

EMMA FIELD

BOOK ONE

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Prologue

Toronto, Ontario,

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The silver-haired woman cocked her head to one side and smiled such a tiny smile that the man at the back of the room could not see it. But he knew she was smiling. He knew by the angle of her neck and the delicate motion of her fingertips on her lips that her eyes were soft and distant as she remembered.

“Who influenced me the most?” she repeated to the reporter perched on a wooden chair at the end of the third row. “I didn’t know my mother. My father was good to me.” She paused, her eyes narrowing slightly. “But I believe that those who showed me love and dignity...and the power of taking risks...influenced me the most.”

“Who were those people then?”

“To start with...a girl named Vera, a man named Dr. Watson, and another named Ezra, a woman named Elizabeth...and a boy named John. Yes, they were the first to show me these things.”

“They sound like ordinary folk. Surely, there must have been more influential people, women like Mrs. Mott and Mrs. Stowe?”

The woman smiled again, both hands firmly grasping the podium. “Lucretia Mott and Dr. Emily Stowe? Yes, they influenced me...but they weren’t the first. For some reason, it is always the people who first truly open or close their hearts to us who shape us the most.”

She hesitated, staring at the pale blossoms of the apple tree outside the hall window. “And the place. The place where I began...that influenced me in ways I don’t yet understand.”

“I see,” said the reporter, crossing his arms as he leaned back in his chair. The young woman beside him sat forward, timidly raising her hand.

“But what you just said is so soft,” she said. “Your speech was hard – about changing laws to allow women to vote, to have an equal voice, yet what you just said about people and places is so soft. I don’t even know what I’m asking...I guess I’m just puzzled.”

The speaker nodded her head slowly. “Ahhhh,” she said quietly. “Hard and soft...you can’t have the one without the other. I wouldn’t have been able to do this hard political work had I not first experienced the softness of love. And without the rigid or hard framework of laws which protect women as human beings, there is little room for softness – the safety and nurturance every child requires.”

“Is that what those people did for you...the ones you named?”

The woman nodded and beamed with a smile so generous that even the man at the back of the room could see it. “Yes,” she said. “They showed me ‘all that is.’”

The young woman’s hands formed a cup as though she wished to hold the words she knew to be both foreign and true. “I think that I understand. Thank you. How old were you when you met those people?”

“About your age. It’s never too early, or too late, to begin.”

Chapter I

Emma’s World

Emma lived in a quiet world. Most of the sounds and all of the colours came from nature. She absorbed them like moss absorbing a spring rain.

Emma Field – daughter of Jeremiah and the late Josephine, child of the land, child of a Methodist and Quaker community swept by the winds of Lake Ontario – knew where she belonged. The circles of her life were clearly defined. That gave her comfort. It also filled her with fear.

She shoved the sleeves of her dove-grey dress to her elbow and scraped the sticky bread dough from the bowl onto the table top. Closing her eyes, she sprinkled the mound with flour with one hand while with the other she folded the edges over into the middle. She often created games in which she closed her eyes. Today, it was to practise for a day when her vision might be gone. Yesterday, it had been to notice things with her frailer senses. Other days it was to memorize the smallest details of things that mattered to her.

Emma kneaded the dry flour into the dough. In her mind’s eye she could see the land to the south of the cabin and the ribs of the rail fence following the contours of the fields sloping down toward the creek. No need to open her eyes: she knew where the fence intersected first with a small pile of snow-dusted rocks, then with a patch of silvery ice. She saw the ribbon of barren maples and beech and butternut and elm stretched from the creek’s edge to the far ridge.

Swinging her view to her left, Emma opened her eyes to see if the sun had yet broken through the heavy veil covering the November sky. It hadn’t. The bands of cloud were only a lighter grey above the woods.

She closed her eyes again and in her imagination swept past the simple frame house and barn belonging to the Coopers, past the newly constructed log schoolhouse, and on to the fine brick house in the southwest. Emma liked its size, dignity, and sturdiness. It was full of surprises – like the indoor privy and especially the dumb-waiter in the pantry. As they had cooked for each threshing, Anna and Mary Victoria Williams had let Emma use this convenience to pull the jugs of cream up from the coolness of the cellar.

Emma liked Anna and Mary Victoria. They were nice and they were kind. They worked hard. They wore pretty dresses and had older brothers – and both parents.

With the back of her forearm, Emma pushed her hair from her face. She wondered what it would be like to have so much and so many in one’s nearest circle. Opening her eyes, she went

to the window. The road was empty: empty of people; empty of beasts; empty of colour. Emma cocked her head to one side. She had never noticed until now how the woods, barren of leaves, wrapped themselves around the house like a worn and frayed mother. “Huh!” she said, pleased with herself for having discovered a fresh detail of the world so familiar to her.

Emma returned to the circular mound of silky gold-and-brown dough, plopped it into the three-legged kettle, and gave it a satisfied little pat.

Chapter II

Finding Colour

The snow was smacking like little kisses against the schoolhouse window. It was sticking, melting, then running in tiny rivulets down the outside of the wavy glass above Emma’s bench. She forced her pencil across the slate board, looked up at the rivers, sighed heavily, and copied yet another line.

The girl eased sideways on the bench. The snow was falling heavily now. Emma calculated the angle of its path...180 degrees was even with the horizon, 90 degrees was straight up, 45 degrees was half of that. 40, it was close to 40 degrees. Emma wondered what made it fall like that. How could something as light as a snowflake fall with such purpose and speed?

The fire in the wood stove behind Emma snapped. She glanced furtively at Jane, sitting beside her, scratching on her slate board with the diligence of a dog after a lone flea. Emma sighed again and rested her mouth on the inside of her wrist.

The village in the distance was dusted from view by the snow. Emma followed the angle of the snowflakes to the top of the window and imagined flying directly into them, her face stinging. Then she would turn and soar above this patch of earth cleared out of the wilderness of Canada West. She saw what a hawk would see: vast expanses of charcoal grey deciduous woods, patches of smooth white fields, and patches of worn, dark cedar bush. The woods looked like her father’s beard, and the fields all pale and sickly white like the skin of Mr. Brown, who was languishing on the teacher’s chair at the front of the classroom. Emma had never seen a man with skin as white as Mr. Brown’s.

Her father had once told her there were people who had skin the colour of cocoa working the fields of their white masters in southern United States. He had said the coloureds were becoming restless and nothing but chaos, confusion and the ruination of the cotton industry could come from it. Emma tugged on the waist of her faded cotton dress. It pulled tightly against her breasts. She glanced at the darker band of fabric used to let out the seams this past summer. Her eyes gently closed, she felt the sodden humidity of summer, heard the whine of cicadas, and tasted the tangy fleshiness of raspberries. She leaned her mouth into her knuckles and looked out the window. It was hard to imagine, she mused as she watched the snow falling, that all that lay beyond the window could change to the colours and sounds of summer. That would take time...time or imagination... imagination...was that what was causing the brown people to think that they could be anything but slaves? Women were almost slaves – well, Mrs. Henderson

wasn't – she had her own dressmaking business in the village. And there was a woman in Picton with her own school. And Emma supposed that Jane's mother wasn't almost a slave – she had servants of her own – but she was still the property of Mr. Morgan.

A knot tightened in Emma's stomach as she thought about being the property of someone other than her father. One hand dropped to her belly; the other clutched the slate pencil as though it were a lifeline. Emma had begged her father to let her do more of what a tenant farmer's wife would do around the cabin and barn. She didn't need to attend school – no one did at her age. But he had remained firm: Emma must become a woman schoolmaster - schoolmistress - though she had never heard of such a thing. That way she wouldn't have to be someone's property.

A chair slammed against the wooden platform at the front of the class.

“Uh!” said a wakening Mr. Brown in a loud, startled voice. “Yes. Wipe off your slates now. The Bible reading...George, fetch me the Bible!”

Emma stared at the whitewashed logs of the side wall.

“Turn around, everyone. Now!”

She wheeled in unison with Jane and the other girls to face the boys who were against the far wall.

The snow had stopped when Emma and Jane stepped into the deepening grey of the November afternoon. Emma stared past her cabin to the south.

“Watch that puddle!” said Jane. “You never look at your feet, do you?”

“Why would I look at my feet when there are much better things to look at? I was thinking about the colours of summer. I'm certain that there is more colour here than I can see at this moment. Do you remember how we used to play “I Spy” when we were little? Want to play it again? Come on. It could be fun.”

Emma thought of Jane Morgan as a salt-pork friend. Though she was fancy enough to be dessert, she provided Emma with a predictable and salty companionship. Jane's father was a miller in the village. The Morgans lived in a fine brick house flanked by a huge verandah on the Danforth Road. Emma dreamed of one day having a house with a verandah. She vowed she would sit on it every day of the year, no matter what the weather.

“When will you grow up, Emma Field?” complained Jane.

“I am grown up,” responded Emma, “I am much more grown up than you. It's just that I also like to be young at heart, shall we say. Let's play a more adult version then - yellow, no, gold, do you see any gold?”

“The long grass?” asked Jane.

“Right. Your turn.”

“I spy with my little eye something that is grey.”

“The sky?”

“No.”

“The tree trunks,” Emma stated with certainty.

“No.”

“Those rocks over by the fence?”

“No.”

“Everything is grey. Give me a hint,” pleaded Emma.

“You were close when you said the trees. Give in?”

“The fence posts – where they touch the ground!”

“Right, Miss Field!”

“Funny isn’t it, how they’re the colour of rust at the top but a ghostly grey at the bottom.”

“Rusty red and ghostly grey!” Jane scoffed. “Your turn.”

“I spy with my little eye something that is oak brown.”

Jane rolled her eyes. “The grass.”

“No, that is not oak brown.”

“These leaves?” Jane snatched a dry, curled beech leaf from the cold ground as they walked along.

“That’s it!”

“Last one. Something red!”

Emma followed Jane’s glance to where the track turned to the north. Red? She couldn’t see anything red. Her eye caught the thorny stems of the raspberry bush which wound around the limestone-grey stump. “The raspberry bush!”

“Yes.”

“What’s your favourite colour, Jane?”

“Purple.”

“Why?”

“Because it’s the colour of royalty. What is your favourite colour?”

“In fabric or in nature?” asked Emma.

“In nature. There aren’t enough colours in fabric.”

“No there aren’t, are there? But there might be one day. Father says that everything is changing – steam power and industrialization are changing everything.”

“I don’t see how that would change colours. Come on, what is your favourite?”

“Scarlet! I love scarlet. The colour of cranberries. Can you imagine having a scarlet cape like the brick-red one Mrs. Henderson made for your mother?”

“What’s wrong with brick-red?”

“Nothing. I just imagine how much prettier scarlet would be, that’s all. I wonder if there is any way you could dye the fabric a brighter red?”

“For a tenant farmer’s daughter you have grand ideas! I’ve never seen you in anything but that grey shawl. Why don’t you make yourself a cape? Maybe Mrs. Henderson could tell you how to dye it brighter. Maybe scarlet!”

Emma didn’t respond. “Race you to the pine,” she yelled over her shoulder as she sprinted down the hill toward the Danforth Road. Wisps of her hair freed themselves from the bun at the back of her head.

“Why don’t you make a cape? There is nice wool for sale at Bishop’s store,” Jane panted as she caught up to her friend. The two slowed to a walk. Jane steadied herself against the pine tree.

“This shawl is fine. Besides, I’d rather wait till I grow up.”

“You would not! You don’t mean that!” Jane stopped, her hands on her hips, her chest heaving under her blue woollen shawl. “Emma, have you ever had a new dress?”

“I do not need one.” She looked back toward her cabin, her chin proudly thrust upwards.

“You’ve never had a new outfit have you? You’ve only worn made-over clothes. That shawl was Matilda Cooper’s wasn’t it?”

Emma wheeled around. “This is as far as I’m going today. And the shawl? It was my mother’s and it’s perfectly fine! See you tomorrow.” She turned and ran quickly back up the hill, her grey dress and shawl flapping behind her.

Jane stood watching. “Her frock is the colour of those rocks,” she thought. “And her shawl – it’s the colour of pine bark – pine bark in November.”

Jane looked to the west. A faint pink bathed the sky above the pines.

Chapter III

The Planks

Deep grey hung over Jeremiah Field and the cows to which he was pitching forkfuls of sweet-smell-ing hay.

“Father?” Emma poked her head around the doorway.

“Father, are you in here?”

“Over here!” he called.

Emma squinted in the direction of her father’s voice. She could barely see him, swinging hay to the cow in the last stall. The barn was warm, fragrant and dark. Emma loved the Coopers’ barn more than any other building in the world. It was especially nice at this time of year, when the cold winds started to hurt. Her father had not lit a lantern to finish his chores; he knew where everything was. He didn’t need to see, and besides, the Coopers were frugal people who valued hired men who did not waste their hard-earned resources. Jeremiah reached across the doorway to hang the wooden fork on the nearest peg. Emma stared straight ahead.

“Father?” she asked again.

“Yeeees.” He jammed his hands into his pockets. “Go ahead. I’m listening.”

Emma blinked. “Oh... Yes... Father, was this really Mother’s shawl?”

“Yes. Why do you ask?”

“Just wondering.” She fixed her gaze on the calf tied in the far corner. “Father?”

“Hmmm.”

“Who do I look like?”

“Your mother.” He leaned against the satiny hip of the nearest cow.

“What part of me is like Mother?”

“Everything – the colour of your hair. The way you stick your tongue out when you concentrate. And the way you ask too many questions.”

“Hmm.” Emma curled her lips inward and dug her teeth into her upper lip. He’d never said *that* before. She’d asked him this question often, hoping for another glimpse of the mother she could hardly recall, yet he had never before given her *that* answer.

“Why did Mother ask questions?”

“Why do you ask questions?”

“Because questions can take your mind zig-zagging to places you’ve never been before.”

“A little like a rail fence taking you across the neighbour’s land?”

“I guess so. Sometimes I worry that my questions will take me to places I shouldn’t be. Do you know what I mean?”

“Yes,” he said with a nervous laugh. “Why do you think I am in this country in the first place?”

Emma’s eyebrows came together like knitting needles. She thought about the wisdom about pursuing that comment further, then asked, “How do you know when you are crossing into places you shouldn’t be?”

Her father smiled and rubbed his eyes with his chapped hands. “You will know. Believe me, you will know. The world has a way of beating down people who ask the tough questions.”

“Then why do people ask them if they are only going to be beaten down?”

“Don’t know. Maybe because they can’t help themselves. I really don’t know.”

Emma noticed him rubbing his eyes again in the gloomy light of the doorway. She recalled how, several springs ago, he had covered his face with those hands when she’d previously asked him about her mother. They had been sitting in the doorway watching the Canada geese fly north. He had dragged his hands down over his face, taken a deep breath, and said, “Your mama loved geese. She always said she wanted to fly north with them each spring. Do you ever want to fly, Emma?”

“Every day,” Emma had said solemnly.

“Would you be the lead goose, or the slacker at the back?”

“Both.” She had studied the V shape that became a scattered W, then two Vs before becoming one again. “I’m strong, but even geese know when it’s time to take a rest and let someone else take over.”

There had been a long silence as Emma realized that maybe she wasn’t really talking about herself as a goose. She had smiled, wrapping her arms around her knees. Her father had said nothing.

“I’ll milk Rosalie now,” her father said now, taking a few steps toward their cabin and tiny barn. “Say – I know it’s getting late, but would you run down to Morgan’s Mill and get the strips of blanketing that Caleb has set aside for me? I want to tack them around the door frame before it gets too cold. They’ll be working there for at least another hour.”

“But what about the stew?”

“It’s on the fire already.”

Emma trotted down the hill to the southeast. The western windows of the mill were glowing with lamplight. The millpond was full of frigid water from the rains that had been falling steadily all autumn. She had heard Father say that Caleb Williams wanted to card as much wool and saw as much timber as he could before the ice froze the massive water wheel. Perhaps he was carding wool now.

A slight movement on the bridge over the creek caught Emma's eye. She slowed to a walk, then stopped and squinted. She could see the faint outline of a girl crawling across the bridge on her hands and knees. Emma squinted harder and walked slowly past the mill. The girl appeared to be wearing a dress tattered enough to be discarded and used as a rag in most households. Emma guessed the girl was a Plank from the shack on the other side of the creek. She understood the girl's fear: the water under the bridge at this time of year made you feel you'd be sucked into it and drowned. The child was hesitating, staring at the water below, then looking at the far bank.

Emma had always been the first to help. She had a certainty about her that made her the master of the ship in calm and in storm. When George Robertson had smashed Samuel Barker's nose with a branch from the silver maple tree, Emma had bolted to the boys' side of the playground and forced Samuel to tip his head back. She had dispatched Peter Minaker to fetch Mr. Brown, who promptly chastised her for being on the wrong side of the yard. But this was a storm she didn't know how to navigate. Something felt different - like blood about to spurt from a sudden gash. Emma could almost taste it.

She shifted sideways and for the first time saw a woman standing amongst the cedars on the far bank, her skirts wet and hanging limply around her ankles. The woman raised a rifle to shoulder height and pointed it at the girl crawling toward her on the bridge. Emma's legs went limp and she sank into the tall grass beside the track, shaking violently. The girl's bare hands clutched at the timber in front of her. Her dress caught under her knee and she slumped forward.

Emma looked over to the far bank. The woman was lowering her rifle and shouting something into the din of the rushing creek. The child dragged herself to her feet, stumbled over last few yards of the bridge, and struggled up the bank. The woman wheeled around and strode away. Emma caught sight of her at the next break in the trees. The girl staggered after the woman, holding her wet skirts to her knees.

Her legs now cramped and tingly, Emma turned just in time to see the silhouette of Caleb Williams heaving the mill door shut.

"Mr. Williams! Mr. Williams, sir!" She called out to him. Caleb jumped.

"Good heavens, child, where did you come from?"

Emma wasn't certain how to answer that. "Thank you...I'm sorry...Father asked that I fetch the woollen strips you offered him."

"Oh, is that it? Here they are, just inside the door."

"Thank you, sir. And Mr. Williams, do you know the people who live in the shack on the other side of the creek?"

"The Planks? Yes, I know them to see them. A sorry lot, they are," he said, shaking his head thoughtfully.

“Are they...do they...do you think that they would hurt one another?”

“That’s a strange question but, yes, I suppose that they just might hurt one another. What makes you ask such a thing?”

“Oh, nothing.” Emma was uncertain. Adults were different when it came to dealing with the wrongs of other adults. They were so quick to chastise youngsters, but so tight-mouthed about the behaviour of adults. “You look cold, Emma. Let me give you a ride up the hill. Hop up on old Jed. That’s right. Giddy-up, Jed.”

The wind had turned colder and carried with it a bone-chilling dampness. Emma ducked behind Caleb’s broad back and gripped the fabric of his coat.

Chapter IV

Quaker

Emma’s father was sitting at the table when she returned. He had it set with the two tin plates, two cups, and two spoons. His feet were stretched toward the blazing fire and the side of his head lay heavily on the palm of his right hand.

“Here is the blanketing, Father. Mr. Williams says you can have more if you need it.” Emma stomped her feet on the mat, dropped the wool on her settle, hung her shawl on a peg, and lifted the stew pot from the crane in the fireplace.

“Who are the Planks, Father?”

“Immigrants.”

“From where?” she asked spooning the dark, meaty stew onto the plates.

“Don’t know.” He rubbed his eyes, then he rubbed them some more. Emma could tell that the conversation was going no further tonight. Emma and her father bowed their heads. “For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful. Amen.”

Emma scooped up a chunk of pork. Her father had used the word “immigrants.” That meant that the Planks had come from across the ocean, just as he had. In this country you were either an immigrant or a Loyalist. If you were lucky your family had been granted land as United Empire Loyalists. But that was long ago - close to fifty years now. The Loyalists and the United Empire Loyalist families were stable people. They had money and certainty. The homes they were now building were big and solid and made of red brick. It was different with the immigrants. Most of them were hungry, worn out, and scared. Many had just barely survived the second failure of the potato crop in Ireland. They had witnessed the slow and horrifying starvation of people they knew and loved. They were poised for a better life in body, but terrified in spirit that they would die an equally miserable death here, on foreign soil.

Emma couldn’t imagine going for an entire winter without potatoes. They had them in the salted pork stews they ate almost every day. But they also had onions, turnips and carrots until the spring. And five squash, which would store until Christmas. And apples, which would last until March. After that, Emma’s father would shoot the odd rabbit and they would eat the last of

the potatoes until it was time for the fiddleheads, asparagus, and dandelion greens of spring. But in Ireland it was different. They had nothing but potatoes and now they didn't even have those.

Emma wished she could ask her father more about the Planks, but he would probably just tell her it was none of her business or that the girl must have been deserving of whatever treatment she got. Emma and her father mopped their plates clean with Saturday's bread. Jeremiah pushed his dishes to the centre of the table and sat back in his chair. He didn't notice the determined set to Emma's jaw. She swung the kettle of steaming water from the fireplace and poured a few cupfuls into the dishpan.

When the dishes were done, Emma folded the settle into a bed and readied herself for the night. She slipped between the linsey-woolsey sheets and pulled up the woollen blankets.

"Good night, Father."

Her father sat staring at the fire. "Good night, Emma."

He rose and stood for a long time with his hands on his lower back. He stirred the coals and added two logs to the fire, then took his coat from its peg and slipped outside. Emma was breathing deeply the air of sleep by the time he returned from the privy and climbed into the bed in the far corner of the cabin.

The following morning Jeremiah Field woke his daughter earlier than usual.

"Wake up, Emma. Emma?" Emma's eyes flashed open, then eased shut again. She nodded her head.

"Emma, will you please take the last of the eggs to the boarding school this morning before school?"

Emma nodded her tousled head without opening her eyes.

"Elizabeth needs all the eggs we have, and we would be best to sell them. Take all the ones we have packed in the cold cellar. It's turned terribly cold over night. You will need to wear your woollen undergarments...and stockings – don't forget those. I hope they still fit you. Wear an extra pair of my socks too; they aren't too soiled. And my jacket – wear it over your shawl, if you like."

Emma frowned at all of the instructions.

"I don't need your jacket – you take it."

"It's very cold," her father repeated. "You will need to get up soon, Emma. I have to go. I hope you have a good day. The porridge is ready."

"I am thankful for small mercies," she smiled. "Goodbye, Father."

An icy wave of air reached Emma in Jeremiah's wake and she pulled the covers tightly around her head. Her eyes fluttered open. It was a blue-and-orange morning. She loved the colours that came only on these coldest and clearest of days. She threw the bedding back and stretched the tight webbing of her stockings over her legs until her toes curled. Her bladder ached. Emma sat as close as she dared to the fire and scraped the last of the porridge from the pot. Pulling the shawl around her shoulders, she rushed out to the privy. Last evening's snow

crunched under her boots. Her breath and urine formed tiny clouds in the beam of light streaming through the door, which she had left open to let the sun warm her a little.

By the time she had retrieved the dusty sled from the woodshed her fingers were so cold she could scarcely tie the cord around the willow baskets holding the eggs. She raced back into the cabin and plucked her mother's grey mittens from the leather box at the back of the ox-blood-red cabinet. They smelled fresh like cedar boughs. She pulled her father's coat from the peg and draped it over the nearest chair, knowing he would need it when he was working in the bush. She would have to walk quickly to stay warm.

A golden flash caught her eye. The boarding school was a castle again! She stopped and smiled at the glow from the sun reflecting off all nine of its windows. Of course she was much too old to believe that those windows belonged to a magic castle that would one day be hers...but it had been a beautiful dream every year when the sun shone on this same spot. She smiled to think of what Elizabeth would say of Emma's crazy dream. Elizabeth and all of the other Quakers who ran the school were so plain. That was their word for themselves – plain. Plain speech; plain dress; plain, simple living. Emma knew that if the windows of the boarding school were indeed made of gold, Elizabeth would be the first to sell them and give the money to the poor.

Emma wrapped the shawl over her mouth. It smelled of cedar and sheep. She knew that if she were to own the castle she would have to sell a few windows herself to buy her father his own farm. Then she could spend the rest of her days looking out the windows, knowing that she had been blessed.

At the wooden cellar door of the boarding school Emma pulled her right mitten off with her teeth. She pounded heavily on the door, then put the mitten back on and lifted the latch. Elizabeth, the school's cook, stepped out from the shadows of the kitchen. She was a big woman, as were all the Bowerman women. She was dressed in the familiar dove-grey dress. Her kindly blue eyes were framed by a small, white, frilled cap.

"Oh! Good morning to thee, Emma!" she said in a loud whisper.

"Good morning...Elizabeth Bowerman." Emma still felt awkward calling adults by their first names. Quakers were such strange people. They neither swore oaths, nor called one another by the words the rest of society used. There was no Mrs. and Mr., Miss and Master, or even Doctor and Judge with them. All humans were equal in their eyes and would be referred to as such, Father had explained.

"Is thee certain that thee can spare this many eggs? Does thee have enough for thyself?"

"Yes, Father told me to bring them all. We have a crock of pickled eggs in the cold cellar – not that I fancy them much – but they will do in the spring when the meat runs out."

"Yes. I thank thee. I shall bake this afternoon. Will thee have a cup of hot cocoa, Emma? Please sit thyself down. Don't worry about thy boots – it is only snow – it is clean."

When Elizabeth spoke, it was always the same: Emma felt as though she mattered more than anyone or anything else in the world. She wondered if she would feel this way more often if she had a mother. She sat at the long bench, her eyes slowly adjusting to the dimness of the white-

plastered room. The table stretched from near the door right over to the far wall. An orderly mountain of dirty dishes covered the far end. Elizabeth swung the crane and kettle from the fire in the enormous fireplace on the west wall. She added cocoa to a tin cup, then filled it with steaming water, stirred the liquid, and placed the cup on the pine table in front of Emma.

“Thank you, Elizabeth Bowerman.”

Elizabeth nodded, then looked toward the ceiling. “The girls are in Meeting right now,” she again whispered. Emma knew that that meant that they were in the room directly above them, silently observing the start to their day.

“Thank you,” Emma repeated in a whisper. She drank her cocoa in shared silence. She loved the smooth, rich taste. At home they drank only tea – but Elizabeth always served cocoa. Fry’s Cocoa. Elizabeth Gurney Fry caring for the prisoners...wasn’t it her brother who had contributed money to purchase this school? Frys and cocoa – they were as Quaker as William Penn and silence. Emma also liked the comfort of Quaker silence – it led to an easy conversation, once one got used to it.

Only a brown circle remained at the bottom of Emma’s cup as she placed it beside the other dirty dishes. She glanced at the puddle of water that had dripped from her boots, darkening the pine boards beneath the bench. Elizabeth followed her gaze.

“Thee must get to school. I will wipe that up. Have a good day learning all that thee can learn.”

“Goodbye, and thank you.” Emma pulled the door shut behind her.

At the corner she caught sight of Jane Morgan walking stiffly behind her brothers, who were racing around playing. She could measure Jane’s breaths by the puffs of steam surrounding her.

“Jaaaneee,” Emma hollered between her mittened hands. Jane turned and waved. When Emma caught up to her friend she was out of breath and her lips felt thick and numb. They moved as quickly as they could in the cold. “Hello,” she gasped.

“Have you been to those peculiar quake-quake-Quakers?” Jane jibed, quaking as best she could under her many petticoats and layers of clothing.

“Yes,” Emma replied. “But only those who don’t know them call them peculiar.”

“Well, I know them well enough and I still think they are peculiar. Anyone who lives so plainly when they have plenty, and anyone who sits in silence when they can sing, is strange indeed.”

It was too cold for Emma to respond. Both girls pulled their shawls over their mouths and resumed trudging up the hill toward the school, their backs tight with cold.

The schoolhouse stood to the west of the cabin where Emma and her father lived. It was the newest building to be constructed in the community. Only the logs closest to the ground had turned grey. Inside it still smelled more of newly cut wood than wood smoke.

“Oh, look how they left the door open!” Jane said of her brothers as they disappeared into the school. “Mr. Brown will be furious! Come on!”

The two girls slipped inside and latched the door behind them. The room felt as warm as an early-morning, pillow-side cheek. Mr. Brown was sitting as erect as a piece of wire at his desk.

He extracted his pocket watch, looked at the clock behind him, frowned, and stood up – all with a metal tightness. He strode toward the door and the day began like every other day. It continued like every other day.

By afternoon Emma was fighting to stay awake. It was hot in the schoolroom and now her back burned with the heat of the wood stove. Her head felt fuzzy, her eyelids heavy. She reached for the lesson book she shared with Jane and turned it ever so slightly toward her. Jane always made sure the books were closer to her. She also always sat on the very end of the elm bench, facing the window. That way she could see the willow trees and besides, she never had to hoist her skirts, as the girls in the middle of the bench did. Jane was like that. She was always able to position herself in the perfect spot. Emma found this wearying. She found school wearying. She drew her slate pencil from the groove in the sloping desktop and glanced at the book.

“Julius Caesar,” she commanded her fingers to write. “Born – approximately 100 BC. Married to daughter of Gaius Marius approximately 83 BC. Became praetor – 62 BC...”

Emma closed her heavy eyelids. What were her father’s reasons for sending her to school when there was so much to be done at home? She didn’t like any of them and wanted everything to speed up. She wanted to work quickly and efficiently about their place until her father could buy his own farm. He talked about change in the outside world – about steam power and telegraphs and industrialization – but his own actions were slow and laboured. She wondered if he somehow got some strange sort of satisfaction from watching his dreams slip through his coarse fingers – and the one clear memory of her mother washed over her.

She could feel her mother’s fine and cold hands fitting a dress about Emma’s shivering frame as she stood on the kitchen table. She had felt powerful up there, looking at the candles in their holders on the mantelpiece as an adult would. Then her mother had told her to hold her arms out and the icy-cold fingers had poked at the fabric, jarring against the warmth of Emma’s armpits. So cruelly cold then, yet so comforting when they had sponged away the heat of a fever...

Emma sighed and shifted on the bench. She glanced at Jane’s slender, unblemished hands. What would Caesar’s hands have looked like? she wondered. Slowly she rotated her shoulders and wondered if Mr. Caesar had ever thought the events in his life would be so significant that children would be forced to memorize them almost two thousand years later. What made people significant?

Her father had backed out of that race some time ago and now he seemed to want her to run in it – well, sometimes he did; sometimes he didn’t. She willed herself to sit up straighter and copy the next line. She failed to see how Caesar’s life could make any difference in her own. Jane angled the lesson book ever so slightly back in her own direction. Emma frowned and resumed copying the list with neat, parallel strokes. She studied the cluster flies scurrying across the windowpane and ping-pong from the ceiling. Jane pulled the book a little further in her own direction. It seemed as if the day took a year to pass.

Chapter V

Lambing

“Wake up, Emma.”

Emma could hear her father’s voice as though it were coming through a hollow log.

“Emma. Wake up! I need your help.” Emma opened her eyes to see the lantern light filling the room. Her father’s bent frame blocked the pale glow of the fireplace.

“I need your help. A ewe is lambing and she’s having some trouble. My hand is too big. I need you to give it a try. Don’t rush – the water is still heating.”

“It’s so cold. Why is it so cold?” said Emma as they stepped into the cloudless night a few minutes later.

“Because you’ve just been woken up. It always seems so much colder when you’ve been hauled from your bed.”

“Why didn’t you call one of the Coopers? I don’t know what to do.”

“Then it is high time you did! If you are going to marry a young farmer you will need to know how to do everything – and I mean everything.”

Emma stumbled. She folded her arms tightly across her chest, trying to get warmer. “I thought you said that I was going to be a teacher.”

“You are. But you just might marry...and if you marry, the chances are that you will marry a farmer. Besides – this is good experience for you. Life is meant to be experienced.”

“Sleep is meant to be experienced!” she complained, her teeth chattering behind her cold lips. “I can hear the ewe moaning from here. What do you need the water for?”

“You’ve never seen me birth an animal have you? I had forgotten that. We need water for us – to wash our hands in, and for the ewe too.”

Hanging the lantern on a nail, they put the bucket of steaming water on a plank shelf. “That’s it, old girl, that’s it. Here Emma, take this soap and scrub as hard as you can. That’s it. Till your arms are red. Good – now shake them dry. Now, ...the birthing. There are lambs inside the ewe’s...,” started Jeremiah, swallowing hard, “...the ewe’s womb. The first one is blocking the opening. It can’t come out until it is turned around. My hand is too big. I can’t reach in far enough without hurting the ewe or myself. I want you to put your hand in and move the lamb around so that we can either pull it free or pull out another lamb first.”

He glanced at his daughter.

“Why do you look that way?”

Emma’s face was pale and twisted in the lantern light.

“You mean I have to put my hand *inside* her? It’s all bloody!”

“So is meat. If you don’t do this, the lambs will die. The mother will too.”

“All right,” Emma said, her voice sounding as if she were being strangled. Taking a deep breath, she asked “W-what do I do?”

“Just gently put your hand in.”

“It’s warm – and wet.” Her face was scrunched up. The ewe moaned.

“It’s supposed to be. Don’t pull your hand back. Keep adding pressure – ease off a little when she pushes against you but don’t bring your hand back out.”

The ewe pushed herself up onto her front feet, moaning again.

“But I’m hurting her.”

“Yes, and you will hurt her more if you let her push your arm out. Now, close your eyes. I want you to imagine what a lamb looks like. Can you find something you recognize – a leg or hoof?”

“I feel something smooth – soft and smooth.”

“That’s probably a hoof and it’s likely bent. Try to follow the leg to the shoulder or hip. Try to see the lamb with your fingers.”

“Oh – she’s pushing so hard. It hurts!”

“Just wait then. The spasms will pass. Wait a moment.”

“I’m at the top of the leg. It feels like a back leg – but how do I know?” She blew a puff of air upwards to chase the hairs from her face.

“Just go a little further. If it is a back leg you will feel – ”

“A tail! I feel a little tail!”

“Perfect! Don’t move your hand now.” The ewe strained again. “She won’t like this. Listen closely before you do anything. I want you to push on the lamb’s behind with the palm of your hand – like this.” Jeremiah cupped his hand. “You will be pushing against the ewe and it will hurt her. Just do what you have been doing and hold the lamb there when she pushes against you. Here – let me put a little straw under her first. You will have a little more room to manoeuvre. All right. Push forward – steadily.”

The ewe struggled up onto her front feet again, moaning. The lamb moved forward.

“That’s amazing – there is so much more room now,” Emma said, her face breaking into a smile.

“Don’t push too hard, just hold the lamb where it is with the base of your hand. Now, keeping your hand there, take your fingers and see if there is another lamb off to the side.”

“I feel another hoof.”

“There is no telling whose hoof it is. Pull it toward you, just a little.”

“Oh! It pulled its hoof back!”

“Perfect! That means it’s another lamb and it’s alive. Feel your way around as much as you can. See if you can find a second foot.”

“It’s there...let me rest a minute. My goodness this is painful – she’s pushing so hard.”

“That’s a good sign. At least one of them is alive. Get both hooves in your hand if you can.”

“I’ve got them,” she grunted.

“Pull down evenly – just steadily and evenly... that’s it...slowly and evenly.”

Two bone-coloured hooves came into view.

“Just keep pulling – gently...gently.” Then a mucus-covered nose and eyes. “Perfect! Keep the pressure on.”

The ewe strained and the lamb slipped onto the straw like a wad of spit. It shook its sodden ears free of the mucus and gasped.

“Perfect! Pick it up by its back legs. Lift it so that the mucus drains out of its mouth. See how its chest is heaving?”

The lamb shook its head again and cried.

“Careful!”

“It’s so slippery.”

“Put it by its mother’s head, Emma. She will lick it dry. It will be fine now.”

“I don’t believe it!” exclaimed Emma, gently placing the lamb on the straw. “It’s so... alive, so *perfect*. It’s a real little creature – already formed. So different from the chicks or the tadpoles! Look at it! It’s so spunky. It’s not trying to stand *up*, is it?”

