He bowed slightly toward her and she curtsied back. Then he turned to leave.

"Mr. Campbell," Samantha interrupted, stopping him, "do not forget that you have accepted an invitation to our home for a meal before you leave town." She smiled at him.

"Ah... Mrs. Stanfield," Jack continued, "I do regret that I will be leaving Boston sooner than I would like. I plan to be on the train tomorrow... or the day following at the latest."

"What?" Samantha looked stunned and slightly angered, "But you must come and visit with us. Is your business here so soon concluded?"

Jack looked up at her, then at Emma, then back at the Stanfields, "I believe it will be soon, madam. I do apologize."

"Perhaps," Howard stepped in, "you could join us for a light supper this evening, then." He was not sure what had happened to change his stubborn, angry daughter into the old sweet Emma, but he would like to find out what Mr. Campbell's intentions are. "I insist!"

Jack tipped his head in agreement. "What time should I call on you?"

"Oh, seven would be fine," Samantha said cheerfully, trying to lighten the mood, "would that be satisfactory for you?"

"Yes." Jack replied, smiling sweetly at Mrs. Stanfield before walking away. He stopped just long enough to look at Emma, "Good day." Emma smiled as Jack left.

The buggy ride home that afternoon seemed forever for Emma. She wanted this whole day to be over so that she could go home with her husband and stop this charade. Louisa, unaware of anything that had happened, chatted constantly about all the activities of the day. Samantha just sat and stared at Emma, smiling peacefully, while her husband glared at the road ahead. Emma was quiet.

When they arrived at the house, Emma immediately asked to be excused to go and rest for a while. She scurried off to her room and lay in the bed quickly, hoping no one would join her. She was wrong. June and Lizzy were there right behind her and they wanted to know everything.

"Emma, I am so thrilled for you!" June began.

Lizzy interrupted, "Oh yes, Emma. That man... the one who bought your basket, that is the gentleman that I was telling you about this morning. What was he like? Was he a true gentleman? Did he ask about seeing you again? I mean, not just tonight at dinner, but did he ask you to go to dinner or if he could come and call on you?"

Emma sat up and looked at them both. She knew they would not let her get by without saying anything, and she did not want to lie to her sisters. She needed someone to talk to, anyway, someone to tell about everything that had happened over the past few months. No one here in Boston knew what had happened to her in Tennessee, and none of her new friends there knew that she had run away from home or that she had married Jack as a complete stranger because of a promise made many years ago by her grandmother.

She was bursting to talk about it, to get it out in the open once-and-for-all. Emma eyed her sisters, wondering if she could trust them to keep her secret until the time was right to tell mother and father. Finally, she made up her mind.

"I... believe he is coming over tonight..." Emma looked back and forth between June and Lizzy, "to ask for Father's blessing for our marriage." There! She had said it! It was out in the open now and it made Emma feel much better, like a weight had been lifted from her shoulders.

"Do you mean that Mr. Campbell insinuated to you that he was going to ask Father for your hand in marriage?... already?..." June seemed confused.

Lizzy interrupted and was almost giddy with excitement. "Oh, Emma," she hugged her sister tightly, "this is wonderful! Perhaps we could all get married together.

Emma stared at them intently. "No," she went on quietly.

"What do you mean, 'no'?" June went on. She was beginning to see that something strange was going on, but did not know what.

Lizzy was still not seeing Emma's true meaning. "Do you mean you are going to wait a while before getting married? Oh, I think a long engagement sounds simply horrible!"

"No," Emma continued, "I will not have a long engagement. But I will not be getting married with you two, either." The other girls stared at her, partly wounded at her statement. "The fact is..." Emma held her breath for a moment, trying to get the words out, "the fact is... I am already married."

June and Lizzy sat and stared at Emma in amazement for what seemed like hours.

"What are you talking about?" June finally spoke in a low, concerned voice. Lizzy could not say anything.

Emma tried to explain the whole story to them. First, she went over to the bedroom door and looked out into the hallway. As it was clear, she shut the door and locked it. Next, Emma went to her purse to retrieve the letter. She was going to let them read it and tell them the story in full from beginning to end, but she changed her mind. She went back and sat on the bed with her sisters still staring at her.