“It is, but we need to check that other lamb now. Wash your hands off again. That’s it. It will be much easier this time – there is much more room to manoeuvre. Reach in steadily and locate the two sets of feet, then follow them to the body to make sure which end they are attached to. That’s it old girl,” he said gently, patting the ewe. “Not much more to it and you will be finished with this. Poor thing.”

Emma found two legs.

“I think that these are back legs.”

“That is a little more tricky – you have to make sure you don’t stop pulling when you get to the head – pull harder once you get to that point.”

Emma pulled the second lamb out onto the straw. It lay absolutely still in its yolky sack.

“Here, let me take over – it’s not breathing.” Her father broke the sack and swiftly hoisted the lamb by its long back legs. It hung down limply like a wet towel. Her father wiped the mucus from the little mouth with his hand, then pinched the bloody cord at the navel. He pinched it again.

“Her heart is still pumping. Come on, take a breath!” He swung the lamb like a bucket of water, wiped more mucus away, then breathed gently into its mouth. The lamb’s chest heaved.

“Hurray! One breath! That’s all it needs and the rest will follow! Two live lambs! I really didn’t know if this one would live. Here Mama, here is your second lamb. She’s a little feebler. She’ll need more attention.”

The ewe gave a deep chuckle, stuck its nose against the lamb’s tail, then tongued it with sharp, little licks. The first lamb, now almost dry from its mother’s attentions, pushed itself up onto its front feet and promptly fell forward. Emma laughed.

“It’s amazing! How does the mother know to dry it off like that? That chuckle she’s making doesn’t even sound like a sheep sound. It’s so... perfect. How does it all happen? We had to help a little but everything else was there – exactly as it should be, wasn’t it?”

“It *is* amazing. Look at that first little fellow...”

The first lamb was now up on all fours, walking as though on stilts, jabbing his mother with his chin.

“He’s already looking for a feed of milk. Isn’t that something? We will just leave the mother for a moment before we get her up. That second lamb is exhausted from being squeezed inside her for so long.”

“It’s so perfect,” Emma repeated.

“Uh-huh.”

“Life is perfect, isn’t it, Father?”

“Sometimes.”

“Was it perfect when I was born?”

“You can’t compare the two.”

“Father, was I born the same way...from Mother...like that?”

“It wasn’t the same. And anyway, I didn’t see it. Granny Amos was there. That’s enough rest for the ewe, I think. She needs to stand up and give those lambs some milk. Will you fetch some molasses? It’s on the shelf in the granary. Take this bucket and run a pint into it, please.”

Emma knew she had been rerouted. She had felt so strong and capable during the birthing; now she just felt silly. She picked up the bucket. The heavy black smell of molasses chased away the itchy smell of barley. Emma closed the tap and swiped the last drops into her mouth with her finger. She wrinkled her nose at the overpoweringly salty-sweet taste.

“Thank you,” said her father as he took the bucket. He added water to the molasses and stirred with his hand. “There you go, old girl.” The ewe sniffed the surface, then sucked and swallowed until the pail was nearly empty. “That will give her some energy.”

He helped the ewe to her feet. She wobbled, then steadied herself. “Would you move that lamb up near her head while I hold her?”

The ewe chuckled again and earnestly licked the second lamb. The first one tottered to her side and butted her. Jeremiah reached down and squirted milk from both teats, then opened the first lamb’s mouth over the closest one. The lamb’s tail started to flap. It flapped as though in a fierce wind, then eased, then finally stopped. When the lamb had drunk enough milk, he folded his legs and lay down upon the straw.

The second lamb weakly flexed her front legs. Jeremiah plucked her up from the straw and held her to the other teat. He squirted a stream of yellow milk into her mouth until it flowed out the corners. “Drink, little girl,” he coaxed. He squirted again and the lamb swallowed. Again. Then she started to suck.

“Good. We’ll let it take as much as it can handle. There is nothing as important as this first drink of milk – nothing as important. A newborn can stand almost anything if it has a good first feed.” Her father held the lamb to the teat until milk slid from the corners of her mouth again. Then he placed the lamb near her mother’s head, straightened up, and put his hand on the small of his back, stretching.

“A job well done – on everyone’s part, Emma Field.”

“Yes. Thank you for calling me, Father.”

“Thank you for helping. Wash your hands well.”

They watched in silence as the ewe and her lambs settled down.

“Why are you drying your hands on your dress, Emma? Don’t you have a handkerchief? Take mine then. You really should always carry a handkerchief.”

“I know,” she sighed.

Chapter VI

Humiliated

Although Emma and her father had been in the same room since Jeremiah had returned from the barn, their eyes had not once met. Emma poured hot water from the kettle into the dishpan, her teeth clenched together. Her eyes were dry and her cheeks tight. She circled the dishrag inside the rim of the cup like water twirling down a drain.

Finally she could stand it no longer. “Father-is-lambing-a-bad-word?” The words tumbled out in such a rush they sounded like one word. She shot a look at her father, sitting by the fire.

He squinted at her. “No...not in the right company it isn’t.”

“Then Mr. Brown isn’t the right company?”

“No...no...I would say that he probably isn’t,” he replied, scrutinizing his daughter’s flushed face carefully. “You said something at school about last night, didn’t you? Now I understand.”

Emma nodded her head. A tear splashed into the dishwater.

“Show me your hand, Emma.”

More tears splattered. Emma held her left hand toward Jeremiah without looking up. A screaming red line ran across her palm.

“Oh, I’m sorry, Emma. You didn’t know, did you?”

“*No I didn’t and it isn’t fair!*” she shouted.

“Life isn’t fair.” He sat up straight, sighing deeply.

“That’s obvious! But why did he have to strap me? I didn’t do anything wrong.”

“You spoke of matters which are not to be discussed in public. He was making certain that you would not forget that. Matters related to birth are not to be discussed, Emma. Don’t forget that.”

“I won’t!” Her temples felt as if they would burst wide open.

Emma spun around, her wet hands on her hips, her eyes flashing, and a deep frown creasing her brow. “But that is so foolish! So *absolutely foolish!* The barley plants produce seeds of grain. We harvest those together and talk about the yield. Why wouldn’t we talk about newborn lambs? That is *so* foolish!”

“I don’t know. Some of it is just Canadian. We aren’t so tight in our talk in Ireland. But some of it is just...private. Or sacred.”

“Or scared! It sounds as if people are scared if they act that way!”

“Oh, I don’t think so.”

“I did nothing wrong. I helped a ewe and two lambs who would have otherwise died. I helped you and I helped Mr. Cooper.”

“What did you say to Mr. Brown?”

“That the smell he was asking about came from a ewe’s birthing fluids on my dress.”

“Oh, Emma.”

“There is *nothing* wrong with that!” She banged the cup onto the table. “I’m going out! Don’t wait up for me!”

Emma marched off toward their barn, then headed across the road to the Coopers’ barn. She wasn’t as familiar with their barn in the dark and she fumbled to find the latch. Patting her hand

along the wooden partitions, she came to the pen with the ewe and lambs. She could barely make out the shape of the ewe but heard her rise and stomp her feet at Emma. The lambs rustled in the straw. “Maaaa!” they demanded of their mother. The ewe gave them a calming chuckle.

“I’ll just sit here in the corner, Mama. Don’t worry, I won’t hurt your babies. Remember me? I helped you last night...and I got some of your birthing fluids on my dress and...and that Mr. Brown smelled it and then beat me for telling him what it was. I *hate* Mr. Brown! I *hate* him more than *anyone* else I’ve *ever* met.

“But I hate everyone right now. People are so stupid, Mama. They never protect their babies, like you just did with yours. They tell them they should know about all of the foolish rules they established long before any of us had a chance to notice.”

Emma leaned her head into the corner. “I *hate* people. I really, really *hate* people!” In her anger, she squeezed her eyes shut and pursed her mouth into a hard line.

In the silence following her outburst, Emma heard the lambs sucking. Slowly her face relaxed into a smile. “I wonder how people feed babies. The mothers must let their babies suck at their nipples too, but I have never seen it happen. That is...” She swallowed hard as she thought of her own, dead mother.

Her bruised hand went to the pyramid that was her left breast. “How could a baby ever get milk from this? I’ve never had any milk come from it. There isn’t really even a nipple there. And there isn’t a hole. Maybe I won’t be able to feed a baby.” She frowned, then jutted her chin out at a determined angle. “Well, that’s good. It seems like a lot of work.” The ewe settled into the straw. With her eyes adjusting to the dimness, Emma could now see the outline of the two lambs nestling against their mother’s side and she ached for the mother she barely knew.

Chapter VII

Vera Comes to School

It took everything Emma had to walk into the wind and toward the schoolhouse the next morning. She looked over her shoulder to see if Jane was coming around the bend.

“Forward, girls!” The wind carried the voice of Mr. Brown toward her. She kept her eyes on her feet picking their way over the frozen nubs of soil and looked up just as a pair of rag-bound feet disappeared around the door into the schoolroom. A putrid smell hit Emma’s nose as she went inside.

It was odd having a new girl on a colder day – boys yes, but never girls. It was as though every five-degree drop in temperature reached through another layer of clothing and took one more girl off the benches of the schoolhouse.

The girl was standing just inside the door, looking at the coat pegs. Her lips were blue. Her whole body quivered like a carpet being beaten during spring cleaning. Emma shook her head and pointed with her chin toward the benches on the right-hand side of the room. The door slammed shut and Mr. Brown marched to the front of the room, his heels pounding on the

wooden floor. He spun around in front of his desk, slapped his palms to his thighs, and barked, “You! Who are you?”

Emma already knew.

The girl looked up. She swallowed. “Vera Plank,” she said, her voice trembling as much as her thin hands.

“You don’t look as if you own enough clothes to come to school in weather like this! Is that true?”

“Yes.”

“Can you read?”

“Jus a little.”

“Another idiot! Take a seat. Right there. Move along!” He pointed to the spot where Emma usually sat. Vera slunk to the bench. “Stand for ‘God Save the Queen,’ everyone!...God save our gracious Queen, Long live our noble Queen...,” he intoned, the children joining in nervously.

Emma glanced at Vera, whose lips remained closed. She wanted to bundle up this poor, smelly child to keep her safe from their awful teacher. There was no telling what Mr. Brown might do to someone so frightened and unfamiliar with the customs of the schoolroom. They finished singing. Emma nodded to Vera to sit, took her own slate and pencil in her hand, and buried her nose in her palm to avoid the stench. She silently prayed that the wood stove behind her would get no hotter.

“You! Yes, you in the rags. What’s your name again?”

“Vera Plank.”

“Vera Plank! Come here! No – take this book of lessons and read aloud lesson IV, page 10. You *can* read, can’t you?”

Emma dared not look at Vera but she could hear each page being methodically turned.

“There ain’t a lesson 4 on this page, just a lesson I-I-I and a lesson I-V...”

“Read lesson I-V then I see we need to teach you about Roman numerals as well as make you use proper grammar.”

In the silence Emma could feel Vera’s concentration piercing the page.

“‘Bog. Cot. Dog. Fop. Pot. Top.’” the girl said. Tom has h-I-s top. A d-o-l-l, a doll is a fop.”

The acrid smell of fresh urine mixed with the staleness of the room. Emma’s body went as stiff as her pencil. Without moving her head her eyes reached low into their sockets and saw a darkened spot on the earthen floor.

“Very well. Next, lesson V – that’s V – work on that. Write out the words on your slate. ‘Cub, fur, sum, cup, gun, and sun.’ The vowel – ”

Mr. Brown suddenly shifted his attention. “George Robertson, what are you doing? Read out loud what you are writing!”

Emma closed her eyes and slumped forward as much as she thought she could get away with. She stole a glance at Vera, who was biting her lip. Emma glanced again, in horror. Vera was holding her pencil in her left hand. Her *left* hand! No one but the devil held their slate pencil in their left hand! Quickly Emma passed her pencil to her own left hand and cleared her throat. She

looked at Vera and cleared it again. This time Vera looked her way and Emma quickly passed her own pencil to her right hand. She held it with exaggerated tension above her slate.

Mr. Brown had stopped talking to George Robertson and Emma was suddenly aware of the tense silence. She kept her eyes on her slate, not daring to look at Vera. The floor creaked behind the girls.

“Just as I thought,” hissed Mr. Brown. “*Just* as I thought!” *Whack!* The ebony stick smashed against the knuckles of Vera’s left hand. She screamed and slumped toward Emma. “The devil’s hand shall *not* be used in this school – *ever!* Do you have that straight or do you need me to reinforce that idea?” he shouted, holding the stick ready to bring down on the whimpering girl’s hand again.

“No!” Vera pushed herself off Emma and stumbled toward the door, her left arm against her chest.

“Make certain you don’t come back here until you can behave as a Christian should!”

Emma closed her eyes. The wind blasted through the open door and whipped around her feet. She shook in rage.

Mr. Brown stomped to the door and pulled it shut on Vera’s muffled sobs. All that remained of Vera was her smell. All that remained of Mr. Brown was his venom.

Chapter VIII

Helping Vera

Emma felt as tight as a quilt on a quilting frame.

“It’s not *right*,” said Anna Williams at recess. “I don’t care what anyone says; it’s not right to hurt a person so. I will speak with Father this evening.”

“He won’t do anything,” said Mary Victoria. “Adults seldom do when a child is at fault. Besides, Vera shouldn’t have been using her left hand.”

“That is madness, *absolute madness!* Vera doesn’t know that! She uses her left hand for everything else she does – what makes holding a slate pencil so holy? Mr. Brown just didn’t want her there. Her using her left hand was just an excuse to get rid of her! I think you *should* talk to your father, Anna,” said Emma.

Emma couldn’t concentrate for the rest of the day. Her body was still but her eyes jumped from her slate to the window, to her hands, to the wall. After school she darted restlessly around the cabin, getting two potatoes from storage, peeling them too deeply, chastising herself, getting two more, putting a little water in the pot, adding a little more. She felt as though Mr. Brown’s ebony stick could come crashing down upon her at any moment. Every cell of her body wanted to take that stick and smash it down on his head. Finally she could stand it no longer. She flung her shawl over her shoulders and raced down the hill.

The Planks’ cabin looked like a lantern in the blue-grey dusk. Emma shivered to think of the cold that must be pouring in through the cracks just as the light poured out. She could hear angry shouts and the whining insistence of a young child.

Her certainty started to evaporate. Her edginess returned.

“...all knows we’re dense! Dey all knows we’re nothin’ and we gots nothin’!” screamed a woman’s voice. Emma heard a muffled higher voice, then the woman’s again. “I don’ care how sore your hand is! He shoulda broke both. Who the hell you think you is – goin’ off to keep company wif dem who’s high and mighty?” The wailing of the younger child escalated.

Emma clenched her hands inside her mittens. She stepped behind the nearest tree trunk. The woman yelled again and Emma heard flesh hitting flesh. Both higher voices rose. The canvas door yawned with light and a figure stumbled out. Emma could hear her own heart thumping in her chest. She turned sideways to make better use of the shadow cast by the moon. The figure sobbed with the same heaving sobs Emma had heard from Vera that morning. The whining in the cabin rose; there were more angry shouts, then smacks, followed by the shrieks of a child. The sounds propelled Emma toward the sobbing body.

“Vera,” she hissed. “Vera, it’s me, Emma Field. I’ll help you. Stand up and come with me!”

Vera didn’t look up. Emma put her hands on Vera’s shoulders, choking back the foul odour that assailed her nostrils. “Come with me,” she repeated.

The two girls stumbled back along the track toward the creek.

“Under here,” commanded Emma as each foot negotiated the pitch dark of the creek bank leading to the ribbon of cold, black water. Emma pulled Vera under the logs of the bridge. The air was still. Emma unknotted her shawl and drew it around Vera, who leaned heavily against her, still sobbing. Emma gasped with the stench, turned her face away, but left her arm around the girl’s shoulders. Vera shook with tiny spasms, like a leaf quivering in the winter wind. She heaved under the bigger burden of her pain. “Huh, huh, huh,” she panted, “huh, huh.” Slowly both the trembling and the sobbing eased.

“Let me see your hand.” Vera held it up weakly. It was too dark to see much more than an outline. “Come out here into the moonlight.” The girls shifted to where the light of the quarter moon reached the bridge’s edge. Vera’s hand looked barely human. It was swollen and black, and the smallest fingers hung as though held on only by the swelling.

Emma started to tremble. Her face burned with anger. “Vera, if you go back to the house now, will your mother beat you again?”

Vera stiffened and glanced over her shoulder. She sniffed and ran the dirty sleeve covering her right arm over her face. She frowned.

“Maybe – Ma’s al’ays firey. Ya never know. My han’ hurts, Miss Field.”

“I know. And I don’t suppose you’ll see a doctor, or even a granny about it, will you?”

“I don’t have no granny.”

“I mean a woman who takes care of these problems. Like Granny Herbert. Never mind. If you go back now, will your mother hurt you?”

“Probly not. She took it all out on Freddy already. She’d only get mad like dat agin if I don’ work.”

“Then give me back the shawl and go and try to do your work. I’ll see what I can do.”

The girl disappeared toward her shack. Emma wrapped the shawl over her shoulders, her stomach churning with the reek. Her shoulders and back were tight with cold and with anger as she struggled up the hill against the wind still blowing from the north-west.

The cabin was dark. Emma had forgotten to add wood before she'd raced off. She blew the ash off the coals and stirred them with a poker before carefully arranging some dry chips of cedar. Her whole body shook with cold as she waited for the flames to hiccup.

"Bless you, hurry up," she muttered. Her teeth chattered, her back ached, her fingers throbbed with piercing agony. At last a flame licked along the edge of the wood chips.

A blast of cold air whipped across the floor. Emma's father slammed the door behind him and stamped his feet. Emma wheeled around.

"Whoosh! The fire has run low, child?" he asked, sniffing. "What's that smell? It doesn't smell like anything I could possibly eat. Whatever have you been up to?"

Emma was still shaking. "What does a broken bone look like, Father?"

"It depends. When it's a bad break the limb just hangs."

"Can you mend a broken bone?"

"I've tried many a time, but with little success," he sighed as he hung his coat on its peg. "Why do you ask?"

"What happens if you don't mend it?"

"Any number of things: infection can set in and the animal could die. Or the limb can just waste away and become useless. I saw a cat that way once – got around perfectly on three legs."

"What about a human? What happens if a person breaks a hand?"

"Who broke their hand, Emma?" her father asked, looking directly at her, a small frown appearing between his blue eyes.

"What happens?" she persisted. "Can it always be mended so it will work again?"

"Don't honestly know. I've heard it said that a hand is made up of many fine bones; mending it is tricky. But who are you asking about? Was there an accident at school today?"

"No accident. That Mr. Brown used his stick on Vera Plank. I think he broke her hand –" The pain of Emma's own thawing fingers stopped her thoughts.

"A Plank? That's not good. They can't afford the services of anyone, granny or doctor. Yet a person's nothing in this country without two good hands – especially if they're starting out in a hovel like theirs."

"Could we pay for someone to see to her, Father?"

"With what? The ha'pennies we've collected?"

"We've still got lots of potatoes and apples in the root cellar. Maybe we could pay with those?"

"We need those, child, if we're going to make it through to April."

"Someone must have money," Emma said quietly. She looked out the window at the lantern light shining in the Coopers' window.

"What about the Coopers? They're rich!"

“I don’t know about rich.”

“Well, they’ve got four rooms in their house. That’s rich.”

“They’ve also got ten mouths to feed, Emma Field.”

“I suppose you’re right. But they may know what to do.” Emma tried to leap to her feet, but stiffness and pins and needles stopped her.

“You haven’t eaten yet, have you?”

“No, but I don’t have time to wait for the fire. I’ll get something when I come back.”

“Take my frock coat if you like.”

Emma dashed across the track, leapt up onto the verandah, and knocked on the wooden door. She heard the scraping of a chair on the floor. The handle turned and the door opened wide. It was Josiah. He glanced at Emma then looked at his feet.

“Oh, it’s thee, Emma. We thought we heard someone on the verandah. Come in.” Nine faces turned toward Emma as she entered.

“Good evening,” she said, dropping the shawl from her head.

“Why, Emma! Thee looks in a rush. Is thee all right? What can we do for thee?” said Mrs. Cooper, rising from the far end of the table.

“It’s Vera Plank. She’s broken her hand....I need to find a way to pay for her to see a granny or the doctor. Do you have any ideas? Maybe I could work for you?”

“It’s Vera Plank.” Mehetabel Cooper repeated softly as she pulled young Sophia onto her knee to make room for Emma on the bench. “Sit down here, Emma. Vera Plank. She lives in the shack by the mill, does she not?”

Mrs. Cooper’s calmness wrapped around Emma and she relaxed a little as she sat down. Her voice dropped as she explained what had happened. When she had finished she saw Mrs. Cooper look across the table to her husband. “John?”

Mr. Cooper nodded at Josiah, who retrieved his coat from the hook by the door. Emma wondered if she had missed hearing something; no words had been spoken.

Mehetabel Cooper turned again to Emma. “Josiah will take thee to Elmer Watson’s. Stay here till he has the cutter harnessed up.” She shifted Sophia on her lap. “Hast thee eaten?” Emma shook her head.

“Matura, please fetch Emma a plate from the pantry.”

Emma looked at the shy little Sophia, who glanced at her and looked quickly away. There were three nearly empty pots on the table.

“Would thee like mashed potatoes?” Mehetabel offered, holding up a heaping spoonful of fluffy white paste.

“Yes, I believe so,” Emma responded politely. The Coopers had to be rich. They had three pots and they ate potatoes cooked without meat or vegetables! With only one pot in their house Emma and her father had rarely eaten anything other than stew and soup. All eyes were on Emma as she picked up her spoon.

“Does thee like butter on thy potatoes, Emma?” inquired the squeaky voice of Vincent from the far side of the table.

“Oh yes,” Emma responded thankfully. “...butter on smashed potatoes.” Everyone burst out laughing. Sophia looked up at her, her eyes giggling.

“They’re not smashed, Emma, they’re mashed.”

“My lips are still cold,” Emma lied. Her face began to burn. Why was she lying in a Quaker house? Father had said that Quakers never lied.

Mehetabel Cooper rose from the table and flew into action. “Obadiah, we’ll need two baskets from the woodshed. Mind the cold draft on that bread or it won’t be rising. Ruth, would thee get apple butter from the cellar? And two bottles of grape jelly too. Matilda, get some dried apples down from the rafters and cut off a wedge of cheese – it’s still in the press in the pantry.”

Emma was grateful to have the attention shift away from her. She slid a little of the red cabbage and a piece of the salt pork toward the potatoes and mixed them together, ever so slightly.

It was only as Mrs. Cooper tucked the bear skin around Emma in the cutter a few minutes later that she understood what all the other food was for. “This is for Elmer Watson – I’d say that it’s probably enough to pay the bill, but ask him if he requires more. And this is for the Planks. They no doubt need the food,” she said as she lifted up a second heavy hamper.

By the time they had reached Bloomfield Emma had stopped shaking. Warmth had somehow crept steadily from her feet to her hands.

“Did you put hot bricks at my feet, Josiah?” she asked.

“Yes,” he replied, sitting upright, staring straight ahead.

“Thank you. I feel warm for the first time in hours.”

“Yes, I thought thee looked cold.”

The horse’s head bobbed and the cutter creaked and groaned until they stopped in front of Dr. Watson’s house.

“Would thee like me to come with thee, Emma?” Josiah asked in a husky voice.

“Oh, yes please, that would be kind of you...thee,” she glanced at him. Josiah tied the reins to the hitching post.

“Does thee...do you know which door to use?” He looked from the front door to the side.

“There seems to be a light in the front room. Let’s try there.” He knocked on the porch door. The house remained silent.

“Sometimes there are two doors on porches such as this. Ah, yes.” He pounded on the inside door. The light in the vestibule grew and the door was opened. The candle in the man’s hand illuminated the vestibule and the bags under his weary eyes. He peered over his glasses at Josiah.

“I am Josiah Cooper.”

“John and Mehetabel’s son?”

“Yes.”

“I’m sorry I didn’t recognize you. You’ve grown so much.

“This is Jeremiah Field’s daughter, Emma.”

“Good evening, Dr. Watson.” Her curtsy went unnoticed under the layers of clothing.

“What can I do for you?”

Josiah turned toward Emma. “It’s Vera Plank. Do you know of the Planks who live past Morgan’s Mill – Mr. Hubbs’ and Mr. Williams’ mill on Trout Creek?” Emma proceeded to tell the story and thought she heard Dr. Watson mumble the word “barbarian” when she explained what Mr. Brown had done.

When she had finished she held up the basket. “Mrs. Cooper sent this. If this isn’t sufficient payment, she said for you to tell us.”

Dr. Watson placed it on the hall stand. He smiled, “I’m sure it is sufficient – Mehetabel Cooper never skimps. I don’t make house calls for such things as broken bones, but I understand that it is the only way to tend to this child. Let me get my bag and wraps. I hate to trouble you, Josiah, but might you give me a ride? I’m not long back from delivering a baby on the Danforth Road, half way to Picton. The horse could use a rest and besides, it will be faster this way.”

“You sit in the middle Emma,” directed Dr. Watson as he shook the dusting of snow off the bear skin. Josiah undid the reins and flipped them over the horse’s head. He slid onto the seat. Emma straightened as she felt herself squeezed between the two men. Josiah snapped the reins and clucked to the horse. Emma clasped her arms in front of her to give Josiah’s elbows more room. She had never sat so close to adults before. It was a new feeling – a kind of nice, almost dangerous feeling. She had never thought any more of Josiah than she thought of the bare trees they were passing.

“Is your family still clearing land?” the doctor leaned forward to ask of Josiah.

“Yes, and I suspect we will be for some years yet.”

The doctor sighed. “And you, Emma, is it true that you are still going to school?”

“Yes.”

“Most unusual for the daughter of a widowed tenant farmer. Usually young ladies like you are hired out as kitchen help.”

“I almost did that myself!” Emma laughed.

“Is that so?”

“Yes. I thought maybe I could work for the Coopers to pay for this call tonight...I still will if you need me to.”

“There will be no need for that.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Your father shows foresight. That’s good. Educated women are in short supply in this country. Make sure you learn all that you can.”

“Yes, sir!”

They crossed the creek. Light from the Planks’ cabin shone before them.

“Good heavens – it looks like a lighthouse. Have you ever seen a lighthouse, children? I suppose not. This family can’t even afford to fill the gaps in their walls. They certainly won’t

want to accept help from someone like me. This isn't going to be an easy mission. Do you have any suggestions on how to handle this?"

Josiah leaned behind Emma to extract the second basket. "Mother has packed this."

"She's quite the woman, that mother of yours. Let's stop here. Tie the horse to that tree. I need both of you to come with me."

"Hallo! Hallo! Hallo! Dr. Watson here, Mrs. Plank," the tired voice of the doctor called out as he neared the door.

"What...?" The canvas door flew open. Mrs. Plank stood in the doorway, her hands on her hips.

"Mrs. Plank, I am Dr. Watson. I hear that your daughter is in need of a little attention. Here is a basket filled with provisions for your family," he added quickly, sliding carefully past her elbows.

"My daughter won't be needin' no...besides, I've got no way to..."

Emma glanced up at Josiah, uncertain as to whether she should follow.

He nodded. "Go ahead. The doctor may need thy help."

Emma pushed the canvas aside and blinked in the strong light. A wall of stench rose up to hit her. A low grunt came from the corner to her left. Emma's eyes smarted. Her nose dripped. She reached for her handkerchief – which wasn't in her dress pocket.

"You bring the whole neighbourhood wif yous?" the voice from the bed in the corner asked resentfully.

Dr. Watson peered at the figure on the bed. "These are my assistants, Emma and Josiah. Would you bring that lamp closer, please, Emma?"

Emma sniffed and reached for the lantern, which was hanging on a nail. Her eye caught a movement under a filthy blanket in the corner. The bed shook with a phlegmy cough coming from its occupant.

"I can't be payin' yous," instructed Mrs. Plank. Vera was sitting in the far corner, her blackened hand held against her chest.

"It is taken care of," Dr. Watson replied. "You are Vera, are you?" he asked, turning to the pathetic girl. "I am Dr. Watson. I can mend your hand so that it will be as good as new one day. I need you to come over to this table where I can look at it more closely." Vera nervously approached the table. "Josiah, give me a hand, please...that's it. Emma, shine the lantern here, please."

The hand wasn't black; it was dark red – huge and red. The three smallest fingers hung off to the side.

"They are most certainly broken." The doctor reached into his bag and extracted first a slab of soap, then some cotton towelling, a wooden splint, and a number of clean rags. "Emma, fetch me some snow, would you, please? We need to bring the swelling down quickly. Do you have any hot water, Mrs. Plank? And a bowl or pan?"

With great speed and gentle force Dr. Watson set and wrapped Vera's hand. The bandage gleamed in the filth of the cabin. As the doctor, Emma, and Josiah left, Dr. Watson hesitated in

the doorway of the cabin. “Such things should never happen at a school. Vera, I want you to be brave and go back there tomorrow,” he said gently, but firmly. “I shall have a word with Caleb Williams. No one has the right to treat anyone, child or beast, like this.”

“She’ll not be goin’ to no school! I needs ’er ’ere, not fillin’ ’er ’ead with useless drivin,’” Mrs. Plank countered. She was calmer now, but her teeth were clenched and her jaw was squarely set.

“Do as you will, but I *shall* be speaking with the trustees and I will return tomorrow after the midday to check Vera’s hand. And Mrs. Plank, you see that Vera does nothing with that hand until it is all healed. You do realize, don’t you, that she will be of little use to you if her best hand is permanently crippled?”

The winter air outside the shack felt fresh and sharp in Emma’s nose as she took in several deep breaths.

“Good God!” she heard Dr. Watson exclaim, but nothing more was said until Josiah pulled up in front of the doctor’s house in the village.

“Emma, you did the right thing,” he said, patting Emma’s knee kindly. “People like the Planks won’t survive in this country, but their children...I’m just glad that you could see what needed to be done – and that you *did* it. Thank you, Josiah. Give my thanks to Mehetabel.”

“Thee did do the right thing,” Josiah quietly repeated as he pulled the horses up in front of Emma’s cabin.

“I’m not sure, Josiah, but thank you just the same. Good night.”

“Don’t be bringing that smell in here!” her father commanded as Emma slammed the door behind her. “Ugh! Hang that wrap on the front fence and let it air for the night.”

Emma went back outside and draped her shawl over the fence rails. Their house smelled warm and sweet. She felt ill, dirty, defiled.

“Father, I know it’s unnecessary, but I want to have a bath.”

“Unnecessary? What’s unnecessary about it? Hang your dress outside too. Have some stew – it’s a little burned but...”

“I ate at the Coopers. Pork and red cabbage and *mashed* potatoes.”

“You won’t be wanting this stew then! Take the last of this warm water for your bath. I’m on my way to bed.” Emma swung the blackened kettle over the bluest flames and retrieved the copper stand-up tub from the attic, placing it close to the fire.

Her father always set the tub between the table and the fire. He would either go outside or retreat behind the curtains of his bed while she had her bath. Once she was settled into her bed and facing the wall, he would curtain off the bath with a woollen blanket and Emma would hear him gently splashing about. Tonight, she didn’t care about anything except being warm and clean and safe. Emma squeezed herself into the tub and crossed her ankles. Steam curled about her in the soft glow of the firelight and she felt her muscles loosened in the warmth. Her churning thoughts gradually turned to waves.

“Father?” she called to the figure behind the bed curtain.

“Yes.”

“Why does Mrs. Plank hate Vera so?”

“Who? Oh, I don’t know – except that they are useless...”

“But I thought that every parent loved their children.”

“No...no, sadly that’s not true. Children just come. Some people are glad to have them. Some are glad to have extra workers. I don’t know about loving them.”

“But you have always said that I was a blessing from God.” She looked through the steam toward the curtain.

“You are.” There was silence. Emma hugged her knees.

“Dr. Watson said that he’ll speak with Mr. Williams tomorrow about Mr. Brown. Will that get me in trouble?”

“It might.”

“Damn.”

There was silence again, then her father said, his voice heavy, “It might, but Dr. Watson is a good man and so is Caleb Williams. They both know that Mr. Brown has every authority to discipline with the rod, and that a teacher needs to keep order and children need to mind. But they both also have a strong sense of justice and they will both try to do what is right.” After a short pause, he continued, “*Dr. Watson?* You saw Dr. Watson tonight?”

“Yes. He tended to Vera’s hand.” The water grew cool as Emma explained what had happened. When she had finished she asked, “But why should I get into trouble for doing what is right?”

Jeremiah sighed. “That is just the way it goes sometimes.”

“I don’t want to go to school tomorrow. I don’t ever want to go back there. We memorize all day long. I could work out as a hired girl – ”

Jeremiah cut her off, “You will *not* be leaving school. And you *will* go to school tomorrow.”

Emma stood up. “Do you want my bathwater?”

No answer.

“Well, it’s cold anyway.”

Emma dried and dressed herself. She hesitated before deciding to leave her trip to the privy until morning.

She added two logs to the fire and climbed into her bed. The wind whistled around the cabin. Emma shivered and pulled the blankets over her nightcap.

The questions came more slowly now. Why had Vera come to school today? Why was she so stupid? And her mother so mean? Why did they live in such a horrible way? Why was Mr. Brown so mean? Would she be in trouble tomorrow?

Her thoughts turned to Josiah. He was nice. It had felt so...exciting...sitting beside him in the sleigh. Maybe she could see him tomorrow. Father had said that the men of the neighbourhood would all be felling trees down toward the creek.

Chapter IX

Vera Goes to the Boarding School

Emma was leaving the schoolhouse as Dr. Watson pulled his horse up short. “*Whoa!* Hello, Emma! How is the doctor’s assistant today?” he asked.

“Fine, thank you,” Emma responded with a voice as hollow as the sound of axes ringing in the southwest.

“I am going back to see the Planks now. Would you come with me, please? I may need your help.”

Emma’s stomach began to churn. She glanced toward her cabin. “I must be fixing Father his supper,” she said.

“I just saw your father – he is felling trees with Caleb Williams and John Cooper and their lads. He won’t be home for a while yet.”

“But I – ”

“I need your help, Emma. Hop in, child.” Dr. Watson slid over and patted the cutter’s black leather seat. Emma climbed up reluctantly and sat on the patch of warmth left by the doctor’s body.

“Giddy-up, Lily.” They pulled ahead. “You don’t seem very happy today, Emma.”

“I’m not.”

“Anything you care to talk about?”

“It’s Mr. Brown. It is *Samuel*’s turn to light the fire tomorrow morning but Mr. Brown told me that *I* have to do it because I was unable to help Anna Williams with her mathematics.”

“Hmm, that doesn’t seem fair. What did she need help with?”

“Pardon me?” Emma was already lost in thoughts about unfairness.

“What does Anna not understand?”

“Division. I just can’t seem to explain that it is the same as multiplication, only backwards.”

“Would you like me to show you a trick for that?”

“A trick? You know a trick for mathematics?” She brightened.

“I know lots of tricks. How do you think I became a doctor? By my good looks? I’ll show you after we tend to the situation at the Planks’ house – whatever it may be. *Whoa, Lily. Helloooooo, Mrs. Plank,*” he called out.

The woman was standing in the door frame, her hands again hard on her hips, her eyes scrunched up tightly as she glared at the doctor and Emma. “I’s told yous we not be needin’ yous,” she shouted.

“I should have brought more jelly so that you might allow me to doctor your daughter? I’m sorry I forgot it. I’ll bring it to you the next time I come.” Dr. Watson ducked around her rigid arms and disappeared into the darkened cabin. Emma followed quickly.

“Vera?” Dr. Watson chirped brightly. “I’m just checking – Oh my God! What have you *done* to her?” He wheeled around to Mrs. Plank, his face red with anger. Now *his* hands were on his hips. “What the *hell* have you been *doing* to Vera?” the doctor burst out.

Emma peered past him to where Vera lay curled up on a filthy blanket. Her face was purple and swollen, and one eye showed only as a slit. She was staring straight ahead.

“This poor child’s been hurt enough without your compounding it!” Dr. Watson continued.

Mrs. Plank charged at him.

“Stop it right there!” he shouted. The woman hesitated. “Vera, get up! We can’t leave you here in such danger. You are coming with us. Emma help me!” He lifted Vera’s shoulders.

“Don’ you touch ’er!” screamed Mrs. Plank as she lunged at the doctor again, her teeth bared like a caged animal.

“Look out!” shrieked Emma. She dove toward the woman, her shoulder hitting Mrs. Plank in her large belly. They toppled against the table. Emma caught herself and she twisted back toward Dr. Watson.

“Take my bag, fast!” he directed breathlessly as he hoisted the moaning Vera onto his shoulder and stumbled across the room and out to the cutter. When they looked back, Mrs. Plank was lying in the doorway, screaming, “I hate yous! I’ll gets yous!”

Lily galloped up the hill with her jumbled load. Emma braced against the side of the cutter to keep Vera’s limp body from pushing her out. As they neared the crest, the doctor pulled back on the reins. He looked over at the Coopers’ frame house, then towards the Danforth Road.

“Mrs. Cooper?” queried Emma.

“Yes, Mehetabel would take her in – no doubt about it, but I hate to ask her for more help right now. Mehetabel’s done enough and besides, her house is too near the Planks’. They might retaliate and I don’t want to put the Coopers in harm’s way.” He glanced toward the north. “No, I’m wondering about the boarding school. I know the Planks wouldn’t mess with the likes of Elizabeth Bowerman.” He drew himself up. “All right, let’s go to the boarding school, Lily.”

Dr. Watson stopped the cutter in front of the majestic, red brick structure and hopped out. Emma struggled with Vera’s limp form.

“Let me, she’s too heavy for you to lift,” he said, noticing the pain on Emma’s face. “And she’s too smelly.”

“Yes she is, both.”

He slid Vera over so that her body wouldn’t weigh Emma down any more. “She’s in a bad way, poor thing.” Leaving the girls in the cutter, he jumped down, picked his way carefully across the icy walk, and bounded up the verandah stairs.

While she waited for the doctor, Emma leaned against the back of the seat. Fear and disgust welled up inside her. She had never felt so strong and yet so afraid at the same time. The turbulent emotions competed for space inside her. She looked toward the panes of glass forming a rising sun above the doorway. Fear, disgust, strength – and the rising sun.... Tears sprang to her eyes but she quickly wiped them away when she saw Dr. Watson and a young man descending the school’s front steps.

“She’s in rough shape,” Dr. Watson was explaining.

John Williams looked up in surprise. “Oh hello, Emma.”

“Hello, John.”

Dr. Watson climbed into the cutter, “I’ll just turn her. I think that we’ll need to clasp our hands together to make a chair for her. That’s it. Oh, what a wicked odour...and a wicked place

she comes from. Emma, please run ahead and open the door for us – the cellar door, there on the north side. Eeeasy does it. That’s it...steady on the steps. Where should we put her, Elizabeth?”

“On the table, Elmer. She *is* in a sorry state.” Vera flopped like a dirty rag doll onto the table in front of the fireplace. Grape-purple fingers draped from the filthy strands of yesterday’s bandage.

Dr. Watson headed for the door. “Thank you, John, for your help. You might as well go back to your studies. I’ll just get my bag.”

Elizabeth Bowerman shook her head. She held up her wide hand. “Wait. Does thee have another call to make, Elmer Watson?”

“Well, I do need to go to the Paton’s for a while...”

“Very well then, we’ll clean the child up while thee does that. Emma, wait here. John, please take that basin and fill it with hot water from the kettle.” Elizabeth leaned over Vera and took the girl’s head in both hands. “Poor child,” she whispered as she parted the matted hair. Emma could see patches of raw red scalp at the nape of the neck and around the ears. “Head lice,” Elizabeth stated. “John, please also fetch the kerosene. It is in the barn – just inside the door, on the middle shelf.”

As the cellar door closed behind John and Dr. Watson, Elizabeth tenderly lifted Vera’s dress over her belly. The skin was a filthy grey from bare feet to navel. Emma looked away. The smell of stale urine filled the air.

“Body lice as well,” Elizabeth diagnosed. “Does thee think these clothes are worth saving, Emma?”

Emma looked back. “Uh...the elbows are all worn out. She’s missing some buttons and there is a rip there at the bottom. It looks very tight across her chest too.”

“Then we’ll boil it rather than burn it, and patch the elbows. Maybe someone else can wear it. Please open the window in that corner, Emma – we need some fresh air in here. I thank thee. Now, please go upstairs and ask Teacher Mary if we may use the dressmaking scissors. We’ll also need some towelling and two wool blankets. Tell her what we are doing down here. The girls will need to eat their supper upstairs this evening. Please also ask Mary to send two girls to start preparing the meal now.”

Emma got up from the chair at the window and went through the orders in her head – scissors, towelling, blankets, supper, cooks. “This way?” she asked.

“Yes, the stairs are right there. I believe the girls are sewing in the southwest room right now.”

The main floor hallway was bright – brighter than the cabin or schoolhouse even on the sunniest of days. Emma’s fingers lightly traced the moulding of the staircase as she climbed. The door to the southwest room was open and she could see girls bent over pieces of fabric. A floorboard creaked under Emma’s feet and a dozen pairs of eyes looked up from their grey and brown laps.

“Uh...,” Emma began. “Teacher Mary? I am looking for Teacher Mary.”

A woman poked her head around the doorway of the next room. "I am Mary," she said, her eyes twinkling. "Where has *thee* come from?"

"Just now? From the cellar. Elizabeth Bowerman needs some things. She is tending to an injured girl. She needs the dressmaking scissors, two blankets, and some towelling, and...the girls are to eat on this floor...and Elizabeth needs two girls to cook the meal now, please...yes, that's it."

Mary retrieved the sewing scissors from a wooden box in the centre of the room and dispatched two girls to get the blankets and towelling.

"Prue, Hannah, will you prepare supper?"

When Emma returned to the kitchen Elizabeth was holding out some of Vera's matted hair. "How important is her hair to her?" she asked.

"I don't know. It doesn't look as though she really cares about it," Emma responded.

"The girl has bigger worries, I suppose. Cut these mats out, Emma, please." Emma picked up the scissors in one hand, a mat of hair in the other, and scrunched up her nose.

"Are you going to vomit?" Elizabeth asked matter-of-factly.

"I don't know. I feel hot and dizzy and my stomach...no, I think I'll be all right if I do it fast." She snipped with abandon. The brown mats fell to the pine floor. "That's the best I can do, Elizabeth."

"Very well. Rub this kerosene into her hair. Then we will wash her as best we can."

Dr. Watson returned just as they were wrapping Vera in the wool blankets.

"Ah, it smells perfectly fresh in here, Elizabeth Bowerman. And that girl is a different shade too. How did you manage it?" He lifted Vera's hand gently. "You could probably set this yourself this time, Emma – but I'll do it."

"I doubt it – but surely it couldn't be any worse than cutting hair!" said Emma, as she handed the doctor the splint. He set and bandaged Vera's hand again. John returned and the two carried Vera to the second floor. Emma took the sorghum broom from the wall and began sweeping the floor.

"You have plenty of girls here to help you with the clean-up, don't you Elizabeth?" Dr. Watson inquired. "I will take Emma and John home on my way. That's enough exercise for one day, wouldn't you say, John?"

"You are so natural in the way you care for people," said the doctor to Emma moments later as the three of them walked toward the cutter. "You know that, don't you?"

"Natural? That didn't feel very natural to me!" she said emphatically.

"I couldn't have done it," said John. "Another moment in that room and you would have been sweeping me up off the floor too. I have never seen anything more repulsive."

"There are more repulsive things, believe me," said the doctor quietly.

"I don't want to know," said John, his voice flat. "How do you tolerate it? What could you possibly like about this kind of work?"

Dr. Watson smiled as he unhitched Lily. “I like mending people – when they are allowed to heal, that is. Sometimes I bring big, healthy babies into the world too. That’s nice. You could do that Emma – you couldn’t train to be a doctor, but you could become a granny and deliver babies.”

John laughed.

“Why do you laugh?” asked an indignant Emma, climbing into the cutter.

“Well, you don’t look much like a granny to me!”

“Very funny. Dr. Watson, why *can’t* I be a doctor?”

“Because women aren’t allowed to attend university. And only those people who graduate in medicine are allowed to practise as doctors.”

“I didn’t know that,” said John. “I don’t know anyone but you who has attended university. But that doesn’t seem fair, does it, that women aren’t allowed to attend university?”

“Lot’s of things aren’t, it would seem,” said Emma quietly.

“It’s a strange thing,” said the doctor. “I maintain that women hold most of the knowledge in a new country like this, yet they are allowed to display only so much of it publicly. A woman can teach her children at home, but there are few schools wanting to hire women teachers. A woman can deliver babies but not become a licensed doctor.”

Dr. Watson looked over his glasses at Emma as John swung up into the seat beside her. “You were telling me that you were having trouble teaching John’s sister how to do division – ”

“Mary Victoria?” interrupted John.

“No, Anna. I tried to help her today, but I didn’t seem to be able to explain it properly.”

“You take Lily, John, and I’ll show you that little trick I told you about earlier, Emma. Do you have a handkerchief?”

“No,” she replied sheepishly.

“We’ll use mine then.” He reached into his pocket, then into a burlap bag of grain stashed behind the seat. “Give me a question.”

“I don’t know...uh, what is thirteen divided by three?”

“We could do that, if I wanted to use a sharp knife. How about something easier like twelve divided by three?”

“Of course.”

He held out his left hand. “Take twelve kernels from my hand,” he commanded as his right hand rummaged through his black bag. He extracted three clamps and placed them side by side at the top of the handkerchief. You have twelve kernels and you want to place them in three groups. These clamps represent the three groups. Place a kernel beneath each one.

“These aren’t the best of conditions for a lesson such as this,” he said as the cutter lurched. “Just stop for a moment, John. Good, now give another kernel to each clamp. Right, and the last few, so that you have distributed all twelve evenly. Good. You had twelve kernels. You have placed them in three groups. How many kernels are in each group?”

“Four. That’s very clear isn’t it? I think that she’ll understand it if I explain it that way!”

“Good. Let’s go then, Lily,” he directed as he took the reins back from John. “Yes, some things need to be understood, rather than memorized. I do worry about that. We need public schools in this country, but I am not so certain that public schools which use only memorization are of much use to anyone. We need people who can think...and speaking of people who can think, that’s Jeremiah Field coming home with a hungry stomach, isn’t it? Trot, Lily!”

Chapter X

Learning

The schoolroom’s wood stove was pinging with heat as Anna Williams, straight as a pine tree, entered the room. Mr. Brown cleared his throat at the front of the classroom. He was paler than ever, his eyelids heavy. Last night Anna’s father had spoken with Mr. Brown in the front parlor. Emma felt a drop of secret pleasure knowing this; but she knew that every child would need to be on guard today.

“Reading from the Apocrypha...Let us pray...,” Mr. Brown intoned. His spirits seemed bruised as he led the children through the opening exercises. “We will begin with mathematics this morning, since so many of you were having difficulty yesterday. Second form, slates ready? Twelve divided by six.” To Emma’s right, Anna scratched the question on her slate. “George Robertson?”

“I don’t know, sir.”

“What do you *mean*, you don’t know? Anna Williams?”

“Twelve divided by six is two, sir.”

“How do you know that?”

“I learned it.”

“Who taught you? Is your mother teaching you at home? Don’t you know that I am fully capable of teaching you?”

“No, sir. Yes, sir.”

Emma looked out the window at the yellow ribbons of willow and silently prayed that Mr. Brown might today leave them alone.

He did leave them alone and the morning passed as slowly as the afternoon usually did. Finally, with their lunch buckets empty of cheese and bread, the children buttoned and tied their outer garments in preparation for leaving.

“So, your mother is teaching you at home, Anna? My mother says she will teach me in the new year,” said Jane Morgan as they stepped out into the wind. She tucked her shawl under the puffiness of her hair.

“My mother didn’t teach me at all. *Emma* did!” called Anna over her shoulder.

“You?” asked Jane in puzzlement.

“Yes, me. Dr. Watson showed me how to teach her. Want me to show you? All right, then gather some little things...stones, twigs...it doesn’t matter what.”

The girls sat on the big rocks against the fence. Anna and Mary Victoria leaned against the trees and they listened as Emma explained the mysteries of division.

“Well, that’s easy! Why didn’t Mr. Brown explain it that way a long time ago?”

“Because he’s an injured soldier who can’t get other work,” said Mary Victoria.

“Is that true?” asked Emma.

“Yep. But he’d better treat us kindly or he will be teaching somewhere else. That’s what Father said.”

“What if we tricked him somehow, then he’d be mean and he’d be made to leave?” asked Jane.

“Tricked him? He’ll be mean enough to us without our helping him along! Anna, why did your parents send John to the boarding school, especially when your father is a trustee of *this* school?”

“Send him? They didn’t send him,” laughed Mary Victoria. “I don’t think Mother and Father could *send* him *anywhere*! He wanted to go because he thought it was a waste of time with Mr. Brown. He wanted to learn more – about mathematics and business and farming.”

“Farming? Your father is such a good farmer, John could learn everything he needed from him, couldn’t he? Daniel is the eldest. He’ll be taking over the farm, won’t he?”

“No, Daniel is homesteading. He is clearing land near Allisonville.”

“And he is to be married this Christmas!” added Mary Victoria. “John finds that boring!”

“What, clearing the land or getting married?”

“Both! Right now he is only interested in fishing with the MacDonald brothers at West Point. But he says that he wants to expand the apple orchard. And the mills. He’s got plans for the saw and woollen mills.”

“Father says that John’s a natural businessman,” added Anna.

“Why are you asking about John Williams?” pried Jane, turning to Emma. “Are you sweet on him?”

“Sweet? no!” Emma replied quickly. “I saw him at the boarding school yesterday. I was surprised. I thought he was at home farming with his father and brother. And besides he’s not a Quaker.”

“What were you doing at the seminary anyway?”

“Rescuing the poor and infirmed!”

The school bell rang, cutting off further discussion. The entire afternoon was spent memorizing poetry.

“Are you going back to the Quakers again?” asked Jane as Emma failed to turn in to go to her cabin.

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“I have my reasons.”

“And you’re not going to share them, are you? You’ve got that look. All right,” she sighed. “‘Little Lamb, who made thee?’ Have you got that poem memorized yet?” asked Jane.

“I’m not very good at learning poetry – not like you. Let’s try to do it together.”

“You’re right – you aren’t very good at this. Mr. Brown is going to be angry again,” said Jane.

“He’ll be angry anyway. Goodbye. See you in the morning.”

“Remember well and bear in mind, A true friend is hard to find; And when you find one just and true, Do not change an old one for a new...” replied Jane.

“I said, goodbye!”

Emma knocked on the cellar door.

“Emma Field. Come in. Has thee come to see Vera?” asked Elizabeth.

“Yes, please. How is she today?”

“Thee will be surprised.”

Emma followed Elizabeth’s straight back and swaying grey skirts up the stairs to the first floor, and up and around the sweeping staircase to the next floor. She had never been so high inside a house. Elizabeth knocked softly on a door at the top of the stairs and they went inside. A fire snapped in the fireplace on the far wall. Emma glanced at the bed and burst into gales of laughter, covering her mouth with her hand. Vera sat against the pillows, a shadow of a girl, her hair sticking out in all directions.

“Wa’s so funny?” she asked as she pulled the sheets to her chin.

“It’s, it’s...oh, Vera, it’s your...your hair. I’m sorry to laugh but it looks awful. I did such a *ghastly* job of cutting it! I guess that will be the last time you come to me for a haircut!”

Vera smiled painfully. Her face was still swollen and the patch of red and purple had spread from the slit of her eye down her cheek.

“Oh, it’s terrible. I’m truly sorry, Vera. I hadn’t realized I’d done such a bad job.”

“Would thee like hot cocoa, Emma? Vera?”

“Oh, yes!” they both said at once, smiling. Elizabeth turned and left the room. Alone with Vera, Emma suddenly wished that she could follow her.

“How is your hand?”

“Sor. De docta says Ise needs to keep dem fingas straight so dey’ll mend.”

“This is a beautiful room.”

Vera nodded. “Ise don’ wants to leave here – ever.”

Emma nodded. “Yes. I can understand why. You must feel like a princess. You know, when I was young I used to think of this building as a castle that only I could see. Especially in the winter when the windows glowed like gold.”

“Dey hav gold windas?”

“Uh-huh. Sometimes they are gold.”

Elizabeth swept into the room again, a cup of steaming cocoa in each hand. “For thee, Emma. Be careful it is hot. And for thee, Vera. Shall I hold it so thee can drink?”

A log tumbled over in the fireplace, sending up a shower of orange sparks. Emma sat, blowing softly across the surface of the cocoa before taking a little sip and wondering what she could say that would fill the silence. She couldn't ask about Vera's family and it wouldn't be right to speak of her own father or the school. There really was nothing to say. As she drained the cup, her self-consciousness eased. Emma's thoughts turned to Jane and the poem.

"Would you like to hear a poem I learned today, Vera?" Emma missed the flash of approval which shot across Elizabeth's face.

"Ya. Ise finks Ise like a po-em."

"It's called 'The Lamb' by William Blake and it goes like this." Emma took a deep breath.

'Little Lamb, who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee?
Gave thee life, and bade thee feed
By the stream and o'er the mead;

Gave thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing, woolly, bright;
Gave thee such a tender voice,
Making all the vales rejoice?
Little Lamb, who made thee?
Doest thou know who made thee?

Little Lamb, I'll tell thee;
Little Lamb, I'll tell thee:
He is call-ed by thy name,
For He calls Himself a Lamb.

He is meek, and He is mild,
He became a little child.
I a child, and thou a lamb,
We are call-ed by His name.

Little Lamb, God bless thee!
Little Lamb, God bless thee!"

"Da's nice," sighed Vera, leaning into the pillows. "Ise luv watchin' dem lambs of Coopas."

"Yes, Emma, thee recited that beautifully – and without hesitation," added Elizabeth.

"William Blake...his poetry is as beautiful as a lamb, or a sunset."

"Do yas know more po-ems?" asked Vera.

"None I can think of right now, but would you like me to learn another poem for you, Vera?"

Vera ran her right hand through her spikes of hair. "Ise like dat."

“I’m not very good at memorizing things, but it seems I’m better at that than at cutting hair! All right. I have to go now. I’ll come back when I have another poem memorized. Thank you for the cocoa, Elizabeth Bowerman.”

Emma opened the door as a wave of girls pounded up the main stairs, then slowed to ascend the wooden stairs to the attic.

“Hello!” said Prue, swinging around the bend in the banister.

“Hello,” Emma replied, waiting for the last, rather plump, girl to haul herself up the stairs.

Chapter XI

Dressmaker

Late the next afternoon Mr. Brown called Jane and Emma to the front of the class. He handed Jane a letter. “I want you to take this letter to Dr. Watson in the village. Do you know where he lives? I will let you go early. Just fifteen minutes early, so you need not smile like that. You may leave now.”

Outside the schoolhouse, Emma twirled like a cat chasing its tail, then broke into a skip. Jane smiled as she centred the knot on her shawl.

“Can you believe it! Can you believe Mr. Brown let us out fifteen minutes early?” she said.

“No! I can’t!” squealed Emma, galloping toward the road.

“Oh, don’t run! Wait for me. What do you think that letter is about?”

“Maybe he’s resigning!”

“Do you think so? Oh, wouldn’t that be perfection!” Jane twirled too. “Mother says that I am almost too old to be in school. She thinks she could instruct me at home! Ha! But if Mr. Brown goes, maybe we would get an adequate teacher and maybe I could stay until the summer...”

“Wouldn’t it be nice to have someone kind? Maybe there are no kind teachers,” Emma frowned, “but you would think there have to be – somewhere. I wonder if he is resigning! That letter *is* sealed, isn’t it?”

Jane stopped and reached into her muff, which had been bobbing around her neck. Her eyes widened. “Where *is* it? I *know* I put it right here!”

“Don’t fret,” Emma said calmly. “We haven’t come far. It must have fallen out.” They both looked up the hill.

“I just hope it didn’t drop out in the schoolyard. Can you imagine how furious Mr. Brown would be? Why didn’t *you* take it, Emma?”

Emma raced ahead of her friend. “Oh! *Here* it is!” she called from the edge of the schoolyard.

“Shush!” Jane hissed. “He’ll hear us and we’ll be called back to school. *You* carry it now. It’s not fair if I have to have all of the responsibility.”

“Very well.” They turned and headed toward Bloomfield, walking.

“Mr. Brown could have done this himself. Why should we do all his work for him?” asked Jane.

“Because he’s an adult. Besides, we got to leave early.”

“If we have to do the work, then we should know what’s in the letter, don’t you think? Is it sealed?”

“I should expect so. Yes, it’s sealed with wax,” said Emma, holding the envelope tightly.

“Sometimes wax can be just a little soft. Is it?” Jane reached for the letter and started to pry at the edges of the seal.

“Don’t! I don’t think we should!” Emma snatched it back.

“You are so righteous, Emma Field!”

“That I am!”

“Are you going to marry a Quaker, or maybe a preacher?”

“Perhaps.” Emma smiled. “And you, Jane Morgan? Let me guess. The life of a doctor’s wife wouldn’t suit you. Too much blood. Too many people calling your husband away in the middle of the night. A blacksmith would earn enough to keep you, but you would hate the smell of sweat and smoke.”

“And horses. I really don’t like the smell of horses. Besides, a blacksmith is so...”

“Brawny? Dirty?”

“Yes, that’s it. I don’t like brawn. I like dignity and refinement and...”

“...and money. You’re so hard to please. You will need to marry a business man. But that could be a problem for you in a place like Bloomfield.”

“What do you mean?”

“All of the wealthiest people here are Quakers.”

“I know; and they are so boring!”

“Well, they are too boring for you – and too sincere too.”

“Well, I never!” Jane stomped her foot.

“Never were sincere?”

“Emma, *what* has gotten into you? I can be sincere about things – the important things.”

“Uh-huh...”

“I can! You just take it too far. For instance: why could we not take a peak at that letter? It wouldn’t hurt anyone.”

“Because it’s dishonest, that’s why. If Mr. Brown had wanted us to read it, he’d have shown it to us. So what do you think about marrying a lawyer – that would be high society enough for you.”

“I don’t know what they do, but I suppose I wouldn’t have to. They are smart aren’t they? I doubt I am smart enough to be married to a lawyer.”

“I don’t know.” They walked a little in silence, each involved in her own thoughts. “Want to make a wish in the millpond, Jane?”

“Sure. Here’s a stone. And here’s one for me.” Both girls closed their eyes and threw their stones with all their force. Emma’s drove through the thin layer of ice. Jane’s skidded along on top.

“Darn!”

“Don’t worry, your wish still can come true – it’s just that it takes longer, that’s all.”

“I *hate* waiting!”

“I know.” They walked along in silence for a short distance. “Say, do you know the Planks?” asked Emma.

“Planks? No.”

“They live near Morgan’s Mill.”

“In that shack?” asked Jane, wrinkling up her nose.

“Yes. I just wondered if you knew anything about them.”

“No. I don’t concern myself with such people. What did you wish for?”

“Can’t tell.”

“When one person’s stone doesn’t go through the ice, the other person has to tell their wish – that’s the rule,” Jane pouted.

“That’s your rule – and I’m not playing by it. If you ever hear anything about the Planks, please tell me.”

They dashed up the hill and turned to the left.

“Dr. Watson’s house is so pretty. I love that curving window. What do you call it?”

“A bay window.”

“Bay.” The girls stepped up to the outer door of the brick vestibule. “We need to go inside to the second door.”

“How do you know so much, Miss Tenant Farmer’s Daughter?”

“I’ll never tell.” She tapped the knocker against the door. They could hear someone moving upstairs.

“Yes, may I help you?” asked the crisp and efficient woman who opened the door. “Come in.”

“Mrs. Watson, I presume?” Jane curtsied.

“No. Mrs. Watson is out at the moment.”

Jane’s face turned red. “We are delivering a letter for Dr. Watson. Would you see that he gets it, please? It is from Mr. Brown, our school teacher.”

“Would you like to speak with the doctor? He is in his office.” The girls looked at one another.

“No thank you. Just give him the letter, please. That will suffice.”

“Very well then. Goodbye.”

“Goodbye.”

“Goodbye,” called Emma.

“How was I to know she wasn’t Mrs. Watson? The fabric in her dress looked expensive enough. They must have a lot of money if their maid can wear clothes like that!”

“It doesn’t matter, Jane. I would have guessed the same thing.”

“*That’s* consoling – you know *nothing* about fashion.”

Emma scowled at Jane. “Sometimes you are so mean.”

“No, I’m not. I’m just truthful. I would guess that you don’t even know that sleeves that are wide at the wrist are the latest fashion! ”

“I know that,” Emma lied, her eyes cast downward. The girls picked their way around the icy mud puddles of the street.

“I am going to have a gown made with sleeves which fan out at the wrist.”

“Why would you need a dress like that?”

“I don’t need it; I want it.”

“You can’t have everything you want, Jane.”

“I didn’t say I could.”

“Well, you can’t, you know – besides, it wouldn’t be proper – it would be so different. It’s all right to have different fabrics, but different cuts...that’s so...flamboyant.”

“So? I am a flamboyant girl.”

“And you are proud of that?”

“Yes.”

“Well, you shouldn’t be. Girls – women...we’re supposed to be restrained and proper. Besides, how would your family pay for a new dress?”

“Mother would – she’s...”

“It’s...it’s too extravagant. Who needs all of those extras? Those sleeves will just get in the way. You’ll appear clumsy – knocking things over. You already have more dresses than I’ve had my whole life. Think of the poor – there are children right here in this neighbourhood who don’t have enough clothing to go to school – especially girls.”

“Emma, you’ve been in the company of the Quakers too often. Didn’t Jesus say, ‘For the poor ye have always with you.’?”

The two girls stopped in their tracks.

Emma turned to Jane, her eyes bright with fervour. “Yes, but then he said, ‘but *me* ye have not always.’ He was telling them to stop for a moment and listen to him before he died. He also said, ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.’”

“Then, if they’ve got Jesus and God and you and the Quakers on their side, they don’t need me being repressed and meek in my deportment. I *love* the look of those sleeves and I *will* get myself such a dress,” she said defiantly. “If you want to live in poverty, then *do* so. I am *not* poor and I do not *wish* to look poor!” Jane flounced ahead.

“That’s the difference, I guess,” Emma looked at the ground as she walked. “I am poor.”

“You may be, but you don’t have to look poor.”

“‘Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou...’” A woman’s voice broke in “‘...shalt find it after many days. Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.’ Ecclesiastes 11:1-2.”

Emma and Jane spun around, their eyes wide with surprise. The door to the cabin immediately behind them was open a crack. An eye twinkled above a slice of smile.

“It appears I have some young ladies of fashion on my doorstep. Would you like to continue this conversation inside with me, ladies of fashion?” Mrs. Henderson swung the door open and swooped into a graceful curtsy.

Jane curtsied back, “Don’t mind if I do.”

Emma followed with a quick and awkward curtsy. It was warm inside the home of the village dressmaker. A solid and expansive table filled much of the room.

“We were just discussing sleeves which widen at the wrist. I don’t suppose that you have seen such a design?” asked Jane imperiously as she slid her hands from her muff.

Mrs. Henderson closed the door behind them. The vertical furrows between her eyebrows were deep with tiredness, but her eyes softened as they took Jane Morgan’s measure. Her eyelashes fluttered. “Ladies of the most impeccable taste, I can see! Actually, I have done much more than see the design! But tell me, how did you girls know of such a fashion? I didn’t myself until just this week.”

Emma looked at her feet again. She was feeling very shabby, very homespun, very worn. She pulled her shawl around her shoulders.

“*Godey’s* magazine, of course.” Jane’s eyebrows rose as she dropped the name of the magazine. She pressed her lips together smugly and tilted her chin upwards.

“I should have known. Your mother subscribes to it, doesn’t she? You wouldn’t believe it, but I have just completed a pair of such sleeves. I don’t as a rule display my clients’ dresses – it wouldn’t be proper – but I will show you one sleeve alone, which I have only now finished. These are what you are talking about.”

Mrs. Henderson retrieved a glossy mint green sleeve from the next room.

“That’s it! That is what I am talking about. I am going to get myself a dress with sleeves like this.” The tips of Jane’s fingers caressed the waves of fabric lovingly.

“Beautiful, isn’t it? I had already started making an evening dress for Mrs....uh...for my client, when she took a trip to Kingston with her William. They always stay with my client’s sister when they are there. Her sister had just received the latest issue of *Godey’s* – so, my client brought it home with her and told me she wanted the sleeves modified to look exactly like this. She said that she was tired of such plain, tight sleeves and wanted a change.”

Mrs. Henderson leaned forward. Her voice dropped. “They have money, you know. And my client’s husband needs his wife to be beautifully attired when they attend social functions.”

“That’s exactly what I want!”

“Well, it’s easy to modify the sleeves. You must have a church dress we could modify nicely for you.”

“No, I want a *new* dress.”

“Ohhh.” Mrs. Henderson winked at Emma. “And what colour would you like it in, pray tell?”

“You’d look beautiful in lilac, Jane. The palest of lilacs.”

“She would, but I don’t believe that a person can purchase fabric in such a colour. Besides, purple is a colour of mourning, even light purple,” said Mrs. Henderson.

“Gold, then!”

“Iridescent gold?”

“Oh yes, iridescent.”

“What shade is that?” asked Emma.

“Here we go again. She is so serious when it comes to colour!”

“There is a huge difference, that’s all.” Emma let the sleeve fall onto the table in front of Jane. “You would look nice in gold, Jane. But what shade would you like? The colour of wheat in August? Or of goldenrod? Or the colour of snow with late-afternoon sun shining on it?”

“Oh, I don’t care. I just want sleeves which fan out!”

Emma tilted her head to one side, puzzled. “How would one *make* a lilac shade? I don’t know of any plants which produce a purple dye – blue, yes, but purple? Do you know, Mrs. Henderson?”

“So you *do* love colour! A woman of my own heart! I honestly don’t know the answer to your question, Miss Field,” Mrs. Henderson responded.

“You know my name?”

“Yes, but I must confess that I have forgotten your first name. We fell so quickly into conversation that I didn’t think to ask you. My apologies.”

“Emma.”

“Emma, that’s right. Josephine and Jeremiah’s daughter, Emma.”

“Yes, that’s right. How did you...?”

Jane sighed heavily. “Are we going to discuss my dress or not? What do I need to do now, Mrs. Henderson?”

“I would assume that the good Mr. Morgan will be paying for this. Or are you independently wealthy, Miss Morgan? Have your mother place an order with me,” she went on, not waiting for an answer. “Would you like me to measure you now?” Jane nodded. “Fine. Let me get the tape. Come into my parlour, Miss Morgan.”

Mrs. Henderson plucked a neatly rolled, cloth measuring tape from the corner of the table and bustled off. Jane inclined her head upward as she paraded past Emma.

“We won’t be but a minute, Miss Field.”

Emma looked at the basket of scraps under the table. Black, white, grey, brown, and a few pieces of mauve, brick red, mint green, and goldenrod.

She heard Mrs. Henderson say from the next room, “I will order ten yards. Let me see here: chest, 30 inches. Don’t hold your waist in, child, you’ve got lots of growing to do yet. A dress at this price will need to do you for many a year. Yes, waist, 25 inches; arm length, 20 inches.”

Jane was easing her gloves over her hands as she returned to where Emma was waiting. “Very well, Mrs. Henderson, my mother will be speaking with you shortly. Thank you for your time.”

Emma smiled with her head cocked sideways and her eyebrows arched. “Thank you, Mrs. Henderson.”

“My pleasure. Let me think about the source of lilac, Miss Field. Ah! but it is *gold* fabric for you, Miss Morgan. Could I persuade you to buy real gold fabric? I could sell the scraps and give these poor old eyes a rest,” she chuckled.

As Emma and Jane went outside, the dressmaker said, “Do come back again, ladies. I would love to discuss colours with you, Miss Field. The browns and greys and blacks of this village tire me so! I find myself getting excited when I see a paler shade of grey! Even the Methodists are

difficult to convince. They think that anything beyond the colours of November and March are impractical and not proper.”

“Most definitely, Mrs. Henderson. I’d be most honoured to speak with you again.” Emma beamed. “Thank you, Mrs. Henderson. Good evening.”

“What’s iridescent?” asked Emma.

“I don’t know.”

“Well, you acted like you knew!”

“I think it means shiny – like that dress of Mrs. Smith’s.”

“How do you know it’s Mrs. Smith’s?”

“Who else has money in this village? I happen to know that the Smiths ventured out to Kingston recently. Can you imagine how horrified Annabelle Smith will be to see me in the same dress as her mother!”

“It won’t be the same dress,” replied Emma, as though cutting Jane’s smugness in two. “There is no such thing as one dress being the same as another. You already said you wanted a different colour from Mrs. Smith’s.”

“Yes, but it’s the same dress.”

“With all of the thousands of stitches sewn by hand, how could it be the same dress? It’s like a snowflake. One snowflake looks similar to another from a distance. But up close, especially on a black cloak, they look so different.”

“I’m certain some of them are the same!”

“No, they’re not.”

“You’re so *particular!*” Jane stepped around a puddle.

“Yes, about some things I am.” Emma tightened her shawl around the colourless dress she’d worn every day since the geese had flown north.

“Which way are you going home?”

“The back way. ’Bye.”

“I will see you tomorrow.”

“Good evening, Jane.”

“‘The meek shall inherit the kingdom of heaven,’ ” thought Emma. “I wonder what will become of Jane?”

Chapter XII

Envy

The fire was snapping when Emma awoke. She’d been aware of her father moving about in the deep grey of early morning and going out to do the chores. She was relieved that she wouldn’t need to rush this morning; that she could wait for the fire to warm the room. Emma could see her breath in the cozy pink light shining across the middle panel of the east window. The top panel was the lilac colour she’d asked Mrs. Henderson about. She rolled on to her side.

Untwisting her nightgown, she tucked her knees to her chest and pulled the rough winter sheets up around her chin.

“Jane. Jane and that *stupid* dress,” Emma sneered. “She’ll probably even wear it to the Christmas Frolic. I don’t want to stand beside her with her wearing her new dress! I’ll look plainer and uglier than I normally do. Why does she have to be so *extravagant*?”

“I know,” she thought, turning over and smiling smugly to herself, “I’ll stand beside someone else. I’ll stand beside Rachel – she’s plain too. Even more plain since she started wearing that grey dress of Hannah’s. It never looked good on Hannah and it looks even worse on Rachel. If I wait until December to switch places, Mr. Brown will probably tell me I can’t – or the others will wonder if Jane and I are at odds. They’ll think it’s unusual. The trick is to get everyone used to the unusual gradually, so they never notice the change.

“Hmm, what is the most unusual thing that could happen? Mr. Brown being kind and generous! No, I can’t even begin to imagine *that* happening. Dr. Watson sitting by the stove in the General Store.” Emma smiled again and stretched out her legs. She slid her arm under the indigo-and-white-striped pillowcase.