"It is a long story, so I will try to give you the shorter version," Emma began.

"No," Lizzy finally spoke up, "I want to know everything."

Emma smiled at her, then continued, "I... received a letter, this spring. It was from Jack Campbell, the man I had lunch with today. He was living in Tennessee on his farm and asked me to come and marry him." She looked at both of them for a moment, then continued. "And I did!"

June seemed so concerned. Emma had never seen her so worried about anything. "Do you mean to tell us that you just went and married a complete stranger, just because he asked you to? And without telling your family you were even leaving?" She seemed a bit angry now and Lizzy was catching on to that as well, though she also seemed thrilled by the whole adventure.

"I am sorry I did not tell anyone, but I was afraid you would try and talk me out of it," Emma defended herself. "And it was not quite like that. I received a letter from Jack. It told me a story about..." all of a sudden Emma realized she might be telling a story that her mother, or grandmother, had more right to tell, but she could not continue without giving away this family secret.

"...about what?" June prompted.

"...about Gran... and a promise she made to the Campbells." Emma tried to be as vague as possible.

"Gran knows about this?" Lizzy asked, seeming a bit confused.

"Not exactly..." Emma said, "...I mean, she does know about the promise, but it was a long time ago and... well, she does not really know about Jack, in particular." Even Emma herself was not sure if that made sense. She made a funny face, then continued the story.

"Go ahead, then," June was beyond curious now.

"Alright. Gran made a promise to her best friend, Harriet Campbell, Jack's grandmother, that when mother, our mother, had her first girl and Harriet's son, William, had his first son... that they would be... arranged!" Emma was not sure of the exact word to use here, but as the other girls were still watching her and seemed to be following along, she continued. "But... by the time we got the letter from Jack, explaining all this... you were practically engaged yourself already, June... and you, too, Lizzy. You would have never wanted to go out and live on a farm in the middle of the wild west, so I went for you!"

June and Lizzy sat up and looked at each other. "Do you mean to tell me that one of us should have been married to Jack Campbell right now?" Lizzy choked out.

"Well... Yes!" Emma said, "but at the time, he was just a farmer from Tennessee. Or at least that is what I thought. I did not know until just now that he had any money at all. And he did not look like he looked today, either!"

"What did he look like?" June asked, smiling mischievously.

Emma thought about it for a moment. She could hardly remember what she thought when she had first met Jack. It was horrible. But his beard and rough looking exterior had grown on her. She was still a little unsure that the man at the picnic today was not an imposter. This made her giggle a little to think about it.

"He... his face... was covered with a thick beard," Emma smiled to herself, "and he looked like a... like a... farmer."

The other girl's faces scrunched up at the thought of the beard and all the dirt that they always saw on the farmers that came into town to sell vegetables. They seemed relieved that he looked different now. "So you have never seen him... clean?" Lizzy asked.

At this question, Emma blushed deeply, her thoughts going back to the day at the river when she and Jack 'shared' a bath.

"So... go on with the story," June pried, "you got the letter and decided to go 'for us', then what?"

"Well... Jack had sent a letter that got me a train ride to Tennessee. I rode for two days... got off in a town called Columbia, in Tennessee, and met Jack. He took me to breakfast and we talked for a while and walked around the town a bit... then we went to the small church where Jack worships, out in the country, and we got married."

"That very night?"

"Yes!" Emma continued, "we got married... and then later... when I was in town by myself... Mother and Father got off the train and took me by surprise and took me away before I could explain anything."

Lizzy laid down across the bed on her back, staring up at the ceiling like it was the wide open sky. "Then he came back to... 'rescue you'," she said dreamily with a big smile on her face.

"That is very romantic," June chimed in.

"So...," Emma was now back in the reality of the moment, "what should I do? Should I tell Mother and Father all about it?"

"No!" Lizzy advised, "I would wait and let them get to know him a little better first. Then tell them when they are already sure he is right for you."