“Now *that* would be funny. If he were to suddenly start lolling away the hours in front of the stove, people would talk. But if he were to purchase some alum one day and linger a few minutes, then some sulfur another day and linger a little longer, the men would pull up a chair for him. Eventually he’d be sitting there as often and as long as Mr. Forsythe and no one would remember that Dr. Watson once rushed about like the wind, never mind that he once never set foot in the place!

“Yes, *that*’s what I’ll do. Today, I’ll make certain that I stand beside Rachel. Still, I hope that Jane’s mother tells her that she cannot have such a dress. Or maybe she’ll stain it the first time she wears it! That would serve her right! Then she’d have to wear an old narrow-sleeved bodice with the skirt of her new dress. Funny how a stain takes the eye away from the most beautiful of creations.”

Her reverie continued and she smoothed the covers on either side of her. “What is my favourite colour? Hmm. It isn’t orange. There isn’t much orange in my life – just bittersweet berries and Chinese lanterns in the fall. Those are rather pretty.”

Emma propped herself up on one elbow to look out the window and saw a dusting of snow on the ground. She stared at the sun, which was now a yellowy-orange half circle. Closing her eyes, she flopped back onto the straw mattress. Spots danced before her eyes.

“Oh dear, I wonder if I’ll go blind,” she mused. “Father said that people go blind when they look at the sun for too long. The lilac is almost gone from the sky – chased away by the orange. Maybe that’s why I dislike orange. Other people must dislike it too. I’ve never seen orange fabric, or whitewash or paint. Not even rich people like the Morgans have orange paint. But pink – wouldn’t it be lovely to have a pink whitewash – or a ‘pink-wash’! This whole cabin would be bathed in the warmest, softest pink all day long, not just when the sun rises and sets! I’d feel so warm and friendly and nice – even towards Jane in her new dress.”

The sun was like a pale yellow saucer, a finger's width above the ridge. Emma heard the tug of air being pulled up the chimney.

"Oh, I'd better hurry." She extracted her woollen stockings from under her pillow, pulled them over her legs, tied on her boots, and stood on the cold dirt floor. She pulled off her nightdress, drew the bed clothes into place, folded the sleeping box into the settle, and slipped into her dress.

Jane was already entering the schoolhouse when Emma slammed the cabin door and raced across the road.

"The closest person is always the last! One of these days you will be locked out, Miss Field!"

"Good morning, Mr. Brown." Emma draped her shawl on the peg and slid onto the bench.

She ached to know what Jane's mother had said about the dress and it seemed that Jane held her chin extra high that morning. Emma was also certain that she eased their lesson book at least three inches to the right. At recess Emma stepped around the younger girls and raced outside after Jane, with her shawl thrown over her shoulders.

"Are you getting it? Is your mother letting you get the dress?" Emma demanded of Jane as they reached the snow.

"*Letting me? Of course* she's letting me! Why wouldn't she?"

"Well, it is rather extravagant. Are you going to speak with Mrs. Henderson today?"

The girls turned away from the MacMillan boys, who were snapping pine branches and shaking snow on the younger ones.

"Mother will tend to that today."

"Oh, I see," Emma said slowly, her voice sounding deflated. It's as easy as that, is it?"

"Yes, it is. I thought you'd be a little happier for me, Emma. But never mind, let's plan the decorations for the Christmas Frolic."

"I don't want to. I'd like to talk with Anna and Mary Victoria right now."

"Good idea."

"I didn't mean with *you*." Emma might as well have been aiming a dagger Jane's way.

"What's *wrong* with you, Emma Field?"

"Nothing."

"That's not true. Something's making you act very strange this morning. You are positively frosty! If you think everything is normal, fine. Jane tossed her head and turned away from Emma. "Rachel?" she called to a nearby girl. "Would you like to help me plan the decorations for the Christmas Frolic?"

"Oh! Yes!" Rachel beamed.

Anna and Mary Victoria were piling rocks in the far corner of the yard. "May I join you?" asked Emma breathlessly as she neared the girls.

"Certainly," both responded, shrugging their shoulders.

"What are you doing?"

“Just gathering some rocks together so that we have a dry place to sit this winter. We had a pile here last year but they disappeared. I think they might have wandered over there.” Mary Victoria pointed to the boys’ side of the yard. “I saw John over here the Saturday they disappeared. Now wasn’t that a kind and generous thing for him to do! Especially when he isn’t even attending school here this year.” She dropped two more rocks on the mound. “What’s wrong with Jane today?”

“She thinks there is something wrong with *me*. Huh!” Emma said, tossing her head as she tried to loosen a lichen-covered rock. “Do you want this one, Anna, or is it too large?”

“Let’s give it a try.”

“That lichen is such a pretty shade of green. It is not dissimilar to the dress that Mrs. Smith is having made. Here, let me pry that corner with this sharp stone. “It *is* the same shade. Jane is having a dress made too. With flared sleeves. She wants something fashionable for the Christmas Frolic and the weddings this season,” said Emma haughtily.

“Who is getting married besides Daniel and Aunt Jemima?” asked Anna.

“Your aunt is marrying *Daniel*?”

“No, silly! She’s marrying William Hubbs – you can’t marry your nephew – I just meant that both Daniel and Aunt Jemima are getting married,” replied Anna. “I think one of Jane’s brothers is getting married too. Flared sleeves?”

“What did you expect? She’s got everything all lined up – the solo parts in the concert, the beautiful dress...”

“Oh,” Anna said, her voice sagging. “I didn’t realize the parts for the concert had been assigned already. I was hoping I could sing ‘O Holy Night.’ Or *we* could, rather. Mary Victoria and I have been practising that song. Do you *really* think Jane already has the part?”

“Let’s each take a corner of this rock. Bend your knees. Oh”t’s *heavy!* *Put* it back down. Everyone’s fingers clear? All right, down now.”

The girls puffed and could see their breath in the cold, damp air.

“That’s just too heavy. Maybe we should leave it be.”

“No, let’s give it one more try. Ready?” directed Emma. The girls pried and heaved and grunted until they had moved the rock a foot. “Oh, put it *down!* I can’t *hold* it!” she cried, dropping her end.

“Yow!” yelled Mary Victoria. “*Oooow*, that hurt!” She was dancing around, flailing her fingers like the cuffs of long underwear flapping on a clothesline.

“Oh I’m *sorry*, Mary Victoria. I’m *so* sorry. I should have told you sooner, but I couldn’t hold it a moment longer. I’m *really* sorry. Let me see it.” Emma could almost see the girl’s fingertips throbbing with pain. She gathered a handful of snow from the north side of the nearest tree.

“Here – it will hurt, but put it on your finger. It will help.”

“Ow! That hurts so *much*.” Mary Victoria stiffened with pain. “Oh, there. That’s getting better now.”

Anna put her arm around her sister. “Maybe we should just leave that rock where it is. Let’s go back.”

The girls nodded in agreement and started across the school yard, Mary Victoria tucking her hand inside her coat.

“So do you *really* think Jane is singing ‘O Holy Night’?” Anna asked.

“I don’t know for sure, but probably.”

“That’s *so* disappointing. I had so much hoped...” The clang of the school bell made them jump.

Late that afternoon, when the sun was shining directly in the west windows, Mr. Brown instructed the children to clear their slates and turn around on their benches. The boys pushed and prodded one another. The girls edged sideways, giggling.

“Only seven weeks until Christmas, class. We need to start practising for our concert. There will be jobs for each one of you. We shall all begin with the singing now. Those of you who prove unable to sing can always decorate the school room or serve refreshments.”

Emma glanced at Jane, who was squaring her shoulders. Anna looked down at her feet.

“There will be a few solo pieces, but today we shall start with the songs we shall *all* sing.” There was more jostling on the boys’ benches. “And you boys – each and every one of you sing up now. If you don’t sing now I shall have you sing a solo – or, better still, a duet with a girl – in the concert.”

Emma noticed crimson creeping up George Robertson’s ears. She knew Mr. Brown meant what he said.

Jane slipped out of the school before the others that afternoon and ran to catch up with her brothers.

“See what I mean?” said Emma to the Williams girls.

“That’s not *fair*! She had the solo parts *last* year!” added Anna.

“She *does* have the nicest voice in the class,” retorted Mary Victoria.

“I don’t *care*, Victory. It *still* isn’t fair. We’ve been practising that part.”

“Why don’t you speak to Mr. Brown about it? He seems positively cheerful today,” Mary Victoria suggested. “Well, it was just an idea,” she added when her sister looked disgusted.

“Somehow it makes it even worse now that Jane’s going to have a fashionable dress. I wish I had a new one myself. I have never worn *anything* but old dresses handed down from Dorcas and Phoebe.”

“Well, I’ve never worn anything *but* Dorcas’s, Phoebe’s, and *your* dresses!” pouted Mary Victoria. Then both girls looked at Emma, whose dresses were always grey and far more frayed than anything they wore within their own garden.

“Oh sorry, Emma,” they said together, their voices more subdued.

“Well, Mother always said it’s the girl and not the dress that counts,” added Anna. “I guess we don’t need to go home to practise, but we should go home just the same. It’s so dark already, isn’t it? This time of year it feels as though the sun will never come back. Goodbye, Emma. See you tomorrow.”

“Goodbye, Anna. Goodbye, Mary Victoria.”

Jane found herself something of an outcast for the remainder of the week but she did not know what had happened to cause this. She only knew she felt small and weak and a little scared. She struggled even harder to be noticed. Each day she edged the lesson book further still from Emma.

That Thursday when Mr. Brown called on her to sing her part she shaped her lips perfectly, knotted her face, and forced the notes to the front of her mouth. Everyone laughed.

Mortified, Jane Morgan was ready to bite.

Chapter XIII

Making a Dress

Jeremiah soaked up the last of his stew with a crust of bread. Emma watched him intently in the candlelight.

“Are you going to the village tomorrow, Father?”

“I don’t expect so, although I may have to take some grain to the mill for Mr. Cooper. Why do you ask?”

“No particular reason. I was just wondering. When will you know if Mr. Cooper wants you to go?”

“Probably after chores tomorrow...but you can go any time you like, as long as your chores are finished. What would you want with going to the village?” He slid his plate toward the centre of the table and his chair toward the fire.

“Nothing. It really is nothing, Father.” Emma plucked the dishpan from the wall.

Mrs. Henderson opened her door to find Emma on the step. “How do you do, Miss Field?” Her eyes twinkled again from behind her spectacles.

“Fine, thank you, Mrs. Henderson, and you?”

“I have never been better. Won’t you come in and join me while I sew? It is lovely to see you.” Mrs. Henderson’s hands fluttered like a butterfly. Her skirts swung from side to side.

“Mrs. Henderson, I was wondering if you had determined where lilac comes from?” asked Emma, feeling awkward again.

“Yes, I have thought about it – a great deal in fact. Hang your shawl there if you wish. A cup of tea, Miss Field?”

“Yes, please, Mrs. Henderson.”

“There you go. Sit right there – in the chair at the end of the table. Now, I can’t think of how one would make lilac fabric. Yet I know that hundreds of years ago the Ark of the Covenant, which the Jews carried into the wilderness, was covered with a dark purple cloth. And I know that Cleopatra, when she was Julius Caesar’s mistress, decorated the whole palace in purple.

That story is a little too steamy for someone as young as you, but old Caesar must have liked it because he started wearing purple togas...”

“Caesar? Born approximately 100 BC!” stated Emma.

“Oh I don’t know those details,” Mrs. Henderson continued, “but I am puzzled because I don’t think that I have ever seen fabric the colour of lilacs. One would need to have a weave of blue and pink for that, and I have never seen such a weave. The blue would come from indigo, of course, but the pink – I don’t rightly know that I have ever seen pink fabric. I don’t know what you would use to make such a dye. Madder is too red, not pink enough.

“Every fabric has to have a weave of black or white or gold as a base,” Mrs. Henderson continued, her elbow resting on the huge tabletop. She flicked her thimble-capped fingers together. “No, this is just one more thing I don’t understand. Another cup of tea?”

“No thank you. I still have some. What are you working on today, or should I not ask that question?”

“You may ask, Miss Field, but I will only say that this is a wrap dress for a woman who will soon be ‘wearing the shawl.’”

Emma nodded. She knew that that meant there was a new mother-to-be in the village. “Is that calico?” she asked.

“English calico, yes, but it comes from Calcutta. It is American calico only if it has oranges and blacks in it.”

“Then there is orange fabric. I don’t think I’ve ever seen any.”

Mrs. Henderson picked up the bodice from the table. “Yes, there is orange fabric, but it always appears as a pattern in a print. Orange is just too ostentatious to be by itself.” She slipped the end of the thread into her mouth before pushing it through the eye of the needle.

“If you have any desire to make yourself a dress, Emma, I have lots of bits and pieces you could sew together.”

Emma’s eyes lit up. Then a shadow quickly fell across her face. “That wasn’t my intention, Mrs. –”

“I know it wasn’t,” the seamstress interrupted. “It’s just that I accumulate far more odds and ends than I can ever use up. You would be more than welcome to have them.”

“That wouldn’t be necessary, besides I really don’t know how to sew in a fashion worthy of such fabric. I just know how to do basic sewing for Father.”

“I could teach you.”

“No, that’s fine. I don’t want to bother you.”

“You don’t bother me in the very least, Miss Field. And if you did, I would most certainly tell you.”

“Oh.”

“Why don’t you take a look? Here are the biggest pieces on this shelf. Pick out the ones you like the most, then we can add some of these smaller pieces to fancy it up.” The kindly woman handed Emma a rough cotton sack stuffed with the smaller scraps of coloured fabric and resumed her stitching.

Emma slid her hand inside the sack. She felt the cold smoothness of taffeta and extracted the piece from the bag. It was the colour of the bricks on Dr. Watson's house. Emma caressed her lips with it and placed it on the corner of the tabletop. Her eyes darted back to the bag.

"Mrs. Henderson, do you have any more cotton, like this sacking? I could make –"

"Pardon me?" The woman looked over the tops of her sewing glasses at the fabrics on the table. "Oh, so you like the *feel* of good fabric as well as the colour? I made the loveliest of gowns out of that taffeta. Now, what was it you were asking about?"

"I just wondered if you had more cotton sacking. I could make something –"

"What on earth would you want with rough, old Canadian-made cotton? What is it, child? You don't want to make a dress, surely?"

"I do, but I don't. I don't want to make anything until it can be perfect. If I start with some beautiful fabric now, I'll probably destroy it with my poor sewing – it won't be as beautiful as it should be. But if I make it with poorer fabric now..."

"Then you will have an ugly dress with plain fabric and poor sewing. What do you want it to be? There will be more beautiful fabric. As long as there are the Jane Morgans in this world, there will be scraps of beautiful fabric left over for girls like you who have been convinced you are not deserving of such beauty."

Emma felt scolded. Her eyes prickled with tears and her face felt hot.

She had never had a new dress. She'd dreamed about the dresses she'd one day wear: they would be made of the richest colours and fullness of fabric. Those sorts of dreams could not come to life with these scraps and her hands.

"I was thinking that maybe I'd make a little doll," she explained, "just a little doll, so as not to use up all of your pieces. That way I can practise my needlework."

"As you wish."

Emma settled back into arranging swatches of fabric on the edge of the table. When the last of the tabletop was covered she dropped to the floor. A muted rainbow stretched across the room. "It's a shame they can't make all of the colours in between these. There are so many shades between this colour of red and the orange in this fabric. God has made so many more colours than men have. Why is that?"

"Because men can only add a little mordant to fix the dyes that nature gave us, but nature – well, I think nature is taken care of by God, and She must have a lot of mordants we don't know about. I think She also has a better eye." Mrs. Henderson tipped her head back and laughed as loudly and deeply as her corsets would allow.

Emma knit her eyebrows together. "I don't under–," she broke off, smiling. "Oh, yes, I do." Her shoulders hunched and her face creased as she joined in the laughter.

"Do you really think that God could be a *woman*?"

"Not a woman, no, but don't you think that God could be *like* a woman? Rather soft and warm and gentle – and loving? The Quakers may not value God's colours enough to adorn themselves with them, but they do understand the womanly aspects of God."

"Father is rather warm – not so soft, but he is warm – and he's not a woman."

“Hmm. No. I’ve noticed that.”

“Which?”

“That’s he’s not a woman.” The right side of her mouth smiled. “Well, for that matter, child, I’ve also noticed that he’s rather... In many ways he may be more womanly than your mother was.”

“You knew Mother?”

“Not well. She, of course, made her own clothes. But I knew her in the way that I know about everyone between the Danforth Road and West Lake.”

“Was she not warm and kind?”

“Oh, I wouldn’t say that. She may have been with those she loved. Like I said, I only get to know a little of what I see and hear about people. I could never know what she was like completely. But she was brisk and efficient with others. She was quick in her movements. She was always working. Her hands were muscular and red and chapped, but what hard-working woman’s hands aren’t? Especially if she’s a farm woman.”

“I remember her hands – fitting a dress on me when I was very young. I was standing on the table. It felt so good to be that tall. I wondered if that was how adults felt – way up high like that.”

“I’m never likely to know with this dumpy little frame I have to call my body!”

Emma smiled. She hadn’t thought of Mrs. Henderson as dumpy, but she supposed she was rather short.

“Was Mother small?”

“No. But I wouldn’t say she was tall either. She had good strong shoulders and a stride that meant business.”

Emma had gathered up all of the scraps and piled them one on top of the other. “These are beautiful, just beautiful. Are you sure that you don’t require them? Shall I leave them here?”

“If it means it will ensure the pleasure of your company again, then please leave them here. But if you’ll promise to return for a little chat anyway, then take them with you. Do you need any thread? Needles? You wouldn’t have an iron at home, would you?”

“Oh yes, we have *two* irons. And a little thread – enough to get me started.”

“Here, take some more with you.”

“No, thank you, I couldn’t. You have been more than generous, Mrs. Henderson. Thank you for this fabric. I never dreamed...”

No one had ever told Emma she could indeed have something beautiful. No one had ever told her all the colours she could put her hands on could be hers. She felt as if she had been given the world as she stepped onto the street with the bundle of colours clasped to her side. And she had been.

Chapter XIV

Never, No Sort of a Woman

Emma returned to the dressmaker's cabin the next day. "I had reason to come to the village again and I wondered if you needed me to do anything?" she asked Mrs. Henderson.

"Anything? Anything? My word, child – no one ever asks me if I need anything! I'm the one they ask to adjust this and place a tuck there and have something else done by yesterday. Bless you. Ask me that question again just so that I can taste the sweetness of it."

Emma smiled and repeated with deliberation, "I had reason to come to the village – well, no I didn't; I just wanted to see you – and I wondered if you needed me to do any – thing – for – you."

"'Tis sweet – 'tis sweet like honey! Yes, dear child. If I go one more day with the floor in this room unswept I shall throw myself in front of a bucking stallion. And I need more thread from Bishop's to finish this dress."

"Consider it done. The broom is in the kitchen?"

Mrs. Henderson nodded. "Behind the door. It is lovely to have you drop by like this. I do find the days a little monotonous at times."

"A little like school – only that's *every* day!"

"Now don't you complain about school. I didn't have the opportunity to attend a single day of school. I've worked since I could crawl – and now I sometimes crawl to work. Bless me, I'm tired. It's been a quiet day – no one else has come by. Is there any gossip out there I should know about?"

"You're asking *me*? The only gossip I know has come from you, except that Jemima Williams is getting married at Christmas. And Daniel Williams too, though I don't recall who he is marrying. And one of Jane Morgan's brothers..."

"Oh yes, I know all of that. I have already made Jemima a beautiful blue silk dress. 'Married in blue, he will always be true. Married in yellow, ashamed of your fellow. Married in black, you will wish yourself back.' Jemima chose blue."

"Upon your recommendation?"

"All I did was to recite the verse." Mrs. Henderson smiled.

"There. What shall I do with the sweepings from the floor?"

"Throw them on the fire, please. And just put the thread on my account at Bishop's. Oh, it is so much better to have the floor clean again. Thank you, my dear."

The bells jingled as Emma closed the door to Bishop's General Store behind her. She looked to the back of the store, where three men leaned into the warmth of the stove and the chill of their conversation. Mr. Forsythe occupied his usual seat, facing both the stove and the main door. A boy sat on the floor next to him, leaning against his chair.

"...and she never was no sort of a woman," the man with a handful of nails was saying.

"Nope. No sort of a woman, no sort of a wife." Mr. Forsythe leaned back and crossed his arms across his chest.

"Ain't they the same thing?" inquired the boy, arching his neck to look at the older man.

Emma's father always said that a person could often hear things that weren't true by the wood stove in the General Store. "Like a backwards pearl," he'd say. "Rather than start with a speck of dirt and create a beautiful, smooth sphere of pearl, they start with a speck of something good and make it into a dirty, stinky pile of horse manure."

"But horse manure can be good," Emma had retorted the first time her father had made this proclamation. "You always tell me that when you clean the pig pens you call it 'fertilizer – God's fertilizer.'"

Today the men at the back seemed ready to create a very large and steamy pile of manure. Emma knew it was wrong to be interested in such talk, but it was so hard to resist.

"Aren't they the same thing?" the boy inquired again, in a higher pitch. "Aren't a woman and a wife the same thing?"

"Don't be a fool, Jimmy. Of course they're the same thing," corrected the man with the nails. The third man smiled.

Emma dropped her shawl to her shoulders and tucked a few stray strands of hair behind each ear. "That's not true," she thought, "and it certainly isn't true with you, old Jack Forsythe. Father said your missus left your bed and board years ago and turned up in Kingston calling herself a widow. They forced her to go back home – but she ran away again. Oh dear, now my thoughts aren't exactly pearls either."

She cleared her throat and marched toward the thread stand.

"Plank name never did mean nothin' good," continued the man with the nails.

"Plank!" thought Emma. There was only one family of Planks. She reached for some brown thread.

"But still, how could a mother ever drown a poor innocent baby in a well and leave her man to freeze to death – truly freeze to death – in his own bed. The woman is mad, I tell you!"

Emma wheeled around. Unable to stop herself, she demanded, "Are you talking about Vera Plank's family – near Morgan's Mill?"

"Oh hello, Miss Field. Vera? I don't know if that was the woman's name or not."

"Not the woman's name. It's the girl's name, a girl my age!"

"Hmm. I didn't know they had a girl. No one said nothin' about a girl. Only about a boy cryin' over his dead pappy's body, a newborn's body down the well, and the mother nowhere to be seen. Useless scum. They should've never left the old country!"

"Who told you this?" Emma demanded of the stubble-chinned Jack Forsythe, who straightened his back, beckoned with his chin, and pointed toward the front of the store. "Archibald Murray. Just left. Said he heard Doc Watson telling Susannah Degroffe on the street."

"Well, now *everyone* will know!" laughed the man with the nails, slapping his free hand against his thighs.

Emma turned around and was startled to find Mrs. Bishop standing right behind her. "Oh, Mrs. Bishop! I need thread – for Mrs. Henderson. Please put this on her account. Yes, brown thread. Thank you. Good day."

She had her hand on the door latch when she remembered her mittens, which were still lying by the thread stand.

“Don’ know...,” Mr. Forsythe was still ruminating as Emma dove to retrieve the mittens. “Maybe the baby died before it was born. But I hear tell of women who kill their young ’uns – could have been poison, or a blow, or...”

Emma was out the door before the blistering analysis was over. She raced down the wooden sidewalk and burst into Mrs. Henderson’s parlour. “Here’s your thread, Mrs. Henderson. I’m sorry, but I can’t be staying. There is a matter I must attend to.”

The bells on the door hadn’t stopped jingling when Emma slammed the door a second time. She dashed across the street and pounded on Dr. Watson’s door.

“Dr. Watson is out,” said the maid. “He’ll be back before sundown – he had a tooth extraction to carry out.”

A baby had been murdered! The baby she’d felt inside Mrs. Plank the day she’d helped rescue Vera! *Murdered.*

The image of Vera on the bridge and her mother with the gun amongst the cedars burned in her head, and then the feeling of her own shoulder colliding with the unborn baby fanned the flames of terror inside her. Emma clutched her throat and looked first toward home, then toward the boarding school.

“Elizabeth will know what to do. I’ll go to the school. Oh, please God, please may I not have killed that baby. I didn’t mean to. Will they put me in jail or hang me? Oh, please God,” she cried in silent anguish.

Her tears damped the fire inside her and sent a thick, choking smoke swirling through her mind. She stumbled along, head and shoulders bent under the weight of it all.

“Emma? Emma Field! Emma, are you all right? Yuhooooo?”

Emma stopped, straightened, and looked up blankly to see John Williams, a few yards from her, a bucket of milk in each of his hands. She looked back down at her feet. Her mind screamed, “Go away! I’ve murdered a baby. I don’t think you want to talk to me. Besides, I may be hanging on the gallows soon, or do they use a guillotine?” Instead she mumbled, “Hello, John.”

“Where are you going – to the boarding school?” He could see that her upper lip and eyelids were pink and puffed up from crying. They looked like slices of watermelon.

“You don’t want to be seen with me. I must be going,” she muttered.

“Just wait but a moment. I need to take these to Widow Christie. Just wait and I will walk with you.”

“That won’t be necessary.”

John darted off. Milk sloshed from the pails, leaving small creamy tunnels in the skiff of snow. Emma was already at the intersection of her road and the Danforth Road when she heard John panting along behind her.

“You...you...walk so fast.” His chest heaved as he sucked in the cold air and spewed out steam. “What is it, Emma? Has someone wronged you?”

She stopped and looked him in the eye. “No, I haven’t been wronged. I wish it were that easy.” Emma turned to go, her shoulder brushing against the palm of John’s hand, which he had raised to try to stop her.

“It is about Vera, isn’t it?”

“You *know* about that? Is it *true*?” she gasped.

“Dr. Watson came by this afternoon, just as we were heading out to do the milking. He had Vera’s brother with him. What a mess...”

“Is it true then?”

“That Mr. Plank has departed this life? Yes.”

“And Mrs. Plank?”

“Dr. Watson said that she was haemorr... she was bleeding badly. There was a dead baby – oh, I don’t know about these things, Emma. I most likely shouldn’t be telling you what I overheard – it really isn’t proper – but it’s not likely that anyone else will tell you.”

“Elizabeth will. She always speaks the whole truth. Did Dr. Watson say anything else? Did he say why the baby died?”

“No. But you know that babies die all of the time, Emma. We had a calf born dead just this morning. No telling what caused it. It could have had a disease, been too long in the birth – we’re not supposed to talk about such things, are we?”

Emma grabbed John’s sleeve in her mittened hand, her eyes flashing. “I don’t much *care* what they say we can talk about. Tell me what you know, John Williams. Does a calf ever die because something hit the cow’s belly? *Does* it?”

John looked puzzled. “I don’t rightly know. I could ask. Do you want me to ask Father? He may not tell me, but I could ask.” They reached the cellar door of the school. “Will you be long? I could wait to walk you home.”

“Thank you, John. I’ll be fine. Please ask your father – or Dr. Watson, if you see him.”

“Emma,” Elizabeth stated as she swung the kettle from the fireplace. Tinges of the now-familiar foulness still hung in the air. “Thee has come to help again, has thee? The Plank boy is upstairs with his sister. He had no broken limbs...”

“John said that there was a dead baby,” Emma broke in. “Is that true?”

Elizabeth steadied herself against the table. She nodded.

“How did it die?”

“I do not know.”

“Tell me the truth, Elizabeth Bowerman! I need to know the truth! I thought that Quakers always told the truth!”

“‘The Truth is the Way, and the Way is the Truth.’ Yes, Emma, I must always speak the truth. But on this matter, I know not what the whole truth may be. The baby is dead. The father is dead. And the mother is near dead. That I know to be true.”

“Do you know where Mrs. Plank is?”

“Upstairs.”

“*Here? Upstairs*, in this house? Oh.” The colour drained from her face. “I need to get home,” she said abruptly, pulling on her mittens and turning to go.

“Emma Field!”

“I haven’t yet been home. The fire will be out and Father...” Her voice trembled.

“Emma, I believe thee is afraid,” said Elizabeth kindly, looking intently into Emma’s eyes. “Does thee not know that there is ‘that of God’ in Annabelle Plank, just as there is ‘that of God’ in Elizabeth Bowerman and in Emma Field?”

“But she’s the Devil! She had a gun pointed at her own daughter – I saw it!”

Elizabeth’s voice deepened. “I know nothing of that, but I do know that there is no devil – other than what some make up in their minds. There is only God and the absence of God. Thee is witnessing the absence of God, and because thee is witnessing it, thee is responsible for doing something about it. There is no devil, and even if there were, I know that it is not lying upstairs. We are taking fluids to that poor mortal. Thee need not be afraid.”

“That of God.” Emma had heard that expression before, but she didn’t think she understood it. Was there a part of God that let babies die, or be murdered – a part of God that stood by, with all his power and might, and let such awful things happen? Was it the voice of God that had told her to hit Mrs. Plank as she had? She didn’t care what Elizabeth said; Mrs. Plank was evil. Maybe she, herself, was evil too.

“No, Elizabeth Bowerman. I must go.”

“Thee will do no such thing. On this I will remain firm. Come with me.”

Through her tears, Emma looked at the woman towering over her. “But you don’t understand.”

“No, I probably do not. But I do understand that thee is in fear and when thee is in fear thee must walk through it. Up the stairs with thee.”

Emma lifted the latch with her mittens still on. She followed the grey swaying skirts to the second floor, just as she had a few days earlier.

Elizabeth stopped at the door to the room. “I didn’t clean her, Emma. It seemed to be more important to let her rest. Thee may want to hold thy handkerchief over thy nose.”

“Evil has a foul smell to it,” thought Emma as Elizabeth opened the door on a room filled with the last of the afternoon light – and with a thick stench. Emma looked to the bed. The corpse-like face of Mrs. Plank lay deep within the pillow. Her mouth was open. A few blackened teeth protruded from her sour, dry gums. She panted in shallow, even breaths. Emma’s stomach churned. She had never seen anyone but her father asleep. It was hard to imagine how someone so fierce could now look like a newly-hatched sparrow. She had never even pictured that Mrs. Plank did sleep.

Elizabeth placed the cup and saucer on the bedside table. The tiny spoon slid and rattled on the china. Elizabeth swung the chair around, smoothed her skirts, and sat as she reached for Mrs. Plank’s filthy hand.

“Dampen that cloth on the washstand, please, Emma. Squeeze it out well. I thank thee.” With the palm of her hand she gently pushed Mrs. Plank’s crusty hair away from her face and slowly wiped the cloth across her brow. “I have some cool chamomile tea here, Annabelle Plank, if thee does desire some.”

There was only the same panting coming from Mrs. Plank’s desert-dry mouth.

“Annabelle Plank, I am going to make thee more comfortable on those pillows.”

“She can’t hear you, can she?”

“I do not know for certain, but her mouth is parched. She needs fluids.” Elizabeth leaned over, propped Mrs. Plank forward, and repositioned the pillows with her other hand. The woman let out a low moan before sinking into the fluffiness.

“I will spoon drops of tea onto thy tongue, Annabelle Plank.”

“Elizabeth?” a voice called from the hallway. “Elmer Watson needs to speak with thee.”

“Elmer Watson. I need to speak with him too.” Elizabeth hurriedly returned the teacup to the bedside table. Emma bolted toward the door.

“Emma,” said Elizabeth firmly, “thee will stay here and give Annabelle Plank some drops of tea. Drops – little drops on her tongue. There is no need to be afraid. I will speak with the doctor.”

Emma slunk back to the chair like a scolded puppy. She pressed her handkerchief to her face. She glanced cautiously at the grey woman in the bed, then hopefully at the door, before swallowing hard and scooping out a spoonful of tea.

She leaned forward and said rather loudly, “I have a spoonful of tea for you.” She glanced back at the door, then back at Mrs. Plank.

Mrs. Plank opened her eyes. She started vacantly. The corners of her mouth turned up ever so slightly. Her dry lips came together.

“T’ank,” she said, her voice a whisper.

Emma could think of nothing to say.

Mrs. Plank’s tongue stuck to the roof of her mouth. “Nobody help afore.”

“Believe me, I’d rather not be doing this. If it weren’t for Elizabeth, I’d...”

Emma scooped another few drops of tea. Her teeth clenched as she thought about Vera, and the gun, and the broken fingers, and the dead baby, and the dead husband, and the stench. She lifted the spoon to the parched lips again, her hand shaking with anger and with fear. A tear crept to the corner of Mrs. Plank’s eye. Emma had never seen an adult cry. In fact, she didn’t think adults cried at all. She stood up. Mrs. Plank’s eyelids closed and a tear spilled out.

“Ise sorry,” she said.

Emma reached for the back of the chair. A floorboard creaked behind her and she felt Elizabeth’s hand encompass her own. “Do not leave. Thee is afraid, but do not leave.” She stood behind Emma. “Take her hand as thee would want thy hand taken.”

Emma’s hands trembled.

“When thee is ready, take her hand.”

Emma's arms hung shaking at her sides. She swallowed hard. Then, taking a deep breath, she slowly reached across the sheet covering Mrs. Plank's arm and placed her hand awkwardly on the woman's grimy hand. Tears coursed down Emma's ashen cheeks.

"She has no power over thee now, Emma. Thee is free. She is free."

The room darkened. Mrs. Plank's breathing became shallower and irregular. Emma's breathing grew deeper. Finally, there was no sound from the bed.

Emma looked up at Elizabeth, her eyes wide and round. "Is she –?"

Elizabeth nodded.

After a few minutes, Emma whispered. "Is that it? That's all that ha-happens when a p-person – d-dies?" she stammered.

"That's all."

"But it's so – simple."

"The most beautiful things in life are, Emma."

"You think that was beautiful? I don't think so – it wasn't awful, but it wasn't beautiful either."

The room was silent for a long time, then Elizabeth nodded her head. "Compared to the life she led, this was very beautiful." She leaned over and kissed the crusty hand.

Emma was certain that the stench had gone from the room.

Chapter XV

Smoking John

The waxing moon was hanging high over the ridge to the east as Emma crested the hill. Smoke seeped heavily from the grey of the chimney to the almost dark sky. Everything seemed heavy and grey – the sky, the smoke, her heart.

"Hello!" came a voice from the darkness of the smoke-filled cabin. Emma jumped. "It's just me, John. I hope you don't mind, but I came back to tell you what I'd asked of Father and saw that the fire had burned low. I didn't want it to go out."

"Oh."

"I'm just sitting here, slowly smoking myself like a leg of ham –," he broke off, noticing her face. "What's wrong, Emma?"

The girl reopened the door behind her, coughing from the smoke. It escaped as she sat heavily on the settle.

"She died. Right there. I was standing beside her and she died."

John sat on the chair and rubbed his eyes. Smoke curled around him on its way to the door. "Mrs. Plank?"

"Yes." The log in the fireplace sizzled and spat in the silence. Emma tossed her head toward the fireplace, "The wood – is that from just inside the woodshed?"

"Yes. It's wet, isn't it? I'm not very good with fires – Mother and the girls always tend to them at home. Where is the dry wood? I'll go and get some."

Emma stood up wearily. "It's against the far wall. You wouldn't have known that."

John dashed out the door and Emma followed to bring in pieces of birchbark and chips of wood.

"It's such a strange feeling," she said a few minutes later, teasing the pale coals with the white curls of birchbark. "I have never seen anyone die before. It wasn't...I don't know how to describe it...it wasn't dramatic...it just happened and...it was as though everything bad in Mrs. Plank disappeared. She was just a woman, John. Just a woman who had an awful life...but she wasn't the Devil. She wasn't even evil any more."

Emma turned around on her heels, still crouching on the hearth. "I wouldn't say it was beautiful, but it was calm and peaceful. How could that be?" She added three chips of wood to the burning bark. John sighed and leaned on the table, watching her. "It was calm and peaceful," she continued, "even when everything around her was so ugly and complicated."

"Like stepping under an eave in a thunderstorm?" he asked.

"Yes, exactly like that. The thunderstorm goes on but where you are, under the eaves, it is safe and peaceful."

"Well, it has been a thunderstorm...with daughters being beaten, husbands dying, and babies being killed. But it's over now."

Emma sat on the hearth, wrapped her arms around her belly, and rocked back and forth. "That's what I'm worried about, John: I don't think that everything *is* over. What did your father say?"

"About how babies die?"

"Yes." Emma glanced at him, her lip quivering slightly.

"It was like I said earlier. Babies die from diseases and –"

"Blows!" she interrupted. "I wanted you to ask about blows to a mother's belly. Can a blow kill a baby?"

"I asked about that and he said that it would have to be an awfully big blow."

"It was," she said, her voice pinched.

"What did you say?"

"I said that it was a big blow to Mrs. Plank's belly...and..." Emma sniffled and her body shook. Tears started to pour from her tired eyes and she buried her face in her lap. "I need to tell you something...but you can't ever tell another..."

John nodded his head.

"I may have killed that baby, John. I didn't mean to. It was the day we took Vera. Mrs. Plank was going to attack Dr. Watson and I rushed at her, hard. So hard I could feel...I could feel the baby against my shoulder. I didn't mean to – honestly, I didn't. But I do fear that I killed it – I think I killed a baby... Whoever does things like that? Maybe I'm the Devil, John! Maybe it's *me!*" Emma wailed.

Through her tears she glanced up at John, sure he would be making ready to leave. Instead, he was leaning forward, his elbow on his knee, his forehead in the palm of his hand. He looked

sideways at Emma, then lowered himself to the hearth beside her, his right leg curled under him. Gently he touched her damp chin with the tips of his rough fingers.

“Look at me,” he said quietly. Slowly Emma raised her eyes to his. “Did you rescue Vera for her good or yours, Emma Field?”

“For hers, of course.”

“Would the Devil rescue someone?”

“No, I suppose not. It was an accident, but maybe the Devil made me do it.”

“If someone stepped on a caterpillar she didn’t see, would you think that the Devil made her do it?”

“No, but I *did* see Mrs. Plank. I tried to stop her.”

“And she hurt herself. She did. She may have hurt the baby too. There were many little decisions made in that moment but I don’t see the Devil in any of them. You wanted to protect Vera. Maybe Mrs. Plank was even trying to do the same...If you can see that she wasn’t driven by the Devil, you have to see that you weren’t either.”

“I suppose you are right,” Emma said after a pause.

John let his hand drop to the warm bricks. Fire licked along the dry piece of wood.

“You don’t think that I’m crazy, do you?” Emma asked at last. John shook his head. “Should I say something to someone? Dr. Watson maybe?”

John shook his head again, more slowly this time. He stood up.

“I don’t think so but I guess it depends. If it would make you feel better, then do, but I don’t think that you are under any obligation to tell anyone.”

“Oh, I don’t know. Maybe it doesn’t need to happen tonight anyway.” She sighed deeply. “I feel better now. Thank you. Thank you for what you’ve done, John.”

“I didn’t do anything.”

“It feels as if you did.”

Suddenly the door swung open. “Supper ready, Em...? Oh! I didn’t know that you were here, John.”

“Hello, Mr. Field. I was just going...Goodbye, Emma.” John took his hat from the table and nodded his head at Emma. “Mr. Field,” he said and nodded his head again.

Emma added another log to the fire and leaned her head against her knees.

“Do you think that it is a good idea entertaining young men in my absence?” her father asked accusingly as he poured water into the basin.

“I wasn’t entertaining him.”

“You weren’t? It certainly looked like it to me. It’s not wise, Emma. You should never be alone with a man at this stage in your life and, besides, he is of a different standing from us. You are a tenant farmer’s daughter. Why do you continue to forget that?”

His daughter rose and turned her back to him, not answering. “I am going to sleep now. The stew is in the pot.” Emma unfolded the settle, pulled off her woollen stockings, and crawled between the sheets. Before long the sleeves of her dress were sodden with fresh tears.

Chapter XVI

Nightmares and Ponderings

In the crazy way that nightmares unfold, Emma saw Mr. Forsythe and the man with the nails adding Mrs. Plank's miserable body to the fire in Bishop's wood stove.

"No! Leave her be!" Emma screamed into the night. "Leave her be. Don't roast her! Don't!" Her dress was twisted like a rope around her slim body.

"Quiet, child," her father called from across the darkened room. "Go back to sleep."

"They're roasting her!" the girl cried, sitting up.

"You're dreaming, Emma. Go back to sleep!" The straw in the tick crackled as he rolled over.

"You don't understand. She's..."

"It's all right now, Emma. Go to sleep."

Emma flopped back onto her mattress. She felt as though a piece of her had been cast into the flames. A few hours later she again awoke in terror. Mr. Brown had now joined the other men around the fire. He stood with the hot poker raised high above Vera's quaking body. "No!" she shrieked again, sitting bolt upright, her arms protecting her head. Why was she in front of her own fireplace? Who was stumbling across the room toward her? "Stop!" she screamed.

"Good heavens, Emma!" chastised her father. "Get up and go to the privy. You went to bed tonight without relieving yourself, and you've kept me up half the night."

"But it was Mr. Brown. He was about to...to..."

"You were dreaming. Now, go relieve yourself."

When she stumbled back into the cabin, her father was adding a second log to the stirred embers.

"That dream was awful, Father. I don't want to dream it again. Please sit by me?"

"But it's so cold. I'm half frozen here on this floor."

"Please, just for a moment."

"Alright." Jeremiah swung the chair from under the table.

"I think I remember Mother rubbing my back when I had nightmares. Did she do that?"

"Yes. I do believe she did."

"That was nice."

"Yes."

"Are you worried about something, Father?"

"I'm always worried about something."

"What is it?"

"Nothing."

"I'm worried about something."

"I can tell. Now stop worrying and go back to sleep. It will soon be time for me to get up." Her father padded across the cold earthen floor to his bed. He wiped his feet on the burlap sack and pulled his now-cold sheets and blankets to his chin.

His thoughts wandered to the cupboard where his brother's letter lay. They wandered across the ocean to the cottage he'd grown up in, and the fields he'd known to yield potatoes year after year...until this year and last. He thought of his brother, solid and rugged like the cottage, burying his third child in as many years.

He brought his thoughts back to Canada West and felt a mixture of pride and pain as he reflected on the supply of salt pork and turnips and apples and carrots and potatoes which filled the root cellar. They would most likely see Emma and him through the winter...but there certainly wasn't enough to feed six more mouths, and he couldn't think of anyone within walking distance needing a tenant farmer.

He shivered as he thought of the Planks withering on their own in the clay flats by the mill. And then he thought of the Coopers and the buckets of grain they left in his own small barn; the male chicks they gave Emma to raise for meat; and the clothes and cakes and scones and jellies they frequently left just inside his door. The thought of the whole family being like one big generous wife brought a quick smile to his face. But just as quickly, loneliness swept over him again and the smile faded.

The man knew he needed a wife but there were no women to be had in the district. He also knew he needed to help his brother. For a long time he lay on his back listening to the wind whistling around and through the cabin. He thought about how he would fill the chinks near the chimney in the morning, if only it weren't Sunday. And the thought of Sunday reminded him again of the smell and sight of women. And that reminded him of church, and he decided that it was time he and Emma attended a service. He would write to his brother after breakfast on Monday morning.

A pack of wolves howled to the south and Jeremiah Field rolled onto his side, very pleased with himself.

Chapter XVII

Sunday Morning

Emma was absent-mindedly poking the coals in the fireplace. She didn't know what to think of the jumble running through her mind. Her father had been so swift to chastise her for being in the presence of John. She'd never seen her father behave so strongly over something so small. John had been so unaffected and comforting with her enormous anguish. And Mrs. Plank had been so...She didn't have words to match all of these experiences. Oh, how confusing it all was. Emma heard her father's footsteps and groaned. She wanted to be alone more than anything else right now.

"Good Sabbath morning, Emma."

Emma continued to stir the embers. "Good morning."

"Porridge ready?"

“Hmm, almost.” She reached over and scraped the bottom of the pot. It was gluey, but not yet bubbling.

“Do you know what we Fields are doing today?”

Emma rolled her eyes and continued to stir. “No.”

“We are going to worship today. The circuit rider is coming to the village and I think we should avail ourselves of his words of wisdom.”

“Why today? We haven’t been to a service in years.”

“Mr. Williams has been talking about Mr. Green, a circuit rider who comes to his brother’s. He says that this preacher is an inspiration to the youth. You’re rather youthful...wouldn’t you like some inspiration?”

“No...and I thought you said we weren’t to have anything to do with people of higher standing than us anyway,” she said quietly.

“I said that you weren’t to be alone with young men of such standing. At least that’s what I meant. They have no need for people like us. Let them court amongst themselves.”

“John wasn’t courting. He was helping me with something.”

“Courting, helping, it’s all the same thing with young men. But going to church is different. It’s a chance to be amongst them, but not with them. There’s nothing wrong with that.”

“I’m not going. I’m too tired this morning.”

“Well, you’re in luck because the service is not until after dinner. I’ll need to get the manure off those boots of mine, and put a little fat on them – if I want to keep my feet dry.”

Several hours later Emma found herself sitting stiffly in the parlour of John’s uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. John Platt Williams I. She was embarrassed by her father and his sudden exuberance and wished she were still at home, poking the coals. She looked at him twisting his hat on his lap as he smiled across the room at the MacDonald girls. He leaned toward Joseph Smith, who was sitting in front of him.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Smith. Lovely day isn’t it?”

“That it is, Mr. Field, that it is,” came the reply. Turning his head slightly, he continued in a whisper. “So you decided to get away from your dangerous neighbourhood for a day, did you?”

“I beg your pardon...*dangerous*?”

“Women killing their husbands and all,” whispered Mr. Smith.

“What? Women killing their husbands? What women?”

“And babies – yes. And she’d have killed off the others if – you must know about this, Mr. Field. I hear your girl had a hand in saving the one daughter.”

Jeremiah glanced at Emma, who had heard nothing of the conversation. She was coiling her handkerchief round and round in her hands and looking toward the doorway at Jane Morgan in her brick-red skirts and black woollen mantle. The inside brim of Jane’s bonnet was filled with red and grey flowers right from the top of her ears down to her chin. Such ostentation! However, Emma felt a twinge of satisfaction knowing that at least Jane had not yet acquired her new dress. She glanced around the room at the empty seats as she moved her knees to let Jane pass.

“Good morning, Miss Field. Excuse me, please.” Jane smoothed her skirt with a sweep of her hands and sat in the fourth chair from Emma. She touched her hair on either side, then extracted a handkerchief from her embroidered bag and dabbed delicately her nose.

Emma suddenly felt very homely. She felt plain and stale. She clenched her teeth, tilted her head up, and sat straight against the back of the chair. At the very least she could *pretend* to be dignified.

It wasn't long before the parlour was filled with people and colours and scents. She smelled the new leather of the cobbler's wife's boots and the milky odour of Mrs. Fraleigh with nursing James on her lap. Emma wanted to kiss the baby on the temple and bury her nose in his belly.

The MacDonald girls sat in the corner in matching gold capes. They looked like sunflowers compared to the dour grey-and-black line-up of young people on the far side of the room. The young men sat to the right, looking like copies of a newspaper in their identical, single-breasted, broadcloth suits and clutching their wide-brimmed hats on their laps. The two sitting nearest the window were sprouting meager beards on their chins. All of the girls wore dove-grey dresses. Their black shawls had fringes of the same length. Emma wondered why they were even here at a Methodist service. She didn't recognize a single one of them.

A voice of deep conviction shattered the silence, “God's ways are...” Emma looked up to see that the voice came from a man with bushy eyebrows. “Brothers and sisters in Christ,” he intoned, “we shall begin with the singing of “Now Thank We All Our God.”

The reed organ wheezed as Mrs. Williams snapped out the first two lines as an introduction to the hymn. Everyone seemed to know when to stand and also appeared to know all of the words. Emma stood with her head down, making her mouth move in hopes that others would think she knew them too.

*Now thank we all our God,
With heart, and hands, and voices,
Who wondrous things hath done,
In whom his world rejoices.*

Emma could almost taste the sweetness in Jane's voice. It blended beautifully with her father's salty baritone. She glanced over at Jane, glad that she herself was in the back row, where only the minister could see she wasn't really singing.

*Who from our mother's arms
Hath blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love,
And still is ours today.*

“Amen,” the gathering sang and Emma looked up to see them seating themselves. She dropped onto her chair and glanced at Jane who was smoothing her skirt. Emma resolved to watch the movements of others more carefully so that she didn’t stand out.

The preacher remained on his feet.

“From the holy word of God...” He held up an enormous black Bible. “...reading from Genesis 2:1-25.”

“The creation story?” Emma wondered. “Was that in chapter two?”

“...and the Lord God planted a garden east-ward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed...” Mr. Green raised his bushy brows and thundered, ““And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone: I will make him an help meet for him.”” His voice dropped. ““...and they were both naked, and the man and woman were not ashamed.””

Emma thought she heard a muffled snicker from Jane but she didn’t dare look up. She shifted in her seat and puzzled for a moment about the absurdity of the reading. She tiptoed back to the idea of a man and woman seeing one another naked, and stopped herself short.

With purpose, the preacher turned towards the end of the Bible, and paused. He knew the eyes of all were upon him and he savoured the moment. He wanted a good show. “The New Testament reading is from I Corinthians 7, verse 9. ‘But if they have not continency, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn,’” he almost growled as he ground out the last word.

To *burn*? Emma’s face twisted in puzzlement. She looked up and saw Mr. Smith slouch slightly in self-assurance. Past him she could see another grey-haired man who seemed to do the same. Across the room the Quakers sat with heads bowed. A young couple nearest the window smirked. Everyone blushed a little. Emma dragged her thoughts back.

“...without marriage, man is a roving, restless being...the sad victim of untamed passions. Men need to seek pleasure in variety; it is wearisome for them to be confined to the home, *but*...” The preacher’s voice fell again, as though revealing a secret. “...women have the happy knack of making themselves contented at home, of creating a moral little world for themselves and their family. The popular talk is of ‘companionate marriages,’ but *I* say, in the words of the Bible, ‘it is better to marry than to burn.’” This time he pounded his large fist down on the Bible.

Emma jumped, then stole a glance at her father, but could detect nothing on his face.

“Let us pray,” boomed the minister. The chairs creaked as everyone shifted into a different position, relieved to break the tension. Emma’s head was still up as those of the others bowed. “Oh Lord our God, forgive us our *sins*...Forgive our brothers and sisters who have *refused* to follow Thy Will, *especially* those not united in Holy Matrimony...Amen!”

The congregation rose to sing the closing hymn. “Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war...”

“In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen.” The preacher blessed the faithful with the benediction. They sat again in silence until Mrs. Williams started to play a postlude on the little organ.

Jane stood up, smoothing her skirts again. “Wasn’t that powerful?” she whispered as she passed Emma. Emma’s mouth twisted in uncertainty and nervous laughter. She looked toward the ceiling.

“Powerful maybe, but I also think...,” she lowered her voice even more. “...I also think it’s rather ridiculous.”

“Righteous again, are you?” Jane rolled her eyes, swept past Emma, then stopped. “Say, did you hear about the mother of Vera Plank, that girl who came to school that day and...?”

Emma nodded and looked at her boots.

“Sounds barbaric, doesn’t it? One has to wonder how people can behave in such a fashion – killing their own kin.”

“How do you know anyone killed anyone else?”

“Mrs. Plank did – she killed her husband, then finished off her new-born baby before turning the knife on herself.”

“You don’t know that!” Emma hissed.

“Since when have you become so protective of swine?”

“They’re not swine...you know *nothing*, Jane Morgan, *nothing*.”

“I know that *you* are the ridiculous one lately, Emma Field. I don’t know what’s got into you. You are so wrapped up in righteousness you probably didn’t even notice my new gloves....”

“They are perfect for you, Jane Morgan, because they will keep your hands as cold as your heart!”

“Well, I *never*. Good *day*!”

“Come, Emma,” her father commanded. “Good day, Miss Morgan, Mrs. Morgan,” he said in a clipped voice. He nodded and turned to leave.

Emma almost tripped over her father as they hurried toward the door. Both seemed like caged wild animals looking for a bolt-hole.

“Good to have you worshipping with us!” declared the preacher at the front door as he held his hand out to Jeremiah Field. They shook hands with firmness. “And this young woman’s name?” the preacher asked.

“Emma. My daughter Emma Field,” Jeremiah mumbled. “Good day, Mr. Green.”

They were heading down the hill past the Mill Pond.

“People are so *stupid*! I *hate* them,” Emma raged. “Jane knows *nothing* about the Planks, yet she thinks she does. That preacher knows nothing either, but he *thinks* he does!”

“Anger will get you nowhere, Miss Emma Field!”

“I don’t *care*!”

“You’ve got to be more placid. Besides, what do you know about the Planks or marriage, or God for that matter?”

“I know lots.”

“You need to learn a little humility, my girl. You’ve been acting strange lately. What *do* you know about the Planks?”

“What do I know? I know that they were poor. *Very* poor. They had nothing. I told you that Vera’s hand was broken by Mr. Brown. She also...oh never mind – they took her in at the boarding school this week.”

“And you were involved in that?” Jeremiah looked at his daughter through narrowed eyes.

“Yes.”

“Why can’t you mind your own business?”

Emma didn’t answer. “Would you like to know what else I know about them?”

“Not really, but I have a feeling I should.”

“I understand that Mr. Plank has died. I surmise that he has been dying for a long time. There was something lying in the corner of their cabin...and it’s true, there *was* a baby who died, and Mrs. Plank died yesterday at the boarding school.

“Good heavens, child! Why *have* you been meddling with them?”

“It’s not meddling – it’s helping and I’ve helped because Elizabeth was helping, and Dr. Watson was too. What can be so wrong about helping people in need?”

Her father gave her no answer.

“Who do you want me to associate with, pray tell? If John Williams is too high for me – and the Planks are too low...”

“That’s right and John Williams also happens to be a young man. People will talk.”

“So is it John or the people of whom I should be afraid?”

“Both.”

“There is no winning, is there? I need to be cautious of everyone.”

“Caution is a good thing.”

“Then tell me what all of that ranting from the preacher was about today!” Emma’s voice shook. “That didn’t sound like caution. It sounded like a sledge hammer driving people into living the way in which the *preacher* approved. How can it be sinful to *not* marry? And what is continency? And why is it better to marry than to burn? Why should it be *wearisome* for a man to be tied to the home, and yet *fulfilling* for a woman? I don’t understand *any* of this! And I *hate all* of it!” She had to pause to catch her breath.

Jeremiah Field stopped and jammed his hands into the pockets of his frock coat, his face crimson. “Have you not noticed that life is hard? Life is very, very hard! You have to find ways of living that make it a little less hard. You don’t walk into messes like those of the Planks. Life will dish out enough heartache without inviting trouble like that. Life is easier when people do what they are supposed to do. It is easier to stay within your own class. It is easier being married...”

“Then why haven’t you married again?”

Jeremiah abruptly resumed walking, his head down. “How many single women have you noticed around here? Single women who aren’t Quaker and wealthy.”

“You could marry someone wealthy. That might be a way for you to get your own farm.”

“*What*, and feel ashamed for the rest of my days – taking a woman’s wealth because I couldn’t generate my own?”

“But maybe you’d be happy.”

“What’s this about happiness? Do you think that we were put on this earth to be happy? Well, you’ve got a long, hard life ahead if you think that way!”

“What makes you so certain?”

“Because I have lived much longer than you. I have seen much more than you. Your cousin Mary – Seamus’ daughter – has *died*, Emma. She died of the famine, and you are talking about being happy. If *life* isn’t even guaranteed, how can *happiness* be?”

“I’m sorry.”

“Well, so you *should* be!”

“I’m sorry about Mary too. I’m sorry for Uncle Seamus and for you too...That’s what you’ve been distracted by lately, isn’t it?”

“Yes. I don’t know how to keep us from experiencing the same thing ourselves. Since the day your mother died I have worried about my ability to raise you to adulthood. Now that you are almost an adult I don’t know what to think. We aren’t good enough for you to marry the likes of a Williams or a Hubbs. Yet if you marry someone of our standing you are likely to be homesteading in the west and you may not have a life much better than the Planks – ” Jeremiah’s voice broke with anguish.

He rubbed his forehead, cleared his throat, and continued. “And if you don’t marry at all, you are destined to live out your days exactly as you are now: at the mercy of those with money and kindness.”

After a pause, Jeremiah picked up where he had left off. “No, I think you need to fend for yourself.”

“And be a school mistress?”

“Yes.”

“But I don’t *want* to be a school mistress!”

“There you go again. It doesn’t matter what you *want* to be. It’s what you *need* to be. Widow Millbrook has her own school – though I don’t know how long she’ll be able to operate it. There are more than enough rumours about the government forcing communities to create public schools. That’s where you’ll fit in. If more children attend school they’ll need more teachers. There aren’t enough men to fill those positions – they’ll have to hire women. You won’t be paid nearly as much as the men, but it would be enough to see you to old age, or marriage. ”

“Why aren’t the women paid as well as men? That doesn’t seem fair.”

“I don’t know. Uncertainty, maybe. The trustees never know when a woman will get married and leave the school.”

He stopped again, sinking his hands back into his pockets. “Emma, why are you having such a hard time understanding that life is not fair?”

“It seems that there is no way to win, just no way.”

“It’s not about winning. It’s about surviving, and I think that this will be the best way for you to survive. As for Seamus and the rest of his family, I want to invite them to come and live with us in late spring, once there is some fresh food.”

“How many people?”

“What do you mean?”

“How many are in his family?”

“Six, at present. Why are you looking that way? I thought that anyone willing to meddle in the plight of strangers would at least be willing to help their own kin!”

They both looked up the track toward the school. The chimney of their tiny cabin poked up behind it.

Chapter XVIII

The Truth

Mr. Watson’s horse was hitched in front of their cabin. The doctor was knocking on the door.

“There you are,” he called, seeing Emma and her father at the road. “I expected that you would have been at home on such a day as this. You weren’t at the church service were you?”

“We were indeed. What can I help you with, Dr. Watson? Come in. No need to stand out here in the cold.”

“I need to speak with Emma for a moment, if I may, Mr. Field.”

“I suppose you may. It...all right. I’ll go to the barn.” He shook his head in confusion.

“Let’s go and talk to Lily, Emma. She likes a good conversation.”

Emma rubbed her fingers against her thumbs over and over again. “What is it? Nothing more has happened to the Planks, has it, Dr. Watson?”

“No, nothing more. I just wanted to thank you for what you did. It was good of you.”

“Father doesn’t think so.”

“I thought as much. You must understand that he doesn’t know the full story.”

“I know.”

“You have seen an awful lot of difficult things this last week. I am concerned that you have seen more than a young woman should. Is there anything that is bothering you about what happened? Anything that gives you nightmares?”

Emma eyed him suspiciously.

“Why are you asking that? Did someone...”

“Because I feel responsible for some of this. I want to make certain that you have not been unduly harmed.”

“How would I be harmed? I’m fine, really, I am fine.” Emma could feel her throat tightening.

“The greatest harms are those not seen, Emma. My feeling is that there is something causing you worry. Please ask me if there is. Ask me anything. You have had nightmares, haven’t you?”

Emma nodded her head. “But only ridiculous ones about Mr. Forsythe and Mr. Brown.”

“There are no ridiculous dreams, my dear. They are just dreams. If you could ask me anything, what would it be?”

“If I were to ask, you would...you might just humiliate me.”

“If I humiliate you then I am a man not worthy of your company. What do you wish to know?”

“Did I kill that baby?” she blurted out. “Did I?”

“So that is it. Ah, now I understand. No, you did not.”

“But when I hit Mrs. Plank with my shoulder, I felt the baby. Are you certain that I didn’t kill it then?”

“Emma Field, you did *not* kill the baby. I know that for certain. I know that we are not to speak of such things, but you need to know that Mrs. Plank brought the birth on herself. She had no help from anyone – good or bad. The baby was born with no one in that shack save the young boy. You did *not* kill that child. In a way, no one did. Only circumstances did. That is the complete truth.”

“You really mean that, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, thank you, Dr. Watson.” She sighed heavily.

“Thank you,” he reached out and shook her hand.

Ezra Bull, the kindly farm manager of the boarding school, was plucking the wooden hay fork from the wall when Emma entered the barn.

“Hello, Ezra Bull. Is John here?”

“Hello to thee. Thee is looking for John Williams, I suppose?”

“Yes I am. Does he do the chores on Sunday?”

The man tipped his hat back an inch and scratched his weathered forehead with his thumbnail. “He’s done his chores, but he just left for the village with the milk – not long ago. Thee isn’t a student here now, is thee?”

“No. Oh, no. I just needed to speak with Elizabeth, and with John. He’s taking the milk to Widow Christie’s, is he?”

“Yes. If thee hurries, thee should be able to catch him before thee gets to the village.” He stood holding the door open in the bright afternoon sunshine. Vapour swirled around him as the cooler, dry air mixed with the moisture of the barn.

Ezra had three boys besides John to supervise. They were much slower and sleepy in the way they went about things, but Ezra liked them just the same. John was quick to learn and even quicker at refining whatever Ezra taught him.

Take last fall, when they had made a few extra barrels for storing apples; it had been John who had told the others they needed to fit the maple staves to the metal ring and not the other way around. “That ring is going nowhere,” he had said after studying it a moment. “Work with what is flexible. You can trim the wood but you can’t trim the metal ring.”

It had taken him a day to make that barrel – the length of time it took a carpenter. “There must be a quicker way of doing this,” he’d said to Ezra that crisp September afternoon before walking home. It was at Cooper’s mill that he had discovered the machines for cutting staves.

Ezra had heard Elizabeth speak of Emma the same way the previous week. “That Emma Field should be attending school here,” she had said, shaking her head. “She’s bright and energetic, and bored by her teacher, and she’s terrified of him.”

Ezra pulled the remaining stems of hay from the wooden tynes of the fork and flung them into the manger beside the door. His hands stroked the silkiness of the worn tongs and traced the fit of each tyne in its socket. “Tenon and socket,” he thought. “Those two young people would fit together like a perfectly crafted tenon and socket.”

Emma ran right past John at the edge of the village.

“Hey!” he yelled in surprise, setting the pails of milk down. “Emma! Where are you going?”

Emma wheeled, her face as brilliant as the sun setting behind her. She danced in a circle three times, her arms over her head.

“You know, some day someone is going to tell you to be more demure and ladylike!”

“Are *you* telling me that?”

“No, and I never will. Whatever are you so happy about? Has your appointment with the henchman been called off?”

“Don’t be so smart! But as a matter of fact, it has! I didn’t kill that baby! I know that for certain!”

“I told you that.”

“I know, but I didn’t quite believe you. I wanted to, but I was still afraid. So I asked Dr. Watson...and now I know for certain. You know how sometimes you just *know* something? You can’t explain it, but you just know?”

John nodded his head and picked up the pails again. “Yes, I know that feeling well. It’s probably all turned out for the best, as awful as that sounds.”

“What do you mean?”

“Now Vera has a chance, and her brother does too.”

“I guess you’re right. Elizabeth Bowerman and the others will see that they are cared for. There was no possibility of that happening with her mother alive, was there?”

“No. No chance at all. A widow is as good as dead, especially a poor widow.”

“That is so *wrong*. That is plain *wrong*.”

“You are right about that. So what are you going to do about it?” he asked, a twinkle in his eye.

“*Do* about it? What *can* I do about it, except to try to avoid becoming a poor widow myself?”

“Plenty. You can do plenty, Emma. You already have and how old are you?”

“Fifteen.”

“Look out, world! Hey, you know what?”

“No, what?”

“You look like a different girl from the one I met here yesterday.”

“I feel like a different girl.”

Their boots made soft crunching noises as they passed the brick Meeting House.

“Wait here – I just need to take these pails to Widow Christie. I won’t be a moment.”

Emma threw her head back and took in the deepening blue of the afternoon sky. “Elizabeth is right,” she thought. “The truth does set you free.”

Chapter XIX

Smallpox

“Jane Morgan will not be present. She has the smallpox and high fevers. Those of you in the First Reader...” Mr. Brown proceeded as though he had just said the wind would be coming from the southwest today.

Smallpox! *Jane had smallpox!*

Emma looked from Mr. Brown to the door, to her feet, and back to Mr. Brown. She needed to escape, fast! Smallpox! Jane! She’d be dead before the Christmas concert – dead and lying in the Bloomfield cemetery under the hard clumps of cold dirt!

“I wonder if they bury children as deeply as adults. Do bugs and worms eat at a body when it is this cold? Will Jane be buried in her new dress?”

Abruptly she brought these thoughts to a halt, like a horse being pulled up short from a full gallop. Surely Jane would live. She *mustn’t* die.

“But maybe she’ll be blind; maybe her face will be marked like a ploughed field. Then she’ll never marry; she’ll have to live out her days as a spinster, while the family feeds and clothes and puts up with her. She’s so pretty it would be really hard for her to be disfigured, and how hard it would be for Jane, of all people, to never marry.”

All morning Emma struggled to concentrate on her lessons. The letters on her slate were tight and cramped. She was relieved that Mr. Brown stayed in his chair, hour after hour. When she had at last choked down her dry bread for dinner and Mr. Brown had dismissed the girls for recess, Emma bolted.

“Where are you going?” called Mary Victoria. “Emma! Where are you *going*?”

Emma didn’t reply. She knew she wasn’t allowed to leave the school grounds at midday, but she had to – she simply *had* to get as far away from everyone as possible.

Her father sat bolt upright in his bed in the corner.

“Oh! You’re here,” accused Emma, startled. “I didn’t think you’d be here.” She started for the door again.

“Just catching a few winks...I didn’t sleep well last night. What is it, Emma?”

“Nothing!” Emma raced out to the barn to find solitude, but it was dark inside, and felt foreign and stifling today. Besides, Father would know she was here and would scold her for missing school. She turned and fled toward the Danforth Road, glancing back over her shoulder toward the cabin. The door remained closed. Father hadn’t followed her after all.

Emma thought about the Christmas Frolic without Jane. She knew it would be a terrible evening because Jane was the one who always made it beautiful. She not only had the main part,

but she also carried every tune through the disarray of other voices. Jane was the one who supervised the decorating of the school with evergreen boughs. She looked like a Christmas decoration herself. No one looked at anyone but Jane – even when she didn't have a new dress. And now, Emma's belly felt hollow with the thought that Jane might not be there.

She turned east on the Danforth Road. Her feet dragged in the snow as she got closer to Jane's house. Emma remembered how thrilled she had been the time Jane had given her peach-coloured candles – until she learned that Jane had taken them while the candles were hanging to cool in the summer kitchen. The wicks had pulled out just as Jane had handed it to her.

"Why didn't you tie a knot in the bottom?" Emma had accused. "If you had tied a knot, the wick wouldn't have slipped through and I'd have been able to use it."

"I didn't make them – Pauline did."

"Did she give it to you then?"

"Pauline is just a servant, silly. She doesn't own anything she could give me. I thought you'd like the colour. I thought you'd *like* it!"

"I do, but I can't use it like this. What am I supposed to do – feed it to the mice?" Emma had taken the candle home and tried to rethread it, but she couldn't force the wick through the narrow tunnel. It was pretty, but it was *stolen*. "Stolen love," Emma had muttered, throwing the candles into the fire. Her father had come home shortly afterwards and had asked about the sizzling sound. "Did you throw some fat in the fire?"

"No," she had lied as the guilt of her wastefulness twisted inside her. "Just something I didn't want."

The muscles in Emma's temple relaxed for a moment. No more stolen gifts to appreciate. No need to feel inadequate. No need to explain colours. Once Jane was gone her time would be her own and she would be just fine.

Emma sped up as she walked past the Morgan house. Smoke was curling out of both chimneys. Her temples tightened; her cheeks and ears burned like embers. She heard the creak of a cart behind her and pulled her shawl over her head.

"Why, it's Emma Field! Hello Emma! How is thee today?"

Emma didn't look up but she knew Ezra Bull's voice. Her thoughts became jumbled and conflicting. She wanted him to leave her alone. She wanted him to take care of her. She wanted him to wipe away all of the nasty thoughts she had ever had about Jane. Most of all she wanted everything to be different. She wiped her wet upper lip with the back of her mitten and continued to walk.

"Emma, thee is troubled, I can see. Whoa, Bell. So thee is not going to stop. Bell and I can follow thee all the way to Picton if thee wishes. Or we can give thee a ride."

Emma's eyes narrowed with rage. She threw her shawl back. "I don't *need* a ride! I'm not going to Picton! I'm not going *anywhere*! Please leave me *alone*!" Ezra nodded and touched the brim of his hat. Bell fell into step with Emma. They passed the drive to the boarding school.

"Why didn't you turn, back there?" she demanded.

"I am coming with thee."

“You are so *stubborn!*”

“That I am,” he said softly.

Emma stopped, planting her hands firmly on her hips. “If you must know, Jane Morgan has the smallpox! She’ll likely *die* and I...” She crossed her arms across her chest, drew her shoulders up around her ears, and turned sharply away. “I had nasty thoughts of her. Nasty, *nasty* thoughts. Does *that* make you happy now?”

“No.” Ezra leaned against the backrest, the reins draped loosely in his gloved hands. Bell stood patiently, her tail swishing gently. “No. I know the power of guilt. I know it myself, Emma, and it is a fearsome thing.”

“I’m not *guilty* of anything. I didn’t give her the smallpox! I wasn’t nasty toward her! I just said that I had nasty *thoughts*.”

“Nasty thoughts. Nasty deeds. They aren’t so far apart.”

“Why are you people *always* so righteous?...Oh my...that’s what Jane said to me just last week. She told me I am always so righ... but I’m not. I’m *hideous!*”

The dam burst. Emma stood sobbing. Ezra remained in the cart. Finally she was quiet, her face tight and salty. Ezra pulled off his glove, leaned over, and touched her shoulder.

“Will thee come with me now, Emma?”

Miserably she nodded her head. Wisps of hair clung to her wet chin. Ezra slid over to make room for her on the seat.

“I just want to make it better, Ezra. I want to be forgiven and I want to make her better. I don’t *want* her to *die*.” Tears washed her anguished face.

“I know,” he replied gently. “And there are ways of doing something about that.” His arm formed a protective wing around her. “Giddy-up,” he commanded Bell. They turned back toward Bloomfield and the boarding school. At the barn door he tied Bell to the hitching post and took Emma by her mittened hand. “Come here, child. Let’s go inside for a minute where it is warmer.”

It was dark and moist inside this barn too. Emma felt safe. Ezra turned over the tin bucket against the wall and motioned for Emma to sit upon it. He crouched beside her.

“Emma, close thy eyes.” She did. Her eyelids were heavy and scratchy. “What does thee hear?”

Emma listened for a moment. “I hear the cows chewing sideways. I hear the rustle of the straw.”

“Anything else?”

“The sow making mother-noises to her piglets.”

“Anything else?”

She hesitated, her eyelids fluttering a moment. “When everything else stops, I can hear a high hum. It stays the same, but it’s there. I don’t know what it is.”

“Silence maybe? What does thee smell?”

“Barn smells.”

“The likes of...?”

“Hay; and cow dung and the cows’ bodies and their breath. They are all similar, only their breath is sweeter than their dung. And I smell the pigs, but that is an easy smell. There is a faint smell of grain, but I have a hard time telling the difference between the smell of grain and the smell of mice.”

“Think about Jane now, Emma. What sounds would she hear at her house right now?”

Emma’s eyelids flew open. “You are *crazy!*”

“That I am not. Close thy eyes. Thee will see and hear more that way.”