Emma thought about it for a moment. She did not look forward to telling her parents any of this, but she knew that Jack could not stay gone too long. She wondered if it would be best if it came from her. She did not have to worry about it too long.

Chapter 37: Extraordinary Days

The girls had been talking most of the afternoon and they did not realize how late it had gotten. There was a sudden turn of the door handle, then, upon realizing it was locked, a knock.

"It is me... Violet. Let me in!"

June ran to the door and opened it, letting in their younger sister. "What is the matter?"

"Why have you locked the door?" Violet asked, hurt. She looked at Emma on the bed with Lizzy, "Have you been telling about your 'new friend', Emma? Because he is here!"

Lizzy popped up and ran to the window. "Where is he?"

"What have you been talking about?" Violet answered. She had felt many times as the outsider when her older sisters talked and she liked the fact that she had a secret held over their heads now.

"We will tell you later," June said sternly, "now tell us... what do you know about Mr. Campbell?"

"Well..." she strolled around the room, eyeing them and loving her position of knowing something first, "he came a few minutes ago and asked to talk to Father." She looked at Emma and smiled a knowing smile. "They have gone into Father's workshop and have not come out yet."

"Did he say anything about what he wanted?" Lizzy kept pushing.

"No... just that he needed to discuss something very urgently with Father. Mother is going crazy trying to figure it out... and she has called Gran and Grandfather to come over."

Emma looked up startled. "Gran?... is coming here?"

"Yes," Violet continued, "she should be here any moment."

All of the girls were up now, and June and Lizzy were trying to work on Emma's hair and dress and pinched her cheeks for color. They busied around for a minute and then they all headed downstairs. As they came down the front stairs, they heard the front door open. It was their

grandparents coming in. Samantha was in the front parlor and asked them to come in to her. As the girls followed their grandparents in, Gran went straight to the side of her daughter.

"Are you alright, dear?" Gran asked Samantha frantically. "We came as quickly as we got your message. What is going on?"

Samantha looked up at her mother, then over to Emma. Then she began to sob. "Oh... Oh...", she cried dramatically, "I do not know what is going on."

"There, there, my dear," Gran soothed her, "it will be alright. Just tell us what has you so upset." She asked her daughter, but her eyes went straight to Emma. She assumed that this had something to do with her and her 'adventure' and perhaps to do with the young man that she had heard about at the picnic.

Emma could not stand all of this drama on her account. She was ready to tell all to everyone. Her sisters both stared at her, wondering what she would say.

"I...", Emma swallowed hard before continuing, "I... think I know." Her voice was barely audible, but all eyes turned to her immediately.

"I think..."

Just as Emma began to speak, the door opened from the kitchen and Howard walked in, followed by Jack.

"Well..." Howard did not seem at all upset, but actually in a good mood, "what a nice gathering we have here."

Emma looked from her father to Jack, back and forth, trying to get a reading on what had been said between them. Jack smiled at Emma and it gave her confidence to continue, but her father kept talking.

"I suppose all of you should be here to hear what I have to say," Howard persisted. Samantha was sitting up straight now, dabbing her eyes and extremely attentive to her husband and the man behind him. "Please, everyone, sit down."

The children went to sit on a long bench by the fireplace or in other nooks and crannies around the room. Gran and Grandfather took their 'normal' places on the small sofa by the dining room. Samantha, still sitting on the couch, grabbed Emma's hand as she came by and pulled her onto the seat beside her, clutching her hand tightly. Howard took a step forward and waited for silence to settle. He looked back over to Jack, who was still standing by the door and had not intruded himself into the room any further.

Howard cleared his throat and began, "George, Retha and Samantha, I believe you are acquainted with this young man's family. This is Jack Campbell," Gran's eyes began to widen, almost glaring at Jack as she was the first to realize what Howard was about to say. "He is the grandson of your old and dear friend, Harriet Campbell."

Gran and Samantha both gasped at the same time, staring at Jack.

Howard continued before anyone had a chance to interrupt. "I believe you had some kind of... contract," he searched for the proper term, "with this boy's family." Now Howard was staring back at the two of them, especially at Gran, in such a harsh way that the children all got a little nervous. Their father was rarely harsh with anyone, so they knew something was wrong.