“She’s...she’s hearing the squeak of the rocking chair. Her mother is most likely sitting beside her, rocking. Her brothers are no doubt fighting somewhere in the house – they are always fighting. And maybe she can hear her sisters speaking quietly. And she can probably hear her mother’s stomach rumbling just like yours.” She smiled but kept her eyes closed.

“What is she smelling?”

“The sourness of her own breath. Her mother. Maybe supper cooking on the kitchen stove.”

“Then, she’s alive?”

Emma nodded.

“Does thee want her to know that thee loves her and that thee asks her forgiveness?” A guilty look swept across Emma’s face. “What is it, Emma?”

“I suppose I do love Jane...but sometimes I don’t.”

“I think it’s that way with everyone. We hate the same people we love - sometimes both at the same time.”

“Really?” Now a wave of relief washed Emma’s face.

“Right now it wouldn’t be safe for thee to tell her how sorry thee is in person; but we don’t always need to be there in person to communicate with others.”

“I don’t understand.”

“I don’t either. But I do know that when I sit in silence and ‘hold a person up to the Light’ and just think deeply about them, we both feel better. How does thee feel about Jane right now? Does thee have any love for her?”

“Yes – lots of love.”

“Then hold her up to the Light. ‘Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness, and bearing one another, and forgiving one another, and not laying accusations one against another, but praying one for another, and helping one another up with a tender hand.’”

Emma’s eyelids fluttered open again. “You *are* crazy, you know.”

“I may be, but if I am then there are a lot of other crazy people too. Isaac Pennington, a Quaker, said those words over a hundred and sixty years ago.”

Emma nodded slowly. “I feel a little better, but I still feel...I still feel as if I need to ask her forgiveness. I haven’t been nice to her this last week. And I said some things that made the other girls annoyed with her too. And I’m very, very sorry now.”

“I know. Hold her up to the Light.” Emma closed her eyes again and thought of Jane being held up to a brilliant white light. Gradually the muscles of her cheek and jaw eased.

“That feels *so* much better. Do you *really* think it will work, Ezra?”

“It worked for thee didn’t it?”

Emma nodded her head. There was silence. Then Ezra asked, his voice at a lower pitch, “Was thee sad thinking about a future without Jane?”

“Yes.” But the guilty look was back.

“Yes and no?”

She nodded again and fresh tears bathed her eyes.

“And would the ‘no’ be because of some of the moments in the past?”

She nodded faster and the tears again streamed over her pale cheeks.

“But does thee see, Emma...the past has some sad bits and some happy ones too. The future is the same in your mind...but right here, right now, the cows are stepping from side to side looking for someone to milk them, and the mice are waiting for us to leave them in peace, and just up the road there is a girl who, despite her fever, feels the love you have sent her.”

“Hmm. That’s *so* nice, Ezra Bull.”

They sat in silence. Emma absently watched a lone fly slowly creeping along a piece of straw.

“That fly looks as if it’s tiptoeing.”

“Do flies have toes?”

“Oh, you know what I mean.”

Chapter XX

Making Right

By the time Emma pressed the handle of the latch she knew what she needed to do. She threw a piece of wood on the fire without stirring the coals, added a dipper of water to the pot of stew, and hung the pot on the crane. She was grateful she didn’t need to peel more potatoes tonight too. Tomorrow she would put salt pork on to boil before she left for school. She unfolded the settle just enough to find the bundle of fabric Mrs. Henderson had given her. She glanced at the table, then took the fabric to her father’s bed in the corner and tenderly rearranged the colours.

This must be how God feels, she thought as she cut and stitched, ironed and rearranged, the hours flying by. Her father returned just as she was poking the last of some carded wool into the side seams of the doll’s body.

“There you are! Why did you leave in such a hurry earlier? Whatever are you making a doll for?”

“It’s for Jane,” Emma replied without looking up.

“Jane? Doesn’t she have enough worldly possessions?”

“Yes, she does, but this is different.”

“I see.”

“Can we eat now, Father? I want to get as much done on this tonight as I can.”

Father and daughter quickly ate the last of the stew and Emma put the dirty dishes in the dishpan. “I forgot to put water on to boil,” she explained. “I will take care of them in the morning. That’s all right, isn’t it, Father?”

“Yes.” He took a candle from the candle box. “That firelight isn’t bright enough for you to be sewing by. There’s no need to ruin those eyes before you have a chance to become a school mistress!”

“Thank you. I really want to make this for Jane.”

“That is quite apparent,” he said as he leaned toward the fire. He felt rather pleased with himself today. He had done the right thing, mailing that letter to Seamus.

Emma worked on the doll until long after her father had crawled beneath his fabric-covered blankets.

“Leave them there,” he’d said. “It would do me good to sleep beneath a rainbow.”

Emma’s eyes felt dry and tight. She whipstitched the last seam and placed the colourful doll on the windowsill above the settle before wetting her finger and extinguishing the candle flame. She was too tired to change into her nightclothes.

Emma bolted from bed as soon as her father stirred in the morning.

“What a sleep! This must be how a leprechaun feels every morning! Will you leave that fabric there?”

“What? Oh. See what I made? I finished it last night! Isn’t she beautiful?”

“So that’s why the candle is so low. We maybe shouldn’t put a candle in the window this Christmas; we’ve hardly enough to carry us through to next fall, though it won’t be long before the days start to lengthen again,” Jeremiah responded, running his fingers through his hair. “The sleeves are a little short, aren’t they?”

“They are *supposed* to be that way. That’s the latest fashion, Father.”

“Oh. And they are a little...scooped. Is that the latest fashion too?”

“Yes! And you call that ‘flared.’ See the lace under-sleeves which go to the wrist?”

“That doll will never do a day’s work in her life, will she?”

“No. Do you have a tiny piece of paper I may have, please?”

Jeremiah rummaged through the cupboard and held up a thumb-size piece of nearly brown paper.

“Perfect. Thank you.” Emma carefully wrote three words on the paper and pinned it to the doll’s dress.

Her father looked over her shoulder. “‘I’m sorry, Emma.’ Why did you write *that*?”

“Because I needed to.” Emma threw her shawl over her shoulders and raced out to the privy just as the sunlight hit the windows of the boarding school.

Chapter XXI

Christmas Frolic

Weeks had passed since Jane had taken sick. Her brothers said she was still alive, but offered little more information. Emma found herself being completely swept along with preparations for the concert.

A new girl, Mary Simpson, had moved to the farmhouse kitty-corner to Jane's. She and her sister, Amanda, had begun to attend school the week after Jane became ill. Mr. Brown had directed Mary to sit in Jane's spot on the end of the bench. Emma was happy to share the lesson book with her. She even invited Mary to join her and the Williams girls on the rocks at the edge of the schoolyard. Emma was surprised at how easy and comfortable it felt to welcome them into their fold.

The gap left by Jane in the Christmas Frolic had been filled in various ways. Anna Williams had started memorizing the words to "O Holy Night" the week Jane learned she had the smallpox. Emma was sewing costumes.

Now Emma stood as straight as an elm tree against the back wall of the classroom the night of the Christmas Frolic. The room seemed an ocean away from its daytime starkness. It was as full as a belly after Christmas dinner. The men smelled of cattle and sheep, the women of food and woodsmoke. Emma looked from one candle to the next around the room. Each seemed like a little bonfire against the shiny sconces.

Mr. Brown's cheeks and ears were scarlet as he turned to the audience. He looked as if he was going to burst. Emma felt a twinge of kindness for the man. He cleared his throat and looked around the room.

"And now for the breathtaking song, 'O Holy Night,' sung by Miss Anna Williams."

Three rows ahead, Anna stood up nervously. Emma watched as John squeezed her hand and swung his legs to the side to let her pass. Mr. Brown tapped the tuning fork on the desk to give her a note.

*O Holy Night,
The stars are brightly shining...*

Emma shifted in her well greased boots. She knew they were shabby but tonight that didn't matter because, for the first time in her life, the rest of her glowed. She tugged on the edging of the filmy white sleeves about her wrists. She dropped her chin to inspect the lacy layers of the collar and the pelerine about her shoulders and breasts. The stitching of the collar was far too...irregular and bunched; suitable for Father's shirts but not for fine lace. And there were far too many seams in the pelerine – it had been tricky matching all of the scraps together. But none of that mattered tonight. "This must be what Jane feels...felt...like, all of the time," she thought with a pang.

O Night...

Anna took a deep breath.

Divine...

It sounded as if she had a scarf wrapped tightly around her throat; but Anna *had* reached the high note, the climax of the song.

O night when Christ was born.

The crowd began to clap before Anna had even finished. She looked proudly toward her family, her whole face shining.

Smoothing her cotton skirts, Emma straightened her back, and nodded at Mary Victoria on the far side of the schoolhouse. Mary Victoria bit her lip and took a breath. The two girls led the other children to the front, where they lined up and faced the audience.

Emma looked at her father, stiff and awkward, sitting beside Caleb Williams. She scanned the room for the face she knew wouldn't be there, wishing Mrs. Henderson could see her dress; she would know it was as big an achievement as Anna's singing. Emma brought her mind back to where it belonged and the girls began singing.

*See amid the winter's snow,
Born for us on earth below;
See the tender Lamb appears,
Promised from eternal years.*

The boys joined in.

*Hail, thou ever blessed morn;
Hail, redemption's happy dawn;
Sing...*

Mr. Brown had said this part was to be sung in harmony. Emma smiled. It sounded more like chaos to her, especially with Peter Minaker squeaking like a rusty hand pump behind her. She wondered how anyone could sound so normal when he spoke, yet so squeaky when he sang.

It was the girls' part again: *Lo, within a manger lies*. Emma cast her eyes around the room as she sang, until John Williams's teeth gleaming in the candlelight caught her attention. He was looking straight at her.

Emma looked away, then glanced over her shoulder. Peter's face was as red as Mr. Brown's. His brows were knit together and there were beads of sweat on his brow. *He who built the starry skies*. Peter joined in with a sound like metal on metal. *He who throned in height sublime*. Emma looked back at John. His shoulders were shaking with laughter and he ducked his head behind Mrs. Simpson's hat. Emma could only see the outer edges of John's frock coat for the remainder of the carol.

Samuel Barker stood up and took a deep breath. “‘Maud,’ by Alfred Tennyson,” he announced. Shifting his feet, he cleared his throat, swallowed, cleared his throat again, and began to recite. “‘A sad astrology, the boundless plan. That makes you tyrants in your iron skies...’”

Samuel’s voice sounded like a child banging on one note of a piano. His eyes fixed, he was staring straight at the wood stove as though willing it to explode and free him from his sentence. Emma smiled and again glanced in John’s direction. He had shifted to the right to see around the plumes on Mrs. Simpson’s hat. His smile was broad, but he wasn’t shaking now.

Finally the recitation was over and Mr. Brown stepped to the front. His ears had faded from red to rose.

“I now invite you, the members of our community, to join with us in singing ‘Silent Night! Holy Night!’” He closed his eyes and began to sing. Everyone joined in. The room filled with melody.

The song finished, Mr. Brown gestured for the families to sit down. He gave one final nod of his head to the students. They filed to the rear of the classroom before slipping back to their families. Emma stood beside the door, waiting for her father.

“You sang beautifully, Emma,” John said as he slid past her, one hand clutching his hat, the other a pair of dark grey mittens. “Especially with the competition you had!” His eyes crinkled.

Emma laughed, shaking her head, “So *that* was what you were laughing at? I thought you were too far away to notice. He makes me laugh every time, that poor boy.”

“Oh no, his red face helped identify him. It mustn’t have been easy for you to stay in tune. Good job. And your new dress is beautiful too,” he said as he looked at it appreciatively.

“It’s not really a new...” Her face was screwed up in an apology. “but thank you, John.” She curtsied slightly, smiling, and looked at her boots. She felt flattered and embarrassed at the same time. No one had ever told her she looked beautiful before. No wonder Jane took all this so seriously. It felt so...good.

“Must be going. Good Evening, Emma.”

“Good Evening.” Emma reached for her shawl, still smiling. She hardly needed it, her body felt so warm.

“You look just lovely, Emma.” Mrs. Morgan straightened from buttoning young Henry’s coat. “I will tell Jane as soon as I get home. She *will* be pleased.”

“It wasn’t the same without her, Mrs. Morgan – it wasn’t *nearly* as pretty as Jane has always made it. The decorations, the singing – it was all rather plain. We didn’t even have a kissing ball this year! How *is* she? How is Jane?”

Mrs. Morgan fingered the oval brooch at her throat. “She’s much better, Emma, thank you. And she very much appreciated the doll you made her. That was most thoughtful of you. She is better, but she’ll never be the same. Her face will never...” Mrs. Morgan’s eyes brimmed with tears.

“May I come to see her? Would it be all right?”

“You may come any time. The risk of infection is over. Yes, that would be a good idea. Do come. Your company would do Jane a lot of good. She’s dreading the social season ahead. It will be so difficult for her.”

“I will be by in the next few days. Please say hello to her for me, Mrs. Morgan.”

“I shall. Good evening, Emma. Come along now, Henry.”

Jeremiah had just finished shaking Mr. Brown’s hand.

“Thank you, thank you. Yes, they gave an acceptable performance. I am glad it is over with though. I shall be glad to return to civilization for the season,” said the teacher.

“You are going to Picton?”

“Heavens, no. Kingston. I’d hardly call a backward smattering of houses like Picton, civilization.”

“She’s civilized to me, Mr. Brown. Enjoy your holiday. Good evening.”

Her father nodded at Emma’s dress. “That sure is fancy, Miss Emma Field. Mrs. Henderson gave you all of that, did she? I hope that she doesn’t want payment for it.”

Emma sighed. “She doesn’t, but I want to bake something for her. She’s so busy, I don’t know how she has any time to do any baking for herself.”

“Be judicious with that flour now. That bag has to see us through to August.”

“I know,” she sighed again. “Couldn’t he stop worrying about costs and provisions, just once? “but I can’t think of any other way to thank Mrs. Henderson, Father. Mrs. Morgan said that Jane is better but her face is disfigured. She said that Jane would welcome a visit from me.”

“Get your work done first.”

“I know. I will.”

Emma felt like a just-out-of-the-oven cake sinking in a cold draft.

Chapter XXII

Jane after Smallpox

“Jane will be right with you, Miss Emma,” said Pauline. “But you mustn’t let her see that you are shocked. She’s not the beauty she once was, and she’s terribly conscious of it.”

“Don’t worry, I won’t.” Emma sat on the nearest end of the sofa. The parlour was chilly.

“My apologies about the lack of heat. I haven’t had the stove on for long. If you would prefer to be somewhere warmer, just come to the kitchen. The boys are so noisy. I thought that you and Jane might enjoy a little privacy. Tea, Emma?”

“Yes, thank you. Oh, hello Jane.” Emma rose slowly and moved toward the doorway, where Jane was standing with her hands shielding her face.

“Hello, Emma. Now don’t tell me I look fine, because I know I don’t!”

“All right, I won’t.”

Emma looked at Pauline who asked, “Would you like tea, Jane? Emma is having a cup.”

“Yes, Pauline, I would. You’re not running away, Emma, now that you see how disfigured I look?”

“No, of *course* not. Don’t be *silly*, Jane. You don’t look...all right...you look different. Can I say that?”

“*No*. Don’t even *look* at me.”

“I’ll get the tea.” Pauline brushed past Emma.

“But how can I visit with you if I can’t look at you?”

“Oh, you’re *right*. Here, I’ll close my eyes and you take a good look while I can’t see your face. Say what you have to say, then say no more, all right?” She lowered her hands.

“Oh, *Jane*. Does it hurt?”

“Not really. It’s just tight and a little itchy.”

“Is your whole body like that?”

“Yes,” the girl said in a small voice.

“I’m *sorry*, Jane.”

“Sorry about *what*?” Jane asked defensively.

“Sorry that this has happened to you. You were always so...”

“Just *say* it.”

“Well, you were always so pretty and that mattered so much to you...and you still *are* pretty, it’s just that it isn’t the same, and I am sorry about that. I am homely enough – it wouldn’t have done me any harm to...”

“Then you’d be truly homely! At least this way we’re closer to being equal.” Jane laughed harshly. Emma looked at her feet. “Mother said that you made yourself a dress and that it was lovely. Did Mrs. Henderson help you with it?”

“She did. It’s not new – just modified and it’s not very well sewn – not nearly as pretty as your dress will be, but it’s nice just the same.

“I’d like to see it.”

“Well, you will...That is, if there is a wedding dance with one of the weddings – and Father and I are invited.”

“Well, I still *won’t* see it then.”

“Why on earth not?”

“You think I am going to a dance looking like *this*!” Jane cried.

“But you don’t look terribly badly!”

“I *know* what I look like and that’s bad enough for me. I *do* have some pride, you know! Less all the time, but I still have a little.”

“What if someone asked you to go? Would you go then?”

“No one is going to ask a girl with a face that looks like bloodied tree bark! Why do you ask? I have never known *you* to care about such things.”

“Yes, but I never had a new dress to wear either.” Emma laughed.

“And now that you have one you want to drag your disfigured friend along with you!”

“No...That’s not it...At least, I don’t *think* so. I’m sorry, Jane. I just always think of you as being so confident. I didn’t think this would destroy your confidence. What about going and we could leave after the first two dances if you aren’t having a good time.”

“Oh, that’s such a *big* help!”

“Well, think about it. At least you haven’t lost your spirit, Jane. You haven’t really changed a bit.”

“That’s not what the potential beaux will think!”

“The right beau will.”

“Oh, *there* you go again.”

“Have you got your new dress yet?”

“Yes and no. Mother collected it from Mrs. Henderson, but I haven’t tried it on yet.”

“Well, try it on *now*! Where is it?”

“It’s no use, Emma. I’ll feel even worse than I do in this house dress.”

“No you won’t. I’m going to get it.” Emma darted from the room and nearly collided with Pauline and the tea tray.

“I’m sorry, Pauline, but I want to get Jane’s new dress and have her try it on.” She leaned forward and whispered, “I think it will cheer her up. Could you please get it for us?” Emma still felt awkward asking an adult to do anything for her, but it was such a big house there was no telling where the dress might be. In her own cabin there were only two doors and two pegs...and one dress.

“I have biscuits in the oven, but I dare say this will take me but a moment. Here. Please take this to Jane.”

Emma returned to the parlour bearing the tea tray.

“I’m *not* trying it on, you know.”

“You don’t have to then. Here, let me pour you some tea. Make sure that I’m doing this right – we don’t have a tea pot, or cups and saucers, for that matter; but I would like to learn how to do this properly.”

“Hold the lid in place or...” Before Jane could demonstrate, the lid tumbled onto the table, hot water splashing on Emma’s hands.

“Yow! All right, Jane. I’m sorry. Tell me what to do, one step at a time, and I will listen to you.” She blew on her fingers and picked up the lid, which had rolled off the table and over near the sofa.

“You really have a lot to learn, haven’t you? Put the lid back on. Hold it in place with these fingers of your left hand, like this. Pick up the pot with your right hand. Look at it – you must *always* look at a pot of hot tea. That’s it. Now arch your wrists like this. No, you’re too close to the cup, the tea will splash over the other side. I had no idea this was complicated – you make it look so hard.”

“Haven’t you noticed that it’s that way with everything? Mrs. Henderson makes sewing a dress look effortless because she’s done it for so long, yet it’s really awkward working with fine fabric. Is this enough in the cup? Is it all right to have so many bubbles in it?”

“Yes, that’s good luck. The more bubbles, the more luck comes your way,” replied Jane, handing the cup to Emma.

“No, this cup is for you – you can have the luck. I forgot to put the milk in first. Darn. Your mother always does that first, doesn’t she?”

“Yes. She says that the china doesn’t stain as easily, and the tea won’t crack the china and it tastes better, but I don’t think it makes any difference. Now, ask me if I would like a little sugar.”

Pauline hastily put the dress on the chair inside the door. “There you are, ladies. I must get to those biscuits before they burn.” She hustled back down the hall.

“She needn’t be so careless with it!” Jane said.

“It’s *beautiful*. Oh, *Jane*, it looks like real gold – not that I’ve ever seen real gold. It’s the shade of candlelight. It’s shiny like that too.”

“Iridescent, remember?”

“Yes, it’s iridescent. It’s just beautiful, Jane. Try it on. *Please* do try it on. I’ll step into the hall.”

“Look at the sleeves! I think they are even wider than Mrs. Smith’s.” Jane pursed her lips. “All right,” she sighed. “You step into the hall and don’t let those boys in.”

“I won’t.” Emma pulled the door shut behind her. She smiled and leaned against the door frame. She couldn’t believe how good it felt to have Jane back in her life. It seemed as if things had changed and she felt a shift in power between them. It felt more like being on a seesaw balanced by two people of similar weight.

“I’m ready. Come on in.”

Emma opened the door just a crack and peeked in. Then she swung it so hard it banged against the wall. “Oh, *Jane*. You look *beautiful*! You look *golden*!”

The sunlight, streaming through the two front windows, lit the red carpet at Jane’s feet, then bounced up and surrounded Jane with the glow of a maple tree in its finest autumn foliage. Emma dropped to the chair inside the door. “You have *no* idea how *beautiful* you look, Jane,” she said breathlessly.

“Beautiful, I rather doubt, but I’d like to see it in a looking glass just the same. It *feels* beautiful. Let’s go to Mother’s room, there’s a glass...”

“No! Don’t leave. Stay *right* there. The light from that window is *perfect*. I’ll get the glass and bring it to you!”

“You’re crazy!” Jane was smiling now.

“You’ve told me *that* before!”

“You’ll need help. Go and ask the boys to carry it for you.”

“Don’t move. I’ll be right back!”

Emma raced to the door at the end of the hallway and knocked softly. She could hear the boys jostling one another. No answer. She knocked a little louder. Still no answer, so she opened the door to the kitchen. Jane’s brothers were stamping their boots on the mat at the side door.

“Is Pauline here? Oh, hello, Mrs. Morgan.”

“Hello, Emma. Lovely to see you. I’m sorry, I’ve been so busy with this wedding coming up. Pauline said that you were here.”

“Jane’s tried on her new dress. She looks beautiful in it – and very happy too. She’d like to see herself in it in your looking glass. But there is a heavenly glow from the sun right where she is and the light accentuates the dress, and not her face. May we bring a looking glass to her?”

“Well, I don’t know. The largest looking glass we have is on my dressing table, in our bedchamber, upstairs. The glass is attached to the table. It would be very tricky to bring it all downstairs. Are you sure that she can’t just go upstairs?”

“Yes. Andrew, would you be able to help me carry it down – if that’s suitable, Mrs. Morgan? It really would cheer her up!”

“Certainly. Andrew, away you go, but do be careful. Boys! Come here for a moment. Andrew, see if the mirror can be taken off the table. Just leave your boots on – they are dry. I’ll be up in a moment.”

“Quickly, Andrew,” Emma commanded, “a cloud might come across the sun.”

Andrew raced up the blue-and-white carpeted stairs two at a time. Emma rushed behind him. At the top they swung around the banister and headed for Mr. and Mrs. Morgan’s bedchamber. It, too, was at the front of the house – and was bathed in the same light as the parlour.

“Oh!” Emma stopped short in the doorway. She had never seen the bedchamber of another person before. Suddenly she felt embarrassed for being so bold. It was *so pretty*. So very pretty. And the bed against the far wall was so high it even had *steps*, three little steps. It was draped in wide curtains which hung to the floor and matched both the gathered fabric at the bottom of the bed and the curtains on the windows. There was a faint, sweet smell to the room. “Maybe I shouldn’t be here,” she said. She bit her lip.

“You are so energetic, you young...what’s the problem?” said Mrs. Morgan, catching her breath as she came and stood behind Emma.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t realize I was being so bold. I didn’t know. I didn’t know your bedchamber would be so *beautiful*. The cover on the bed – it’s so snow-white and smooth and...”

“Have you never seen a Marseilles spread? It is beautiful, isn’t it? Come and look at it more closely. Can you see the floral pattern? That is something new. Most have diagonals or waves or diamonds. It’s professionally made, as you can see.” Emma’s fingertips floated across the surface of the fine spread.

“The looking glass is attached to the base. I don’t think we can easily take it off,” said Andrew. Emma, still lost in her awe of the bedspread, looked at him as though she had never seen him before. Then she noticed the light on the indigo carpeting again.

“I was thinking that you probably slept at the back of the house, closer to the kitchen or I’d never have suggested...The light is the same here as it is in the parlour. If we might move the dressing table over just slightly it will be in line with the light and the doorway. Jane could come up here and look in the glass. This is such a beautiful room, Mrs. Morgan. But how do you ever close your eyes in something so pretty?”

Mrs. Morgan laughed. “You know, I once thought it was beautiful too, but now I think of it as cold. I spend as little time in here as possible, and it’s always in the dark, with the curtains drawn around the bed. But you are right. It *is* very pretty. Cold, but pretty.” Emma could see Mrs.

Morgan's breath fanning out with every word. Andrew grunted as he tried to lift the table by himself.

"What's taking you so long?" came Jane's voice from the doorway.

"Stay right there, Jane. Close your eyes for a moment. Andrew, let's move this just slightly. Jane, take my hand and step forward – straight forward; you won't hit anything; five steps. One, two..." she instructed. "Now open them!"

"Oh my! Oh my, oh my, oh my! Isn't that the most beautiful thing you have ever seen?"

"I'm going!" announced Andrew. No one noticed.

"It *is* beautiful and so are you, Jane." Mrs. Morgan's fingertips caressed her lips. She reached out and felt the fabric of Jane's sleeves.

"Who would have *thought!*" Jane beamed. She turned and looked over her right shoulder at her reflection.

"So you are going to attend the wedding dance?" asked Emma.

"Of *course* she is!" insisted Mrs. Morgan. "Her own brother is getting married in a matter of days."

"Yes, I will go," added Jane quietly, with half a smile.

"Good!" said Emma.

Chapter XXIII

Christmas

Jeremiah allowed his daughter to light a fresh candle before she settled into bed on Christmas Eve.

"You should have named me Mary, Father. Isn't it supposed to be "the Mary" in the family who snuffs out the candle each Christmas morning?"

"That it is. But the snuffing out isn't what's important; it's the lighting."

"To welcome Mary and Joseph?"

"So they say. But I rather doubt they'll turn up. Your Uncle Seamus, on the other hand...he may be here this spring."

"Oh?"

"Goodnight, Emma," he said, abruptly turning toward his bed.

"But... Goodnight, Father."

Emma awoke on Christmas morning just as her father stepped out into the darkness to take care of the chores. The candle had burned out. Only a distorted mound of cold wax remained in the holder. Sleepily she unwound her nightdress from around her legs and stumbled toward the table, where a goose hung on the spit in the shiny reflector oven. She hoisted it and placed it over the edge of the fire. On the crane she hung a pot of water for boiling the plum pudding.

By the time her father returned from the barn the smell of roasting meat was just starting to seep into the room. "It is such a shame that something so good as a Christmas goose is an English tradition!" He laughed as he hung his coat on the peg inside the door.

Just as the sun began to shine in the west window, Emma and her father sat down to a table practically covered with the roasted goose, the black pot of freshly cooked potatoes, carrots, and parsnips, and the equally black, heavy plum pudding. They ate in silence.

"That was a fine meal, Emma," he said when they were finished. "As fine as you'd get anywhere in the district. We don't do too badly, do we?"

"I would have thought that the Coopers would have invited us for Christmas dinner."

"They did, but I told them we were quite content on our own."

"Why did you do that?"

"We're quite content, aren't we?"

"I suppose; but sometimes it would be nice to be in a house where there was a mother and grandmother."

"You don't need a mother and grandmother. You put on a fine spread yourself."

Emma looked at the fire. "You don't understand," she said in a small voice.

"No, probably not," Jeremiah replied, patting his belly with his big hands. "Oh, it feels good to be so full and to know that I don't have to go outside for a little while yet. Look how cloudy it's become. And the snow is dripping off the roof too." He thrust his plate to the centre of the table and stood up. "I can hardly keep these eyes open," he said, rubbing them and moving toward his bed. "I'm just going to rest them for a few minutes before chores."

Emma sighed deeply, pushed herself from the table, and set about cleaning up the remains of their Christmas dinner. She drained the grease into the crock and before she had scraped the pan clean, her father's breathing had turned to a soft, rhythmic whistle. Emma wiped her hands on her apron and sat down heavily on her folded settle. She curled her arms around her knees and watched the water droplets play along the edge of the roof.

"They're like the keys on an accordion," she thought. "Someone's fingers are silently playing the shingles on the roof. Dip, drop, dippity, do..." Emma smiled as she thought about the Christmas Frolic. She could still hear Samuel Barker's monotone recitation of "Maud." She smiled as she thought how painful Peter Minaker's singing was; even now she could just see John Williams's smile. Watching the water droplets, the need to cry welled up in her. She didn't know why; she just felt very, very sad.

There was a rustle from the bed; the whistling had stopped. Emma looked over her shoulder. Her father was rubbing his eyes, looking confused in that middle-of-the-day way. "I must have fallen asleep," he muttered, rolling onto his right side and pulling the grey blanket up under his chin. He looked as if he wanted to be folded back into sleep again.

Emma reached over to the wooden bucket at the end of the bench. She dipped her fingertips into the water and slowly raised them to her eye level. One by one the drops collected on the

ends of her fingers and fell into the glassy surface beneath. She dipped her fingers again. The circles in the water were so perfect.

“Can I do that too?” came her father’s gravelly voice from the warmth of his bed.

“No, it’s much too difficult,” she retorted with a smile. “Father, who is the oldest person you know?”

“Hmm...hmm...Widow Young. Yes, I think it would be Widow Young.”

“How old is she?”

“I don’t know. I don’t think that she knows either.”

“She doesn’t *know*? How is that *possible*? Doesn’t she have a birthday every year, the same as everyone else?”

“Uh–huh, but she came here as a Loyalist back when there was nothing here but bush, and lake, and wild animals, and Indians passing by in their canoes. One year rolled into another and no one kept track.”

“Who else? Who is the second oldest person you know?”

“Hmm...Jessie Way, I do believe. Why do you ask?”

“No particular reason. Why are all of the oldest people women? How old are you, Father?”

“Which question do you want answered first? The answers are ‘33’ and ‘I don’t know.’ Or, it’s ‘I don’t know’ and ‘33.’”

Tears stung her eyes. “I feel so sad, Father. I don’t know why. I really don’t.”

“Then think of something cheerful and the sadness will go away. Or take a nap.”

Emma rolled her eyes. “That’s your cure for *everything* and it’s so *boring*! I feel like *doing* something. I feel so restless, but it’s so grey and miserable out there,” she said, standing and stretching her arms above her head. “I think I’ll only feel worse if I go out in that slush, but I can’t stay in here another moment. You’d like a hand with the chores tonight, wouldn’t you? I’ll be back before then.”

“Certainly, but don’t rush. I’ll nap just a little longer. This feels so pleasant here. I don’t know why you can’t enjoy it.”

Emma set out to the west, her arms wrapped around herself. She passed the Williamses’ house. There were over a half-dozen bobsleds and a lone cutter parked to the northeast of the house. “Hmph!” Emma scowled, thinking about her father asleep in the cabin. She kept walking: past the last of the cleared fields, through the woods and up the rise of the ridge, and past Benjamin Hubbs’s cleared fields. Finally she turned left onto the West Lake road. She wanted to be near water; a huge mass of rolling water, but she knew that West Lake would be frozen over and Lake Ontario was too far for her to walk. She grew even more restless.

Where the road crossed Trout Creek, Emma went toward the spillway of the mill. This water would have to do and she sat on the cold rocks to the south. She could feel the dampness of the creek seeping into her bones. The cattails fanned in quiet swishes in the marsh behind her. A snuffle interrupted the swishing, then a snort. Emma wheeled around. Further up the creek, a huge black bear lumbered over a willow stump.

“Don’t run,” Emma commanded herself. “Don’t run, just keep looking at it, and if it comes your way make a lot of noise. Don’t run!”

Frightened now, she quietly picked up a branch which had fallen onto the rocks beside her. The bear hadn’t seen her. Emma made her way stealthily back up the long slope, keeping the animal in sight. At the edge of the field she broke into a run. She hesitated just long enough in front of Hubb’s cabin to determine that all of the hoof and footprints in the snow were headed toward the road, then ran the rest of the way to the Williamses’ house. Breathing heavily, she pounded on the door. Daniel swung it open.

“A bear!” Emma panted out. “There’s a bear in Mastin’s swamp – not far from the mill!”

“A bear? Are you sure? Not at this time of year, that’s...Father, John, there’s a bear in Mastin’s swamp! The smoothbore – do you still have that?” Daniel took charge. “Bring the shotgun too. We’ll need a rifle too. Uncle Wynett – go to the Coopers’, will you? Uncle Nicholas – I’ll take your horse! What would a bear be doing out this time of year?”

He turned toward Emma. “Show us where it is. Hurry.”

“She can come with me!” John shouted as he raced toward the horses tethered amongst the trees behind the house. He slipped the reins over the neck of one of the horses, hoisted Emma onto its back, then jumped on behind her. They were the first to reach the West Lake road.

“I think we can ride as far as the mill,” Emma said over her shoulder. “The bear was to the east of the mill, amongst those willows. It was heading up the creek. The wind is still out of the southwest. I don’t think it will smell us from there.” They rode down the slope to the mill, tied the horse to the fence, and crept along the creek bed.

“There it is!” whispered John, pointing. “See; way up the creek, past that second bend. I think we’d better swing around a little to the north.” Emma could see two men on horseback coming across Hubbs’s fields. Her feet were numb. Her heart pounded.

Daniel rode up beside them. “Emma, you’d better stay here. This isn’t the safest place to be without a gun.”

Emma shot him a fiery glance, pulling wind-swept hairs from her mouth.

“I don’t have a gun either,” said John. “She’ll be fine with me.”

“Then at least stay low. Stay back too. No noise either!”

John rolled his eyes. Emma grinned and looked to the edge of Hubb’s field where she could see that the two men were Obadiah Cooper and John’s Uncle Wynett. They climbed over the rail fence and, taking long, careful strides, joined John’s father and his uncle, William Case.

John put his hands on his hips. “There is no use going any closer,” he whispered. “I wish I’d grabbed that smoothbore before Daniel – he’s a terrible shot!”

The two watched as the men crept cautiously toward the creek, their breath making puffs of vapour. Suddenly everyone but Obadiah Cooper stopped. They raised their guns. But Obadiah moved forward as smoothly as a duck on water. Finally he, too, stood still and he raised the rifle.

The bear caught the human scent and looked up. Obadiah aimed and fired. The bear fell dead.

“Let’s go!” said Emma and the two raced down the slope to where the others had gathered around Obadiah.

“You couldn’t do that again, Obe Cooper!” hollered Caleb Williams.

“I don’t know about that. Has thee got a dime?”

Caleb rummaged through the pocket of his sack coat. He held up bits of straw chaff and a ten cent piece. “What do you have in mind, neighbour?” he grinned.

“Help me move these paws,” he replied as he leaned the rifle against a tree trunk. “We’ll put them under the head, just so.” Emma looked at John. He shrugged his shoulders. They watched as Obadiah measured a charge of powder from a flask, carefully poured it down the barrel, drove a lead ball on a greased cotton patch behind it, and added a pinch of powder to the pan under the flint. Satisfied, he extended his hand, palm upward, toward his neighbour. Caleb dropped the dime into Obadiah’s hand. Obadiah knelt and placed it in the hole made in the bear’s head by the bullet and walked back fifty paces. Everyone smiled.

“Ptuuu!” The dime was driven deep into the bear’s brain.

“Waaaahooo! You did it, Obe Cooper! What a shot!” Caleb Williams pounded his Quaker neighbour on the back. “Can you believe that? What a shot! You’ll go down in history! I thought Quakers were peace-loving men!”