Samantha, who was unaware of the 'extension' to the deal that Gran had made with her friend after Samantha had married Howard, looked confused, her eyes going from her mother to Howard and to Jack.

"Are you saying that I have to...", she was not even sure herself how she wanted to end that sentence.

Gran looked around the room, then she stared back at Jack, almost pleading with him not to harm her family.

"No," Howard finished his wife's thought, "I believe the 'burden' now falls to our daughters, as you and I have ruined Harriet's original plan with her friend." Samantha began to sob and looked toward Emma.

"I believe..." Howard continued, "Emma has already taken care of things."

Samantha cried aloud again and gazed at her daughter. "Oh, Emma, I am so sorry!" she pulled Emma close to her.

Emma hugged her mother tightly and whispered in her ear, "It is alright, mother," then, a little louder so that everyone could hear, "I am very happy." Emma smiled up at Jack and he smiled back. Emma could not believe how relieved she felt that now all of this was out in the open.

Jack finally spoke up, "I do want to apologize to all of you for our acting without your prior consent, but, I believe it was somewhat your idea to begin with." Gran looked very guilty and could not look anyone in the eye, especially not Emma. "I just want you all to know that I love Emma very much and I plan to spend the rest of my life trying to make her happy."

Everyone was quiet for a moment, and they all looked at Emma. Her parents still were not sure about all of this and Samantha only felt guilt, as if she was having her daughter pay the price for her own happiness. June and Lizzy, who knew the whole story, thought it was all terribly romantic.

Emma looked at her mother and filled in the missing pieces of the story, "Mother," she said calmly, "Jack and I are already married. We have been... since I left home."

"Married?...?" Samantha could not even form words. She cried again, not believing all that she was learning about her own daughter. "I am so sorry I forced you into this."

Emma smiled at her, then up at Jack. "I was not forced, Mother. I went on my own accord... and I could not be happier that I did."

"But... how will you...", Samantha looked up at Jack, then back to Emma, "how will you live?"

Howard laughed and everyone turned toward him. He had always wanted first of all his children to marry for love and to be happy, but as a practical man, he was also concerned for their security. It was not like him to trivialize something that was so important to him as his daughter's future welfare.

"I believe Mr. Campbell can well afford to take care of Emma... and all the rest of us if he were to take a mind to." Even Emma looked confused by this. She knew that Jack was a hard worker and that he had a nice, but modest, home for them to live in, but she did not think he was wealthy.

"Mr. Campbell has inherited a rather large estate from his grandfather on his mother's side. As he and the children are all the family left, they are very well taken care of."

This pleased Samantha, but it also confused her. "Children?" she said at last, "What children?"

Emma told them all about Phoebe and Oliver. During that evening, as they ate dinner, Emma relayed the entirety of her story to all of them. They were all very happy for her and congratulated Jack as well.

Later, Jack went over to Mrs. Lindsey to talk to her. She was still concerned that she had ruined her granddaughter's life by her actions so many years ago. He took her hand. "Thank you." His voice was quiet, but very sincere. "You have made me the happiest man on earth." Gran, who usually was so composed and rarely showed deep emotion, stood up and put her arms around Jack. She had carried a burden with her for all these years and now it was over. The relief showed all over her face.

The next day, Emma left with Jack to go back home. They had all made plans to come to Tennessee and visit her as soon as they could. Even though Emma could think of nothing she wanted more than to go back home with Jack, it was hard to leave her family again.

Emma awoke one morning. The sun was beginning to peek through the curtain into the room. She lay in the bed, still and quiet, so as not to disturb anyone. She looked around the room and smiled. This was a wonderful home and she was so happy to be here.

Emma had spent her whole life filled with ordinary days, waking early in the morning and getting right to work. She still worked hard every day, and she went to bed each night exhausted and ready for sleep. But Emma did not wake up to ordinary days anymore. She rolled over to turn her back on the stream of sunlight and curled up next to Jack. This day, like so many others for Emma, was now extraordinary!

The End – but just the beginning!