“We are!” said Obadiah. “That’s why we kill bears which terrorize the young women of the district! Right, Emma?” He laughed as he strode toward the bear. “This gun was used at Queenston Heights, back in 1812 – I won’t say by whom – but I’d say it still works mighty fine.”

“So do *you*, Obadiah Cooper!” said John as they all crowded around the bear in the bloodied snow.

“It’s too bad we’re all teetotallers,” laughed William Case. “I can’t think of anything I’d rather give a toast to!” Everyone but Wynett Williams laughed. He looked toward his brother’s house on the ridge, then toward the light in the west.

“We need to be heading back to East Lake,” he said. “We’re late for chores as it is.”

“Are you coming back with me, Emma?” asked John.

“No.” Emma’s teeth were chattering. She was suddenly aware of her father’s disapproval. “If I have to sit still on a horse I’ll freeze solid. Besides, it’s shorter this way, and my feet are already soaked.”

“Come with me,” invited Obadiah. “My horse is much faster than anything those Williamses own!”

“Are you sure that you wouldn’t be excommunicated for such statements as that?” laughed Caleb.

“Disowned by the Meeting? I may be! But only if they hear about it, neighbour! Let’s go, Emma! Merry Christmas, gentlemen!” A wisp of disappointment passed over John’s face.

Chapter XXIV

Inviting John

Emma opened the barn door and called into the darkness, “Hello, Ezra!”

“Why hello, Emma! Thee is up early this morning. Come in and shut that door behind thee.”

“I couldn’t sleep. It’s such a beautiful day, isn’t it? Did you see the sun just as it came over the horizon? There is nothing I love more than winter sunrises.”

“I know what thee means, Emma. When it is cold like it is right now, thee feels as though nothing bad could be left in the world – it’s all frozen. How is Jane? I haven’t heard anything for some time.”

“She is well. Scarred, but well. Her spirit is back, but I think it’s been dampened just a little.”

“A dampened spirit...there is many a person with that affliction.”

“I suppose so.” she mused. “John – has he already left for the village?”

“No. He should still be here...” Just then the side door swung open and an icy cloud filled the doorway. “John, you have a visitor! Over here!”

“What?” John squinted in the darkness. He reached into the pocket of his frock coat and pulled out a handkerchief. “Oh, hello, Emma. This is a surprise to see you here. What are you doing about so early in the morning?”

“Standing in the dark, talking with Ezra Bull, and waiting for you,” replied Emma lightly. John blew his nose. “Ezra Bull, did you know that this young woman has the finest tracking skills of anyone in the district?”

“So I hear! I must get the buckets and stool. Please excuse me.” Ezra said.

“You wanted to speak with me?” John asked.

Emma shifted from one foot to the other. “Well, I wondered if your family has been invited to the Morgan and Mills wedding?”

“I honestly don’t know, except that I overheard Mother say that Mr. Morgan and Mr. Mills had been by the other day. They were probably inviting the neighbours to the wedding...the wedding dance...but then there is my aunt’s wedding coming up too. I don’t know when that is. We will certainly be going to that. Why do you ask?”

“For a favour – if you’re going to the dance, that is. It’s not for me; it’s for Jane Morgan. Did you know that she had the smallpox?”

“Yes.” He tucked his handkerchief back in his pocket. “I understand she is lucky to be alive.”

“She is, but at this moment I don’t think she completely feels that way. You know how much her looks matter to her?”

“Anyone would know that.”

“So you could understand that she is terribly self-conscious about going out in public with her face looking as it does. She even thought about not going to the dance the night before the wedding. I was wondering if...if you are going, and she is there, and she isn’t dancing with anyone, would you ask her to dance?”

John laughed. “You’ve never seen me dance, have you?”

“Yes, I have.”

“Where?”

“At Bedell’s barn, last fall. You aren’t great – but you’re good enough. I just need to make sure that Jane isn’t overlooked. Please.”

“You really know how to make a person feel good! All right...if I am in attendance, and if I see that Jane is alone, I will ask her to dance, though she will probably laugh in my poor face. This I shall do for you, Emma Field. Suitable?”

“Very suitable. Thank you, John.”

“Are you going?”

“I don’t know if we have been invited. I’ll check with Father. Thank you, John.”

“You are welcome – I think.”

“Goodbye, Ezra Bull,” she called into the thicker darkness. No answer. Emma skipped down the hill to the road.

Chapter XXV

Dancing with John

It was the night of the Thomas Morgan and Jessie Mills’s wedding dance. Emma, with a lantern in her hand, met John outside the Mills’s stable.

“Good evening! You are here already? We could have given you a ride, you know,” said John.

Emma shrugged and held the lantern in line with the mare’s withers.

“Say, what were you doing at Mastins’ swamp on Christmas Day?” John asked, undoing the traces of the harness. “I meant to ask you before.”

Emma stepped back and glanced toward the road. “I don’t believe you would want to know,” she said, shaking her head.

“Yes, I would. What were you doing?”

“Consoling myself, I suppose.”

“Why? Why did *you* need to console yourself?”

“Because I was lonely.” She crossed her arms. “Because everyone else had family to spend Christmas with and I guess because I was angry with Father. He didn’t *tell* me that we’d been invited to the Coopers’ and that he’d turned the invitation *down*. It would have been so *nice* to have had people around. That’s what Christmas is about, isn’t it?”

“Just because a family is together doesn’t mean that they have a good time and enjoy one another’s company. ...Here – would you hold the shalves for me? Walk on, Blaze.”

“I *know* that. Don’t patronize me, John Williams. Just forget about it.”

“I’m sorry. You said you felt lonely on Christmas day.”

Emma nodded her head. “Father wants what’s best for me...but it’s so *boring* with just the two of us. It’s so *lonely*. He just doesn’t *understand*. On one hand he wants me to succeed – you know how he wants me to be a school teacher – yet in every other way he pulls me back.

“He is so careful, so frugal. Do you know how easy it was to make this pelerine for my dress? All these years the Coopers have been giving me clothes and I didn’t think I had the right to ask for *anything* else – and I didn’t really – and I *am* grateful for all of them; but it was *so easy* to make this pelerine and make my plain dress look pretty. I wanted to thank Mrs. Henderson for

her help so I told Father I was going to bake something for her. Do you know what he *said*? He told me I needed to be careful with how much flour I used!

“Although he says he wants me to do well, he is always, *always* pulling me back – as if he’s stopping a pendulum on a clock. I know I should be more grateful. I have so much more than most people...”

John shrugged. “It doesn’t matter about *most* people. You aren’t most people, as far as I can see.

“You are so lucky to be surrounded by a big family. You have a bright future ahead of you.”

“That I do; but jealousy will get you nowhere, Emma.”

“Now you are sounding *just* like a Quaker.”

“I take that as a compliment.”

“Take it as you like, but I have every right to be jealous of you. You’re a young *man*, John. The world supports you in doing what you want to do! The world doesn’t do that for a *woman*!”

“What do you want to do?” John turned the mare’s head toward the barn and clicked his tongue. Emma walked beside them, holding the lantern high.

Inside the barn John asked again, “What do you want to do?”

Emma kicked the straw with her boot. “Make a difference, I suppose,”

“In what way?”

“I don’t know yet.”

“What do you *love* to do?” John asked, tethering the lines.

“Make pretty things. Help people. Make up stories. But they’re all so frivolous.”

“Too bad. Do them anyway. Why don’t you go and see Mrs. Henderson in the morning and ask if you might do some work for her. Maybe you could use her scraps to make pretty things for others. And you could write stories in the evening and send them to some magazines – in London or New York.”

“Don’t be *ridiculous*, John Williams!” Emma snorted.

“I’m not. All you have to do is start.”

“And *how* do I do that, pray tell?”

“With one stitch. Then two. With one word. Then two.”

“Is *that* how you start?”

“Uh-huh,” replied John, leaning against a beam. “My guess is that once you are happy, you won’t be lonely.”

“I always thought of it as being the other way around.”

“Maybe sometimes it is – but not all the time.”

On a sudden impulse, he stood up and faced Emma, his hands stretched out to her. “Let’s dance.”

“*Dance*? Where? *Here*? *Now*? I don’t know *how* to dance those fancy dances. Besides, I thought you were going to dance with Jane.”

“I am, but Jane isn’t here, and you are. And I hear the dance music.”

“But I *can’t* – not the fancy way, anyway,” spluttered Emma.

“Can you walk?”

“Don’t be *smart*. I don’t want to look foolish. I wouldn’t know where to start.”

“You start with one step. Come on, it will be good practice for your sewing and your writing!”

“You are *crazy*! We can’t dance here in the barn!”

“Why not? You can hear the music too. There is plenty of room.”

“Others will be coming – they’ll see us and gossip.”

“Then that’s their problem. Let me show you – they are playing a Strauss waltz. Just watch my feet for now. Like this: one, two, three; one, two, three...see, I’ll slow it down – one, two, three.” John waltzed around the barn, his eyelids almost closed, his face as calm as a pond on a summer’s morning.

Emma started counting in her head to the music, nodding with the first beat of each bar. John made it look so easy. “Now I’ll do it in one spot,” He said, slowing down. “I am making sort of a triangle. See how my feet move with the one, two, three? Now, you do it with me.”

He put his left arm around her waist. Emma stiffened at his touch. John stopped. “Are you uncomfortable with this?”

“I’m uncomfortable with *everything*. It’s all so *new*. I feel so *awkward*. What if I can’t *do* this?”

“Can you breathe?”

“Don’t be brazen.”

“No, Emma, *can* you breathe?”

“Of *course* I can.”

“Can you breathe *well*.”

“Well enough for me.”

“Then whatever way you dance will be well enough for you too. May I put my hand on your waist, Miss Field? I need not, if you are uncomfortable, but I think you would find it smoother, and easier to follow me.”

“All right.” Emma bit her upper lip in concentration. She moved slowly at first, in hesitant little jerks, then with less hesitancy, then smoothly.

“Now, what a couple does when they dance...What’s wrong?”

“Are *we* a couple?”

“Only for this moment – while we’re dancing. You don’t like the word?”

“The word is all right...it’s just that I’ve never been a part of one before, and it feels a little...foolish.”

“All right, so the two people who happen to be dancing together for this moment face one another, and the woman...let me think. This is all backwards...the woman puts her left hand here, on the man’s right shoulder.”

“Why?”

“Oh *Emma*, I don’t know...so she won’t fall over, I suppose. She puts her right hand in his left hand. With your permission I will put my other hand on your waist again...like this.”

Emma had never been touched like this before. His hand felt big and firm and strong. She took a deep breath and closed her eyes.

“That’s a good idea, closing your eyes. I will start to dance and you can just follow with me. Eventually you will be using the steps we just practised, but for now, just move with me.” John pulled her gently toward him and to her left just a little and they started to sway. “Relax. Don’t *fight* me; just move *with* me. Pretend that you are...a handkerchief in my hands.”

“Oh thanks, you are *so* complimentary.”

“I know. But if you think about it, it’s a great description. I could hold a handkerchief here in my hand and just let the wind blow it, like the music will blow you once you are able to relax.”

“I’m not tight.”

“Oh yes you are, but that’s all right. You are doing very well. As light as a well-starched handkerchief, you are!” he chuckled, looking at her kindly. “Now, I’m going to take you further. It’s the same thing, only we’ll move around this fine ballroom. Don’t worry, you will feel the pressure in my hands leading you around obstacle and beast, but if you want to watch my eyes you will also know where I’m going. I’m a little like a cat, you know, you can tell what I am about to do by my eyes.”

They danced across the rough and uneven boards of the barn floor. Emma felt as though she were riding up and down on waves of whipped egg whites. She sensed it was something more than the lacy folds of the pelerine that made her feel so...pretty, and so happy.

“You, Miss Field, are a natural dancer. Your mother must have rocked you a lot as a wee babe.”

“I don’t know. I don’t remember, of course...but perhaps I rather do – it’s a primitive memory, isn’t it? Do you have a primitive memory of that?”

“Of being rocked?” John looked into the distance, concentrating. “No, not one I can recall, but I do remember watching Mother rock Anna when she was a baby. I remember watching them for what seemed like the longest time, until Mother told me that there was room for me as well. I remember that feeling of being close to both Mother and baby Anna. That is one of my softest memories. Maybe that’s why I like to dance – it’s the closest I’ve ever come to that feeling as a...what am I?”

“You’re an ‘almost-adult’, I’d say. I’m still a girl.”

“Well, you dance beautifully, Emma girl, and when you wish to join the others, just speak up. Otherwise we can continue to sand these planks with our boots.”

“I think I would like to go in shortly. I am certain that Jane will be here soon. You *will* dance with her, won’t you John?”

“Of course. I am an ‘almost-man of my word’.”

The house was crowded with people. The music dipped and reeled, but the party-goers stood as still and stiff as corn stalks around the edges of the living room, smiling and laughing tightly, like corn husks in July.

Emma caught sight of Jane coming through the front door. Her head was bowed more than usual but she cast off her mantle with her usual flourish.

Touching John on the elbow, Emma said, “There is Jane! Ask her to dance right away, please John.”

John shook his head, saying, “As promised I will ask her, but I would like to give her a few moments to catch her breath.”

“I don’t think she wants a few moments.”

“Well, maybe I want a few moments...but...all right, lead the way.”

Emma wove through the crowd to her friend. “Oh Jane, you look *beautiful*. Probably the most beautiful I have ever seen you looking!”

“Don’t be silly, Emma. You look quite smart yourself – your pelerine really does fancy that dress up. Hello, John. Oh, John, you know how to dance – would you please dance with me so that I don’t have to stand here feeling awkward? *Don’t* look at me that way, Emma. I can ask him if I *like*. I know it’s improper, but so are a lot of other things.”

Emma stood smiling by the door.

Mrs. Morgan touched Emma’s arm. “Emma dear, how lovely to see you. Thank you so much for coming by the other day and persuading Jane to try on the dress. She *does* look beautiful in it, if you don’t look too closely, wouldn’t you agree?”

“She looks beautiful *especially* if you look closely. You can be very proud of her, Mrs. Morgan. Most people would hide for the rest of their days, and look at her...dancing, when no one else dares to dance!”

“Yes. This is the strangest of communities for that! I dare say we Presbyterians may be the only ones dancing all night. But it is suitable music, and one need only dance if one wishes.”

“Or if one can!”

“I hadn’t even thought of that – probably most of these people don’t even know how. This is so different from Kingston...Excuse me a moment, Emma. Good evening, Dr. Watson, Mrs. Watson.”

Emma leaned against the windowsill and watched Jane and John. John was no longer leading – he was a well-starched handkerchief in Jane’s hands. Her golden skirts swirled like steam from a kettle. Emma put her hands behind her back and smiled. Every inch of her felt happy.

The accordion player pumped the bellows with his arm and his fingers flew over the keyboard as he began a jig. Jane shook her head and curtsied to John. As they moved over to Emma’s side, she said, “That’s enough for me. I’m quite out of breath. I haven’t moved that much since Mr. Brown sent Emma and me to deliver his letter...Have you heard anything, Emma? Is he resigning, by any chance?”

“I haven’t heard anything. Do you know if Mr. Brown has resigned, John?”

“I know nothing of your school. Father says very little. Jane, thank you for dancing with me. You are a fine dancer!”

“And one day you will be too, Mr. Williams. Oh, I need to sit down for a moment. ”

The girls were just sitting down when Emma felt a touch on her elbow and a deep voice near her ear.

“Come, Emma, we must show these people how to *really* dance!” Jeremiah took her by the hands. They two step-danced around the room, their feet tapping and stamping in time to the fast rhythms. Emma saw her father smile at one of the MacDonald girls. When the song ended and the musicians started to play the “Irish Washerwoman,” Emma let her father’s hands drop.

“Thank you, Father. I’m going to teach John how to dance this next one,” she said quickly, not waiting to hear his response.

“This isn’t fair,” said John as she pulled him toward the dancing area. “Shouldn’t I be allowed to have private lessons too?”

“You’ll pick it up easily,” said Emma. “All you have to do is move to the music!” John stumbled along beside her, doing his best until the song ended.

“I guess I won’t be winning any competitions against Master Juba!” he laughed.

“Master Juba?”

“Yes – he’s called...‘the danciest fellow...that ever was,’” John gasped, “the only black man...to appear on stage with...white performers...in New York...He has nothing...to worry about from me...” As the strings commenced playing a waltz, John said, “Oh, now this is more my speed. Can you tolerate anything so slow again?”

“All right,” replied Emma. “If you can jig, I guess I can waltz.”

“Good. That settles it then. May I have this dance, Miss Field?” John bowed and extended his hand to Emma.

“I wish there were others dancing though. What do I do? Oh yes, I hold your hand this way...” Emma gripped John’s right hand tightly. “Oh, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to...”

“Squeeze all you like – I love it!”

“I had no idea, you were so...”

“Nonchalant?”

“I don’t know what that means.”

“Carefree.”

“Well, amusing might be closer to what I was thinking. I always thought you were a very serious, about-to-become-successful farmer and business man.”

“I am – but I also know how to be exceedingly carefree when the time is right.”

“Hmm. Would you rather dance with Jane? I don’t mind if you do. I know I’m rather awkward.”

“No, Emma. I’d like to dance with you.”

“Are you *sure* you don’t wish to sit out this next dance?”

“Let’s just keep going till we’re tired of it.” John threw his head back and closed his eyes for a moment, “You ask a lot of questions. I didn’t know that about you.”

“Where did you learn to dance, John Platt Williams II?” demanded his mother with a wide smile, one hand holding a teacup, the other firmly on her hip.

“From people far removed from your brooding eyes, Mother. Would you like me to teach *you* to dance?”

“He’s a good teacher, Mrs. Williams. He taught me only a short while ago.”

“Oh, I have no doubt he is. This son of mine has a wealth of hidden talent, Emma. Do watch him though; he has little of Daniel’s restraint.” She smiled at John and held her teacup in both hands.

“Tea, Emma? John? Hello, Mrs. Williams.” Jane asked, smiling as broadly as Mrs. Williams. “This is a grand party, isn’t it?”

“And it is even grander to have you here with us, Miss Morgan. I am glad to see you have recovered so completely.”

“Well, I still have these scars.” Jane raised her chin a little.

“We all have scars, Jane. Yours are just easier to see. That’s why it’s all the better that you are here tonight. Enjoy the evening, young ones.”

“Your mother is too nice to be your mother!” said Jane.

“How would you know that?”

“She just is, that’s all.”

Chapter XXVI

Apples

The sociability of the Christmas season gave way to the quiet solitude of January and February. Jane returned to school. Mr. Brown continued to patrol and drill his students. Emma put aside John’s advice to sew or to write and continued with her studies, just as she continued making bread and stew. The days were bright and cold and uneventful. The nights were longer and colder. Except for the deep, worn green of the cedars, pines, and spruce, the world outside the cabin was white and grey.

Then came March, when the dogwood stems blazed scarlet, the remaining patches of snow flared in the sunshine, and a tired brown bathed everything else.

“What are you doing, Smoking John?” Emma’s shout barely penetrated the wind.

John was crouching in the slushy snow to the south of the road. He looked up. “Oh hello, Emma! I’d long forgotten about my lack of fire-starting skills. Come and see what I’ve found!”

“What is it?”

“Something good and something bad...see here.” John parted the tired, bleached grass to show two tiny, brilliantly green blades of grass. “That’s the first grass I’ve seen here in the field! Isn’t it grand?”

“It is!” exclaimed Emma, crouching down beside him. “It really is! You forget, don’t you? You forget that all of this will be a patchwork of green in another month or two. So what is bad?”

“It’s not *that* bad, just a little set-back; to be expected, I suppose – here, see how the mice have killed these apple saplings?”

“They chewed them?”

“Yes, all the way around. I’ll have to pull these trees out and plant new ones,” John replied, fingering the bare patches.

“They won’t ever re-grow? Can’t you just leave them in, in case they do?”

“There is no value in that.”

“Don’t you find that discouraging? Don’t you just want to give up?”

“Why would I do that? Half of them survived the winter. I just want to find a way to protect them for another winter.”

“Ask Gershom!”

“Gershom who?”

“Gershom Butt. You didn’t meet him at the boarding school. He’s a Friend from New York. I overheard Elizabeth talking with him this afternoon. He is an apple grower. His face is as brown as an Indian’s. Elizabeth had asked him if he was Iroquois. He said he was “Pourquoi”.

“Pourquoi I prune these trees in February?” he’d asked himself.

John laughed. He thought for a moment. “When was Pourquoi the Iroquois there?”

“He’s not Iroquois.”

“Alright. When was he at the boarding school? I didn’t see him.”

“He arrived last night. It must have been after you left.”

“Father says that no one grows apples like the people in Dutchess County. That’s where he’s from, right?” John asked.

“I don’t know. Would you like me to inquire? I am fetching some buttons from your mother - then I’m running back to the Boarding School.”

“No, I’ll go with you. Just call out when you finish with Mother.”

“It feels like spring, doesn’t it?” Emma pronounced as she and John walked along the rutted track to the Danforth Road. She turned to let the wind blow the hair from her face.

“It does. I love this time of year. The air feels different. The sun shines so much longer. It’s so full of possibility!”

“You can say that, even after finding so many trees killed?”

“Yes, of course.”

Emma shook her head in wonder. “I guess that is good. What do you like about trees, John?”

“Possibilities. I love the possibilities.” John stopped, tipped his hat back, and closed his eyes. “I can stand here and smell the sweetness of the late-spring blossoms. That whole slope will be the softest pink – from here right down to the creek. And I can imagine standing here in the autumn dew, when the fog hangs low in the morning, eating my own crisp, juicy, tart ...”

“Stop! You’re making me hungry! Especially for something as fresh as an apple. Doesn’t it seem forever since we had anything fresh?”

“It does; but it won’t be long now. Another month and we’ll find dandelion leaves on the south side of the buildings.”

“I don’t like dandelion leaves – they’re so bitter. So you like planting trees? What about clearing land? Do you like clearing land for crops?”

“Not really. It’s routine work. The same as milking cows. You fell a tree today then you fell another tomorrow. You milk a cow in the morning and you milk her at night.” John yawned. “I like tending things, and I like the idea of working with the same apple trees until we are both old and feeble, but I also like change and variety. Permanence and change. They go well together. A little of each. How about you, Emma? What have you been making this winter?”

“Oh, don’t ask me that. I’ve been busy,” she replied defensively.

“Emma, the only ‘should’ you will ever hear me say is that we should never be too busy to do what we love.”

“Hello, Elizabeth Bowerman! I don’t think I have ever seen you sitting down!” declared John. “Hello, Ezra Bull.”

“Hello, John. Hello, Emma,” replied Elizabeth. “For Friends, both Quaker and Methodist, I always sit down. Come and meet Friend Gershom Butt from Dutchess County, New York. Friend Gershom, this is Emma Field and John Williams.”

The tall, gangly man chuckled as he pushed his seat back on the pine floor. “‘Emma Field’ – now why wasn’t I given a name as lovely as Emma Field? I am happy to meet thee, Emma; John.” His bony hands squeezed theirs.

As an easy silence filled the room Emma and John pried their boots off and settled their outer garments on the bench by the door. Elizabeth rose and filled tin cups with cocoa for Emma and John. She placed one beside Gershom, the other opposite him.

“Thank you, Elizabeth Bowerman,” said Emma, sitting beside the tall Quaker.

“Thank you, Elizabeth Bowerman,” said John.

“Friend Gershom here...” Ezra cleared his throat. “Friend Gershom is an orchardist in Dutchess County.” No further explanation, just a statement of fact, but John knew it was an invitation.

“I am very interested in apples myself. What varieties are you able to grow there?”

Gershom’s full beard was as black as his suit. His eyes twinkled. “They are the same deep blue as the sky of yesterday afternoon,” thought Emma. “I like Gershom Butt.”

“Northern Spy and Roxbury Russet. The early Russian apples, Duchess of Oldenburg, Red Astrachan, and Tetofsky, as well as the autumn-ripening Alexander. I also have Baldwin, but thee may not be familiar with it here. It is bothered by the cold. Bethel – you could grow that here. Blue Pearmain. And there’s Cox Orange Pippin – that is a new variety, developed in England. Tolman Sweet. And...the ‘Spitttzzzenburg,’” Gershom laughed as he accentuated the sibilance. “The Spitzenburg was said to have been President Thomas Jefferson’s favourite. There must be more, but those are the ones I can think of right now.”

Emma smiled as she watched John. He was leaning forward on his elbows, his hands clasped tightly at his chest. His jaw had dropped just slightly. He was clinging to every word that Friend Gershom had to say.

“How many acres do you have?” he asked.

“About thirty.”

“Thirty acres! How old is the orchard?”

“I am the third generation to work it. Perhaps the oldest trees are eighty years old. Tell me, does thee know much about the McIntosh. That’s from somewhere east of here, isn’t it? I hear that it has been introduced into Vermont. And the Saint Lawrence – another apple, from Canada West?”

“Father has several McIntoshes. They are good trees – they bear such crisp fruit at an early age. I think they’ll be a fine commercial apple. We have Northern Spies and Talman Sweets. I grafted some Saint Lawrence last spring. They produce a very good eating apple in the early autumn. It probably is more of an apple for home use, rather than commercial...the fruit doesn’t store the best and the crop ripens unevenly. But the apples are so pretty – beautiful bright-red stripes over pale yellow. I’ve only seen one such apple, but it was beautiful. I planted twenty-five seed-grown trees last spring too but the mice got to them terribly...”

“Do you know how to prevent that?” Emma asked Gershom, getting caught up in the discussion. She glanced at Ezra, who was smiling at his empty cup.

“Girdling. Thee needs to encircle the trunk to above the snow line. Metal wire works best, but it is so expensive. I sometimes use small wooden staves bound together – anything to put distance between the mice and rabbits and the tender bark.”

The conversation continued for the next hour and Elizabeth eventually excused herself to prepare afternoon tea for the boarders. Ezra left to call the boys to their chores. Emma, John, and Gershom stood up and made toward the door. John stopped with his arm mid-sleeve in his overcoat.

“Would you like to see my orchard, Gershom Butt? It’s not much to look at, but you would be welcome to...tomorrow is Sunday, er, First Day, but you could come on Monday. I will be here for classes until late afternoon.”

“What about right now?”

“Oh, all right. That would be fine, if you are free.”

“I’d like that very much. Let me fetch my coat and hat from upstairs.”

The three set off and Emma bid them both goodbye as they rounded the corner between her cabin and the school.

“Goodbye, Gershom Butt,” she said, again extending her hand. “Goodbye, John.”

“Goodbye, Emma Field,” replied the Friend. “I trust that thee finds a way to learn and grow too.”

“I wonder what he means. Why would he say that?” Emma thought. “Can Gershom Butt see through me as Ezra Bull and Elizabeth Bowerman and John seem to?”

Both orchardists were deep in conversation before she had swung open the dooryard gate.

Chapter XXVII

Father

The killdeer returned the following week. Emma watched them from the window as she began to eat her porridge. Their spindly legs punctuated the thin line of dirty snow between the cabin and the road. She went to the front step, bowl in hand, and stood observing the birds until a faint honking caught her ear. She ran to the southwest of the cabin craning her neck and saw the first dots of Canada geese in the distance.

“Geese!” she shouted and dashed across the road to the Coopers’ barn. “Geese, Father! The first Canada geese! Come quickly!”

“Right you are!” he called, wiping his hands on the sides of his trousers. “Ah – they warm my heart! That’s a big flock. My, they are flying low! Probably wanting to get ahead of the storm.”

“Look how white their bellies are!” Emma said when the birds were closer.

“And listen to the sound of their wings! They are magnificent,” exclaimed John Cooper, poking his head out of an upper window. The flock passed, a lone goose trailing behind.

“Can you touch it?” Jeremiah called up to John.

“No, but I can almost feel the wind from it!”

“My guess is that there will be one heavy wind by dinner, wouldn’t you say?” asked Jeremiah, looking up to John in the mow.

“Hard to say, but we could use a good rain right now,” came the reply.

“That groundhog over there might not think so,” said Emma.

“They are so bold this time of year. They make me laugh,” said her father.

“Hello!” came a voice from the road. It was Jane. “Hello, Mr. Field! Mr....John. My goodness, do you always eat in the barnyard, Emma?”

“We were just watching the geese. Did you see them?”

“I think I heard them, now that you mention it. You’d better hurry, Emma. The school door will be shut in a few minutes!”

“Good.”

“Off you go!” her father tapped her upper arm and retreated into the barn.

“Goodbye,” called John Cooper as he pulled the window shut.

The air inside the schoolhouse was damp and cold compared with outside. As she sat down beside Jane, Emma wished she had brought her shawl. She shivered.

“Five more months,” she told herself. “Five more months and I will be finished with Mr. Brown, and children will be calling me ‘Miss Field.’” She drew herself up tall as she settled on the bench.

The wind rose before the dinner hour and Mr. Brown slammed the windows all the way shut. They rattled in their frames. Dust swirled outside the schoolhouse.

“You will be staying inside today,” declared Mr. Brown as the children wiped the last crumbs of their meal to the floor. “Don’t –”

An insistent and loud knock cut him off. Mr. Brown strode purposefully to the door, almost relieved to know that someone other than a child would be in his presence. The children could

hear a man's voice but could not hear what was being said. Mr. Brown turned his head and looked directly at Emma.

"Emma. Emma Field. Come here, please," he croaked. The colour had drained from his already pale face. John Cooper stood on the step, his hat clenched in his hands.

"It is thy father, Emma," Mr. Cooper managed to say. "Thy father – he has been – he's been killed."

"*NO!* No – you *can't* mean that."

"The barn door slammed shut. It..." his voice quivered.

"No! He was right *there!* *You* were right there...where *is* he?" she shrieked, running toward the gate.

"Emma, no!" shouted John Cooper, running after her. "The blood...it is everywhere. There is a gash on his head. I don't think that thee should see him."

"He's my *father!* I don't *care* what you say! I've *got to see* him," she cried. The skirt of Emma's dress snagged on the gate as it slammed shut behind her. She yanked it clear, tearing the fabric. Dust swirled into her eyes. Mehetebel was stumbling toward them.

"Where *is* he? Where is my *father?*" Emma shrieked, her eyelids narrowed to mere slits. She grabbed Mehetebel's shawl and pounded on her chest. "Where *is* he?"

Mehetebel gripped Emma by the shoulders.

"*Please!*" Emma wailed. "Ohhhhh," she sobbed into Mehetebel's arms. They clung to each other as heavy droplets of icy rain mixed with hot tears. Soon rain was pounding down. Their hair matted against their necks and water ran off their earlobes. Emma didn't notice any of it.

"Thee wants to see thy father now?" Mehetebel asked in a low voice. They turned toward the barn, arms around each other. Her head down, Emma saw only boots parting around her, then a hayfork as it was tossed aside, its tongs holding strands of wet hay. A sickening layer of blood swirled in a puddle of rainwater. Emma shivered. She squeezed through the doorway.

"Over here." The voice was almost drowned by the din of the rain on the roof. Jeremiah's body lay in the bloodied hay, his head twisted to one side, a gash at his left temple.

"Ohhh," Emma moaned, sinking to her knees. Her body felt as cold as a rock in winter. Her hands felt the sticky mass amongst the black and grey hairs. "Ohhh...Father..." She took a deep breath and buried her ashen face against his still chest. Under the metallic smell of blood, he smelled as he always did, of animals and sweat.

An hour later the wind had eased. Mehetebel shifted in the hay where she sat. A slice of faint sunlight cut the darkness as the door opened. Elizabeth Bowerman slipped inside. The door eased shut behind her back. Emma, still kneeling over her father's body, didn't notice. She kissed his forehead, her salty lips trembling. She straightened, bit her upper lip, and felt in her pocket.

"Here," she whispered, "I have a handkerchief today, Father." She braced herself against his left arm and touched the folds of cloth to the dark gash, her tears mixing with his blood. Crimson soaked the embroidered initials EF.

“Thee is coming with me now, Emma,” prompted Elizabeth gently, taking the grief-stricken girl by the arm. Numbly Emma stood and they walked, arm in arm, out into the blinding sunlight.

Chapter XXVIII

Waking Up

Emma felt as though she were falling off an eternal cliff, drifting down through questions as thin as wisps of cloud. She twisted and turned, trying to find a safe and soft place to land, but she only became more entangled.

“Ahhhhhhh!!” she screamed, kneeling in the big bed, an unfamiliar nightdress twisted around her. She looked about the room in raw terror. Golden sunlight streamed in the two windows. Flames snapped in the fireplace on the far side of the room. Slowly Emma sank to the feather mattress, curling up like a fiddlehead.

The door opened softly. Someone moved silently across to the bed. A hand gently stroked her tangled hair. The someone was Elizabeth Bowerman.

Reality returning to her abruptly, Emma buried her face in the pillow and sobbed. She felt Elizabeth’s forehead against the back of her own head. She felt the firmness of Elizabeth’s hand between her shaking shoulders.

“What happens to me now, Elizabeth Bowerman?” she said when at last she could sob no more.

“I don’t know, child.” The fire warmed, the forehead steadied, and the hand soothed. “I do not know. I know only this...that thy father’s love is greater than death. Thee will never lose it. His soul is here with thee.” Then she added more softly, “His body is at the Coopers’.” Elizabeth stroked Emma’s hair again. The woman shifted slightly on the bed.

“Don’t leave! Oh, please don’t leave me, Elizabeth! Promise me you will...” Emma broke off and clutched Elizabeth’s arm.

The Quaker took Emma’s face in her hands. “Just as thy father’s spirit will not leave thee, neither will I.”

Elizabeth stayed with Emma as she said one last goodbye to the man who had been both her father and her mother. She remained with the girl as Mr. Brown tittered about the poor judgment of some people going out in storms. She stood by as the anaemic-looking minister droned on endlessly about “God’s will moving in strange ways” and “In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you...” and finally “dust to dust and ashes to ashes...”

Wave after wave of sorrow swept over Emma’s young body. Only the presence of one so silent and steady beside her kept her coming up for air. And so it was that Emma found herself in the castle with the golden windows. The life that she had often imagined for herself within these walls was grand. The life she found, though just for a while, was safe.

The pain, so jagged and rough at first, gave way to a flaccid, gaping emptiness. Just as her seven-year-old tongue had kept probing the hole left by a lost tooth, her mind kept going back to the jagged, rough spot where her father had lain in her arms.

Finally, there was only emptiness.

Chapter XXIX

Emptying and Filling

Emma returned to the cabin the following week. Having told Elizabeth she wanted to be alone, she had dashed by Jane's house and skirted the cleared fields at the top of the hill to avoid anyone seeing her. Now she leaned against the inside of the cabin door, the smell of cattle and sweat and smoke and long-ago-eaten meals filling her every pore. She slid to the earthen floor, pulling her knees to her chest to keep it from breaking apart.

How long she sat like that she couldn't have said but a gentle knock on the door rattled Emma's spine. She stiffened. The knock came again, only a little louder this time.

"Emma?" It was John. "Emma, I know you are home," he said gently. "If you wish to talk, I am only too willing to listen. If you wish to be left alone, I understand."

Emma swallowed hard. Her voice croaked, "I don't know what I want."

"Then I'll just sit here on the step for now."

They sat that way for a long time, Emma on the earthen floor on one side of the door, John on the stone step on the other. At long last Emma moved to one side of the door, reached up, and opened the latch.

"You can come in," she said in a hollow voice, without looking up. The palm of John's hand rested on the top of her head for a moment as he slipped past her. He sat on the chair by the table and leaned his elbows on his thighs.

"It's awful, isn't it?" he said at last.

Emma nodded. "It's the smell. The touch is gone. The sounds are too. His looks are still in my head; at least, they were a moment ago. Even they are fading now, but...that smell...I suppose it will eventually fade too."

In the north window the flies buzzed, then dropped; buzzed, then dropped.

"What has the strongest smell of your father on it?" John asked.

"I don't know. His frock coat, I suppose. No, his undershirt...but they probably burn..."

"Why don't you take his coat with you. You can smell it whenever you need to."

"I couldn't...it's probably covered in blood...I don't even know where they put..."

"Good afternoon!" came a man's voice with a thick Irish accent from the path.

Emma jumped, thinking it was her father's. John stepped around her.

"Good afternoon!" the man called again. "Perhaps I have been mistaken. I am looking for Mr. Jeremiah Field. I thought this was his cabin."

"It is. It was," replied John.

"Then where might I find him?" asked the man, glancing toward the road.

“I’m afraid that Mr. Field passed away last week.”

Colour drained from the man’s face. He took his hat from his head and clasped it to his chest, then covered his face with his other hand.

“I...I’m Seamus Field. I am Jeremiah’s brother,” he said, his voice shaking. Again he looked toward the road, where a worn-looking woman and a group of children stood against the fence. “And that is my family...” He rubbed his eyes.

“Then you are Emma’s uncle.” John glanced over his shoulder at the open door. “Emma? Did you hear that? Your Uncle Seamus is here.”

Emma stepped through the doorway, her eyes cast down, her arms still wrapped around her. She extended her hand. Her uncle reached past it and folded her into his arms.

“I have come too late,” Seamus Field whispered in anguish. “I am so sorry I have come too late. I am so sorry. My brother is dead. And you, his daughter...”

They stepped back from one another, uncertain about what to do next. “Come and meet my family – your cousins, Emma. And your name, young man?”

“John, John Williams. I am a neighbour.”

Emma felt as though she were back at the funeral, shaking the hands of people unknown to her but familiar to her father. She tried to cut through the confusion to do what she knew her father would want her to do. She knew little about her uncle but she knew her father had wanted to help them.

“Please come inside for a cup of tea. We don’t have enough cups,” she said, “but if you are willing to share...I’m not living here anymore. This house belongs to the Coopers...but I imagine you could stay the night.” She looked at John for direction.

“I’ll fetch some coal from the Coopers,” he said. “You fetch some water for them to wash up in. I’ll be right back.” John jumped over the fence and ran toward the Coopers’ home. He returned a few minutes later carrying a pot, a kettle of steaming water, and a basket. The cool, damp cabin was filled with silent people standing or sitting awkwardly. “Mehetabel Cooper had just made these scones. She wants you to have them,” he said, smiling and setting the basket on the table. “The coal is in the pot, Emma.”

The two cups had been drained several times and every crumb dabbed into the children’s mouths when Mrs. Cooper appeared at the door with a larger basket cradled in her arm.

“Welcome!” she smiled first at the children seated on the bed. “Welcome!” she said to Seamus and then his wife. “You have come a long way. I am certain that you need more than a few biscuits to fill thy bellies.”

The children squirmed and their eyes widened.

“I cannot stay, Emma, but once everyone has eaten, please bring thy family over to meet the rest of us.”

That night Emma closed her eyes in her own settle once again. The loft was filled with children sleeping under woollen blankets brought over by the Coopers and the Williamses. Her aunt and uncle and their baby occupied the bed in the corner – her father’s bed.

Emma felt as though she were watching it all from a distance. She didn't know how she felt, or if she felt anything at all. She went to sleep knowing that she was being carried along like a raft on a stream – a raft she could not control.

Chapter XXX

Filling and Spilling Over

The next day the neighbours descended upon the cabin with baskets of food. Mrs. Hubbs sent a pan of scalloped turnips and apples; Mrs. Williams brought a maple syrup pie and a forty-pound bag of flour; Obadiah Cooper, three freshly skinned rabbits; and John, two enormous pike. Mehetabel Cooper had just handed another basket to Emma when Vera came running from the southeast, dove into a clump of sumac to retrieve a basket, and raced toward the cabin.

“Cook Elizabeff sent dis, but Ise remembered deese!” she announced triumphantly. “Deys maybe froze, but jus’ a little – I finks deys still good for somepin’.” She twisted sideways to reveal a stash of whizened potatoes and apples enfolded in her black cape.

“They’re yours, are they?” asked Emma.

“My momma’s, but you can ’ave ’em now, Miss Field. An’ Cook Elizabeff, she sent dis.” She held up the basket. “Dere’s warm ’tato water mixed wif sugar in dere for makin’ bread. An’ dat grass on da outside, it’s jus’ from when I weft it dere in dem bushes. I’m learnin’ now, Miss Field. Teacher Mary’s started learnin’ me how ta read today.”

“That’s good, Vera, said Emma, smiling at the scruffy girl. “That’s very good. My aunt and cousins – they are here. They are from Ireland too. Would you like to come in?”

“Oh no, Miss Field. I won’ be wastin’ yur time. I hope dem ’tatas are all right. Frow dem out if dey ain’t.”

“Thank you, Vera.”

“Bye, Miss Field.”

“You forget that you should call me Emma, Vera.”

“Goodbye, Emma-Vera. Oh...” she giggled and turned toward the north.

“My word!” said Ashling Field as she looked at the basket Emma placed on the kitchen table. She finished braiding Orla’s fiery-red hair then said softly, “I don’t think I have ever seen so much food in one place. The folks here are so kindly.”

“Yes, they are,” said Emma sitting heavily at the table. “They are good people.”

“They are good in Ireland too,” said her aunt. “It’s just that it got so they had nothing left to share, except for a bit of kindness. There is so much more to share here.”

Emma nodded. She saw the bounty in front of her, so much compared with the emptiness inside. She felt ashamed of herself.

“How much bread do all of you require?” she asked propping her head on her bent wrist.

“Require? We require very little. But those boys seem to have forgotten how much they require. They prefer to eat as much as they’d like. Make as much as you are able. They will eat them all.”

Emma reached into Elizabeth’s basket and extracted the potato water. “The potato water has gone cold,” she said. “Vera didn’t know that you need to keep it warm once you add the sugar. I’ll need to fetch more from Mrs. Cooper. It’s a lot of work caring for this many people, isn’t it?”

“That it is. That it is.”

Emma trudged across the track to the Coopers’ house. There was no response to her knock. The house was silent. She glanced across the barnyard to the heavy barn doors and choked back fresh tears. She wanted time to fly backward and return her to the days when the cabin was filled with what was hers and her father’s. She wanted to remain there for the rest of her life. Wrapping her arms around herself, she leaned into the wind and set off again. The wind buffeted her until she came to the calm created by the woods to the west. She knocked on the Williams’ kitchen door and soon heard Anna’s voice.

“It’s Emma. Mary Victoria, it’s Emma at the door.”

“It’s your mother I would like to speak with, please,” stated Emma in a serious voice.

“We heard that you have your family with you now,” said Mary Victoria, bounding from the front room. Mrs. Williams appeared from the pantry, her apron caught up in her wet hands.

“Yes, I do. Good afternoon, Mrs. Williams. Thank you very much for the flour – and the pie,” Emma curtsied. “That is more than generous. Would you also have some potato water and sugar you might spare? I need to make some bread.”

“Oh yes, Emma, certainly,” Mrs. Williams said gently, studying the girl’s sad face. “Do come in and have a seat. Would you like something to drink? Anna, please get Emma a drink. Mary Victoria, would you please take the baby to the front room while I get this ready for Emma? One moment while I get a blanket to wrap the jar in.” She disappeared behind Mary Victoria carrying little George.

Returning a few minutes later, Mrs. Williams looked up from the cream-coloured blanket she was folding. “There, this should keep it warm enough, Emma. Thank you for getting that cordial, Anna dear. Now, I need to speak to Emma alone for a moment.” As Anna left the room Mrs. Williams pulled a chair from under the table and softly said, “Emma, please do sit down.”

Emma sat on the chair beside the front door. She swallowed hard to hold back her tears.

“All is not well with you, is it Emma?”

“No, ma’am.” Emma dug her nails into her hands in her lap.

“You do understand that this is a traumatic time. One day you will see it as the worst time in your life.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“I would expect that you are torn over having your aunt and uncle and cousins with you.”

“Yes, ma’am.” She could hardly choke the words out.

Emma could hear Mary Victoria and Anna whispering in the front room. She looked toward the sound and angrily wiped the tears from her eyes. “I know I should be grateful to have family.

I've wanted this all my life...but it's so...there are so many of them...and it's all so sudden. They take up every inch of the cabin and every scrap of food. I feel as if I am inside the belly of a very full fish...and I don't want to be. It's awful." Tears fell from her eyes.

"It is," said Gloranah Williams softly, yet firmly. Emma blinked and glanced at her to verify what she had heard. "It is," she repeated, "and you will need to make some changes, which will make it less awful."

"Really? You don't think I need to stay with them?"

"Not if it makes you miserable."

"But they are my family. Besides, where could I go?"

"There are many places. You are an intelligent girl, Emma Field. You will find your way."

"I don't know."

"What do you know? Where do you feel safest?"

"At the boarding school," Emma replied. "I know that Father wouldn't really approve, but I feel safe with Elizabeth Bowerman."

"Then there is your first answer," said Mrs. Williams standing up.

"I don't know, ma'am. I really don't know. But thank you just the same."

Emma returned to the cabin with the wrapped jar under her arm and the seeds sown by Mrs. Williams safe in her heart.

Chapter XXXI

Establishing Herself

"I must be going," said Emma to her Aunt Ashling two days later. With new assurance in her voice, she continued. "I have spoken with the Coopers to make certain that you may remain here. They are happy to have you. You will find them to be good people. I am going back to the boarding school. They can use my services for a period of time."

"But you are family, Emma. Surely it isn't right for you to be living amongst such queer folk when your family is here."

"Perhaps not, but I think it to be best. And you would find them really kind and nice if you knew them. I would like to take this blanket to put my clothes in," she said of the rough blue and white blanket on her settle, "but you may have the rest. Father would want you to have it."

"Nothing else?"

"I...I would like to have the box in the cupboard. It was my mother's. I'm not sure why it matters to me so much, but it does...but that would be all...if that would be all right."

"I can see that thee is quite certain about this," said Elizabeth as she took the box and bundled blanket from Emma. "Thee understands that thee will be staying with the girls on the upper floor and that we can only offer thee room and board in exchange for thy help."

“Yes, I understand all of that perfectly,” said Emma with certainty. “And I will work hard, Elizabeth Bowerman. You need only tell me what to do. I will not be a burden to you or to the others. If you require a bed for a paying student, I will sleep on the floor.”

“I understand, but there will be no need for that. Let me show thee to the upper floor. And Emma, thee need not call me by my last name – ‘Elizabeth’ will suffice.”

Their footsteps echoed as they climbed the last flight of stairs to the immense but spartan room of the attic.

“It’s dark up here,” said Emma looking to the single windows on either end of the sweeping row of single beds.

“That it is. And I am afraid that it is rather cool too. I am glad that thee brought a blanket. This is where Vera sleeps,” Elizabeth patted the second-last bed. “And this is for thee. I hope that it is not too cold against this west wall. Please tell me if it is. Thy box could go under thy bed. I hope that thee is comfortable, Emma. Settle thy possessions. I will return to peeling potatoes.”

“I will be right down. And Elizabeth...now that I am living here...am I expected to speak as you do?”

“Thee must be thyself. When thee is thyself, thee is what God wanted thee to be. I am glad that thee chose to return to us, Emma. I was afraid that my desire to have thee here was not of God, but now I know that it was. Welcome.”

“Thank you. I will be down to help you in a moment.”

Emma yanked the sandy brown blanket from the bottom of the bed and tucked in her own blanket.

“Hello,” called a voice from the stairs. Emma jumped.

“Oh, you frightened me. I didn’t hear you coming. I’m sorry. Hello. It’s Prue, isn’t it?”

“Yes.” The girl in the grey cotton dress smiled and held out her hand. “I’m not wearing my boots – they are too muddy. That’s why thee didn’t hear me. I was just bringing this back.” Prue held up a small red book.

“That’s the same colour as my box – it’s ox-blood red,” said Emma. “What is your book about?”

“I don’t know,” replied Prue. “It’s still being written. It’s an autograph album. Have you ever heard of them? This one belongs to Mary Jemima, one of the other girls. She has asked me to write in it – something nice – something she will be able to remember me by. See, this is what she wrote on the first page.”

*Mary Jemima Southard.
Album, Friends’ Seminary*

*An invitation I give you all
To write in my album if you will
So when youth has given way to age
I may look upon this page,*

*Then will days of youth remembered be,
Then your token affection I shall see.*

*Written by Mary J. Southard, Hallowell
2th mo 4th 1846*

“That’s nice,” said Emma. “That’s really nice. I have never seen such a thing before.”

“No, I hadn’t either. I want to think about what I will say. It needs to be just right. Serious, but not too much so. Pleasant, I think. I want mine to be pleasant.”

“Like you?”

“Maybe. I suppose so. Thee was staying on the next floor earlier in the week. Is thee starting school here now, Emma?”

“Not school. I am helping Elizabeth Bowerman with the housework, and working with the younger girls for now. I’m not Quaker, you know.”

“That’s apparent,” said Prue, smiling. She tucked the album under her pillow. “And it’s good too. It will be nice to have thee here. This is my bed,” she tapped the one on the other side of Vera’s. “It was thee who brought Vera here, wasn’t it?”

“Not really, I was just helping Dr. Watson.”

That night, as the wind shook the west window and Vera’s snores shook the bed beside Emma, Prue called out softly, “Emma?”

“Yes.”

“I am sorry about thy father.”

“Thank you.” The wind whistled. Emma rolled onto her back and pulled the blankets to her chin. She stared at the dark ceiling.

“Do you have a father, Prue?”

“I suppose I do.”

“What do you mean?”

“I have one, I just don’t know who he is,” Prue whispered. “I know his name, I just don’t know him.”

“Then I suppose I am lucky.”

“We’re all lucky in some ways, unlucky in others. Every one of us.”

“You really think so? I thought that Quakers were so deserving that they would always be lucky. All of them around here seem lucky – or blessed, I should say.”

“Elizabeth says that there is pain in everyone, even those who appear blessed – that is why it is important to not envy others.”

“Elizabeth is smart. I wish that she were my mother.”

“I know what thee means.”

Emma sighed. “I wish she were my mother, yet I do not wish to use her and her kindness. I am only staying here until I can find work for myself elsewhere.”

“Thee doesn’t want to be a burden?”

“No.”

“I don’t think that thee could be, Emma. People are never burdens to Elizabeth. And besides, I don’t think that thee would be that way with her – or anyone else. What is thee going to do?”

“I don’t know, but I don’t want to be a teacher and I don’t know how to sew well enough to be a seamstress.”

“‘Way will open’. It always does.”

“I know. That’s what Elizabeth says. Good night, Prue.”

“Good night, Emma.”

For the next week Emma left the large brick building only to fetch food from the root cellar and dump the scraps in the nearby compost pile. Her heart ached, but the pain was softer – sad, but easier – and dulled by the physical, hard work of sweeping and scrubbing and kneading and chopping.

“I want thee to take this package to Audrey Henderson,” said Elizabeth late on Friday afternoon. “John is going to the village. Thee can accompany him. I have asked him to stop by when he is ready to go, which I expect to be any time now.”

“Can he not take the package with him? I have yet to finish cutting these carrots. I hate the smell of carrots in March. There isn’t much left after you cut out all of the rotten bits, is there?”

“I will finish with the carrots. Run and get thy shawl.”

John was striding toward her, staring up at something to the north. Emma smiled for the second time in two weeks.

“What are you looking at, John?” she called.

“Oh, hello – I didn’t see you – that hawk circling. It hasn’t flapped its wings once – it’s just riding the currents, adjusting its wings ever so slightly to take it where it wants to go.”

Emma and John stood shielding their eyes as they watched the hawk soar above the fields.

“I wonder if it’s easy to be a hawk,” said Emma.

“What do you mean?”

“I wonder if it’s easy to just realize in your little bird brain that you are hungry, and you flap your wings until you are high enough to see all of the mice and voles and moles in the grass below you, and you just let the wind carry you until you are ready to drop upon your meal. It seems easy...and you wouldn’t worry...”

“Or mourn?”

“Or mourn,” she agreed, sighing deeply. “It’s hard to soar when your brain is bigger than a bird’s and you remember things and feel things.”

“Are you having trouble soaring, Emma?”

“Terrible trouble.”

They turned and walked toward the road in silence until they were at the edge of the village.

“What are you doing about the apples?” asked Emma. “Have you written to Gershom Butt yet?”

“Not yet. And the trees? I am waiting for the buds. Have you noticed how the maples have changed this last week? See them?” John stopped and held the twigs of the nearest maple for Emma to inspect. “The buds are splitting open...see?”

“That red looks exactly like the sumac flowers of last fall. I’ve never noticed it before. It’s pretty, isn’t it?”

“Yes. And see what happens next – the buds open to these tiny, creamy spikes.” John pulled down a nearby branch to show Emma.

“They’re creamy – yellowish cream, like Jersey milk. That’s beautiful.”

“If the weather warms the way it feels as though it will, these spikes will turn to flowers within two days – and the buds on my trees will begin to swell.”

“It’s all so different – the same but different – everything is coming to life, but in different ways at different rates. It makes me think that maybe there *is* something that can be trusted – something big, like the sun and the wind.”

“I think there is, Emma. Good things happen, with an order and a pattern.”

“If I could turn my brain off...”

“Uh huh – but ’tis much easier said than done. You’re going to Mrs. Henderson’s, aren’t you? That’s her cabin, isn’t it?”

“Oh, yes, thank you. I wasn’t paying attention. I’ll only be a moment – but don’t wait. I can walk ho...I can walk to the boarding school by myself.”

“I’ll wait.”

Emma knocked on the door. There was no answer. She knocked again, then lifted the latch and set the parcel on the floor just inside the door. Her jaw relaxed as she realized that she wouldn’t need to talk to the dressmaker today, much as she liked her. But as she turned she saw Mrs. Henderson herself deep in conversation with John at the edge of the street.

“Hello, Mrs. Henderson. I just placed the fabric from Elizabeth Bowerman inside your door.”

“Hello, Emma. Thank you. I am glad to see you at last. I have missed your visits these last few weeks.”

“Father...”

“I understand. I’m just saying that I have missed you. Can you come in?”

Emma glanced at John. “Stay if you wish,” he said, “but I – I will go as I have work to do at home.”

“I will come another time, thank you,” said Emma, tightening her shawl about her shoulders.

“Any time – come any time, Emma. It would be lovely to see you. Goodbye, Emma, John.”

“Goodbye.”

“Is it hard to talk right now?” John asked as they set off again down the street.

“It is terribly hard. I can’t think of anything but him, yet I know that others don’t want to talk about it or him. I just can’t seem to talk about other things much. Everything else seems so trivial – except for the hawk and the buds – those didn’t seem trivial.”

“Or that sunlight – look at the cattails in that light,” John enthused.

“They’re golden, aren’t they? And the blue – look at the blue of the water. It’s almost indigo, but icier than that. Fire and ice, that’s what it looks like.”

“Mary Victoria once asked me what was stronger, fire or water.”

“It depends, doesn’t it?”

“That’s what I told her. It depends on how much you have of either.”

“That’s a great question,” Emma put in. “I love great questions.”

“Me too. Now *that’s* something a bird can’t do with its little brain!” he chuckled.

Emma smiled again. Twice in one day. Life was a little more golden.

Chapter XXXII

Proposal

The mud of early spring gave way to freshness, then to the humidity of summer. The cool of the boarding school cellar was as inviting as the heat of the attic was stifling. Emma scooped all but two of the fiery red coals from the fireplace and took them out to dump them into a hole she had dug in the grey ash pile near the root cellar. She stood for a long time staring at the sun, which looked not unlike the coals. Her jobs done, she left the ash kettle and her apron at the back door and wandered off until she found herself studying the rows of apple trees John had planted months before.

“Hello there, Emma!” John called from further down the track. He bore two buckets on a yoke balanced on his slender shoulders. “Are you looking for me?”

“Not really. I just couldn’t bear staying in the kitchen any longer. I just started to wander, that’s all. You have to water the trees now, do you?”

“Yes, they are at the point where some will die if I don’t,” John replied as he caught up with Emma. “I’ve been watering as many as I can every evening before it gets dark.”

“You look hot.”

“I am. Want to sit down? I would welcome the break.”

“Would the trees?”

“Probably not, but I can always water them by the light of the fireflies tonight – although they, too, are disappearing in numbers. Oh my, this *is* hot work.” Pulling his handkerchief from his pocket, John wiped his beaded brow, and sat down heavily to lean against the trunk of the maple tree. He looked up and patted the ground beside him. “Sit down here, Emma. It isn’t near fancy enough, but the view is good.” He smiled.

Emma sat down and began tearing the green seeds off the nearest stems of grass and throwing them into the air.

“The grass has gone to seed early,” said John.

“Oh. I hadn’t noticed but I suppose you’re right,” she answered, her voice dispirited. “John, I don’t know what to do. I can’t stay at the boarding school much longer. I am a burden there,

although Elizabeth says that I am not, but I don't want to be dependent upon Quaker charity all of my life."

"It may not be charity, Emma. I expect they are happy to employ you. You've always said that Elizabeth speaks the truth."

"She does, but it still feels like charity to me."

"What else might you do?"

"There is a need for a teaching assistant at Nine Partners in New York."

"That sounds perfect."

"No, it's not. I can't teach – and besides, I'm not Quaker and they really need a Quaker assistant."

"You won't know until you try, Emma."

"All right, I just don't want to teach, that's all. I think I will take a job as a governess for Mr. Franklin in..."

"Edmund Franklin? The lecherous..."

"It's the children I'd be looking after. I wouldn't have to go far away." She sighed, scuffing the heels of her boots in the dust. "Do you have any better ideas?"

John stretched out his legs and clasped his hands behind his neck.

"You could always marry me."

Startled, Emma looked up and saw him smiling contentedly at her.

"*Me?* Marry you? You would want *me* to marry *you*? Why?"

"Because I like you and I suspect that you like me too. And I'm not the worst of catches. I'm good-hearted, ambitious, and energetic. Shall I go on?"

"*No!* That's precisely the problem. You're *too* good for me, John Williams. You need to marry someone more of your own standing; and besides I don't want to love anyone. I am tired of loving."

"How could you be tired of loving?"

"Well, maybe it's not loving that I'm tired of – it's loving and losing...when you love, you lose – haven't you noticed that? Father lost Mother, and I suppose I did too although I don't remember it. He lost her and he lost his dream. Now I've lost Father. That always happens...you love and you lose so much more. You dream big dreams and you lose so much more than if you didn't dream at all. I don't want to love and I don't want to dream. I couldn't bear to lose any more. I want to get by and take care of myself. Marrying *me*? That's a *crazy* idea. Did you just come up with it now?"

"No." He shook his head. "I've been thinking about it for a long time. You seem to like me. You seem to like the trees too. I just think it is a good idea." He leaned his head against the tree trunk and closed his eyes. Emma studied him, her eyebrows knit together.

"You aren't bothered by what I just said, are you?"

"No. I expected you'd say as much."

"Then why would you ask?"

“Because if I never asked, you would never know, and if you never knew, there would never be any possibility.

Emma looked over her shoulder. “Can’t they see us from the house?”

“No. The grass is too high.”

Emma leaned against the maple. Her gaze followed the row of saplings stretching toward the newly cleared land to the south. “What do you want from life, John? What do you *really* want?”

John smiled, removed his hat, and ran his fingers through his damp hair. “What do I want? I want to make this farm into something even better than Father could have imagined. I want to be with a woman who will do that with me. I want to grow old with her and these apple trees. I want to have children and grandchildren with her. And I want to serve my God.”

Emma nodded her head slowly. “Then any one of the girls in Bloomfield will do.”

“They might,” he nodded. “They might suffice; but I know I would tire of most of them very quickly. You have spark and energy and ambition and depth...and a freshness that none of them have, Emma. Mother has that. She has it and I know that is what has brought Mother and Father this far in life. They are the right combination. This land is filled with opportunity; but opportunity is nothing if you don’t have the right combination of people.

“Grandfather and Grandmother Williams were the right combination too. When they came to the sand dunes there was nothing here but forest and the occasional Indian canoeing by. When Grandfather died at the age of fifty-five, all thirteen of their children were provided for – most of my uncles with farms like this one.

“Mother and Father cleared all of this land and look at it...you can’t find a nicer place, Emma; really you can’t. But I know that it can be so much more even than it is now.” John’s eyes shone with enthusiasm. “The apple business could expand. I know it could. And someday I’d love to have a big, solid barn somewhere on the slope there to the southwest, and...”

“And you need someone to cook and clean and bake bread and ...” Emma interrupted softly. “I would be your property, just like these fields.”

“Well, legally, I suppose you would be. That’s just the law, but to me you would be my equal, *never* my property. We could find a way to make this our farm – not just mine, or mine and Father’s. What do you want, Emma? What do you *really* want? You asked me. Now it’s your turn. Please?”

They sat in silence for what seemed a long time, their clothing barely inches apart. The grasses bent slightly in the rising breeze. John plucked a stem and slowly chewed on it.

“It’s probably easier for me to say what I don’t want,” Said Emma finally.

“Then go ahead.”

“I don’t want to be *owned* by anyone,” she said with resolve. “I don’t want to be abandoned *ever again*.” She fell silent.

“All right. What do you *want*, then?”

Emma’s eyes filled with tears. Her lower lip trembled. “What I want almost doesn’t matter. I will never be able to have what I truly want.” She shot him a look and angrily snatched another stem of grass as a large tear rolled down each cheek.

“Like what, Emma?”

She twirled the stem between her thumb and forefinger. Her throat was tight when she spoke. “You remember what I said once about wanting to make a difference and wanting to make pretty things?”

“Yes, and write – you also said you wanted to write.”

“Yes. But there is one other thing that is a lot harder to explain. I’m not sure that I can, but do you remember what George was like when he was younger? Do you remember how he’d fuss just the slightest bit and your mother would pick him up? He’d coo and smile and reach for her hair. Do you remember that? And now, when he is hurt, even slightly, he just picks himself up and proceeds on his way; but if he is *really* hurt, he calls for your sisters or your mother and he cries till the hurt is gone. Then he carries on.

“I want that, strange as it may sound. I really, *really* want to know that I can pick myself up.” She swallowed. “*And* I really don’t want to say it, because now I am really starting to dream and I don’t think it is possible, but...but it would be awfully nice to be with someone who was my equal. I know it’s crazy, but I would love to work side by side with someone, to pick him up when *he* needs picking up, and...” She swallowed again.

“To be picked up by him when *you* need picking up?” he prompted gently.

She nodded, not looking at him.

Two sparrows landed on the fence, then flitted from the rail to the ground, to the maple above them, then back to the rail.

“But life doesn’t seem to work that way,” Emma continued.

“It does with some people. And I think we are more equal than you realize. I know I could care for you like that. I *did* care for you like that. Do you remember when you were so terrified of Mrs. Plank? Did I not pick you up then?”

Emma squeezed John’s thigh just above his kneecap. “You did,” she said, barely above a whisper. “I think that is when I first realized that is what I have always wanted.” She chuckled. “Remember how certain I was that I was going to hang from the gallows in Picton?” She threw her tired head back against John’s shoulder and laughed out loud.

“And don’t forget how toasty-warm the cabin was when you got back that night?” he murmured into her hair.

“Toasty – yes, like burnt toast; cold, burnt toast.”

Emma pulled away and rolled over onto her side, she was laughing so hard. John folded himself double, clutching his slender belly. When their laughter subsided John slid further down the tree trunk until he was lying beside her. She turned towards him. Tenderly he swept the loose hairs from her forehead, his fingers tracing a line over her temples and down the angular line of her strong chin. He propped himself up on one elbow.

“*This* is what I want, Emma. Moments like this. And moments like the one we experienced with Mrs. Plank. While it wasn’t like this, it was...well, it just isn’t with everyone you can be that caring. I like that. I like being with people I am comfortable enough with to be caring. I know that my fire-starting skills lack something, but that keeps me humble! I’ve been so serious this

summer, Emma – far too serious about myself and the trees and the rest of the farm and the woollen mill. I hadn't realized until just now how much I need to laugh.”

He put his hand under her chin and lifted it so that he could look deep into her eyes.

“Emma?”

“Yes, John.”

“May I kiss you?”

“Is that proper?” She grimaced. “I'm not sure it's proper.”

“Then we'll keep it short. Like this.” He planted a quick, but tender kiss on her lips.

Emma sat up on her elbow, her face flushed. “What's that for?”

“For helping me water the trees,” he said, standing up. “Come on.” He pulled her to her feet and planted another kiss on her lips. He had been wrong: Mary Victoria and Anna bolted toward the house, giggling uncontrollably.

“I should have known,” John laughed. “Let them be. I meant everything I said. Now, Miss Field – promise me that you will consider my offer.”

“I have considered it, and the answer is no.” She picked up his hat and plopped it on his head. “No thank you, John.”

Chapter XXXIII

Edmund Franklin

The man who opened the door had eyes like a pig about to be fed its morning meal. His white eyelashes blinked as his gaze darted from Emma's eyes to her waist, then to his pot-belly pushing hard against the lower buttons of his vest.

“Miss Field!” he squealed, glancing over his shoulder. “Miss Field, do come in, do come in. Children. *Now children!*” Three children crowded around the door. “Back up so that Miss Field may come in and I may shut the door. *Children!*”

Emma stepped inside. “Miss Field, these are my children. This is Dorcas, and that is Henry, hiding behind her. Fennamore, this is Fennamore,” he said, pulling another boy by the ear. “And Daniel – that's Daniel over there on the floor. Say hello to Miss Field, children.” Fennamore howled and tried to kick Daniel. Dorcas pushed Henry against the stairs. Mr. Franklin's face blazed but he giggled nervously.

“You will have to excuse them, Miss Field. Their mother's death was a terrible loss...Fennamore, *stop* that this *instant!* Now children! I will show you to your room, Miss Field.”

Edmund Franklin was puffing by the time he had reached the fourth narrow step leading to the attic.

“Well, here we are.” He took a deep breath. “It is a little warm up here in the summer...but we can open those windows. Yes, I believe...we can open those windows. My...” He inhaled deeply. A crazy quilt lay haphazardly on the narrow bed in the corner. He followed Emma's gaze. “Oh my...how the last girl didn't...keep things tidy. Terribly disorderly, terribly.”

Still puffing, the man busied himself, straightening the quilt and tucking one end under the pillow. The bottom of the quilt still touched the floor. He turned to the washstand behind Emma. “Daniel, fetch that water pitcher. Miss Field will need some water to clean herself before dinner.” He swung open the door of the washstand, eyed the porcelain basin, then snatched a ragged piece of grey towelling from the rack and wiped the bowl.

Adjusting his glasses on his red nose, he continued issuing orders. “Dorcas, get a fresh towel for Miss Field.” Another deep breath. “My, it is good to have you here, Miss Field. I can only hope that you are able to establish order once again. Leave Miss Field be, children. Mrs. Anderson will have dinner on the table in...” he pulled a pocket watch from his coat “...in seven minutes. In the dining room. To the...” he paused, frowning, “to the right of where you came in the front door.”

“Thank you, sir.” Emma curtsied, uncertain about what to say, or do, fearful of what might be expected of her in something as fancy as a dining room. The children tumbled down the stairs, one thumping hard against the door.

“Daniel *pushed* me! *Fa-ther!*”

“*Stand up this instant!*” The door at the bottom of the stairs slammed shut.

Hot tears welled up in Emma’s eyes. She flopped down on the bed, the straw crackling beneath her. She had only been here a few minutes but already she hated everything about the place. Then the door at the foot of the stairs creaked open again. Slow, heavy footsteps ascended the stairs. Emma jumped up from the bed, wiping her eyes with the back of her sleeve.

“Thank you, Daniel,” she said quietly as the boy deposited the pitcher on the wooden washstand. Water sloshed over the rim.

“Hmm,” he mumbled before pounding down the stairs again.

Emma pulled her sleeve to her knuckles, wiped the basin and blew the remaining dirt to the floor. She poured two inches of the cold water into the bowl and splashed it over her face. Taking a deep breath, she glanced nervously toward the closed door at the bottom of the stairs then threw back the quilt to wipe her face and hands on the rough cotton sheets. She tucked the stray hairs into the bun at the base of her neck, pulled herself up straight, pressed down her skirts with her clammy hands, breathed deeply, and descended to the dining room.

Dinner was as dark and heavy as the warm mulberry-coloured drapes shielding the room from the noonday sun. The children’s angry but silent attempts to disturb each other were so intense that no one noticed Emma carefully lifting her mashed potatoes to her mouth with her knife. Fennamore dropped his two-pronged fork to the floor, then ducked under the table and whacked it just below Daniel’s kneecap. Daniel’s leg shot out, kicking Dorcas, who practically choked on her food.

Their father had narrowed his focus to sawing the slab of dry beef on the white plate in front of him and seemed oblivious to what was going on around him. Not a word was said until the last drop of tea had been drained from his teacup. He dabbed his forehead with his napkin and pushed himself away from the table. “Very well, the afternoon is before us. Miss Field, the

children must now have their naps. I shall return to business in the hotel office. I shall let you know when it is three o'clock, then, the children must tend to their chores until six o'clock, when we shall eat supper."

"What chores do the children have, sir?"

"They know what they need to do." He nodded at the woman bustling into the room, clutching the skirt of her full white apron in her chubby hands. "Thank you, Mrs. Anderson. Chicken pot pie is on the menu for tonight, is it? Good. The guests always savour your pies, no matter how hot the weather."

Emma never did determine which chores Mr. Franklin had had in mind for the afternoon. Nor did she find out which bedroom belonged to which children. The day had stretched endlessly and chaotically until at last she had pulled the door closed on the three boys in the dusk of the front bedroom and Dorcas in the room at the back. Emma leaned heavily on the railing as she went downstairs to the dining room. She sat on the mahogany chair, tracing the weave of the white tablecloth with her fingertip, uncertain what she was expected to do now. The door to the hotel swung open and her employer bumbled in, his face aglow.

"Oh, you are still up? Good. I trust by the quiet in this house that the children are all in bed. How lovely! How simply lovely to have the children in order."

"I'm not certain of the order. I'm not even certain which rooms belong..."

"And how lovely of you to wait up for me."

"I...I didn't know what you expected of me. For that matter, I haven't known all day long."

"Well, this is lovely, simply lovely of you to wait up for me. The children are a terrible, terrible handful, I'm afraid. You don't need to wait in the dining room. You can wait in the sitting room, you know. It is much more comfortable."

"The sitting room? I thought it was called a parlour."

"No, the parlour is that room, on the other side of the hall. It is for guests. The sitting room may be used for reading and writing and sewing. The children are not to use it, but you may when your work is done. Come."

Mr. Franklin led the way to the heavy walnut-grained door at the far end of the dining room. He held it open, expecting Emma to walk through.

"Oh. You want me to...Thank you, sir. Oh, my!" The room was so...so rich.

He picked up the circular metal tinderbox with his flabby hands and lit the glass lamp.

"A tinderbox of improved design. Have you ever seen one light a fire so quickly? I'd open the windows but the June bugs would be joining us. Sit there, if you wish," said the man, beckoning toward a straight-backed upholstered seat beside the table. He settled himself in the leather armchair directly in front of the window. Heavy, woollen curtains blocked most of the last of the evening light. "Ah, yes, that's better," he stated, crossing his ankles on the footstool at his feet and clasping his hands behind his neck.

Emma glanced at the plush carpet of red and orange and green leaves. Her eyes scanned the green and orange swirls of the wallpaper, before returning to the smirking face.

“Have you not seen such a room, Emma? I should have recalled that you are, after all, the orphan of a tenant farmer.”

“It is a lovely room, Mr. Franklin. You must greatly enjoy it.”

“I did. Yes, I did when Mrs. Franklin was alive. That is her embroidery there on the table. She had a wonderful ability to make a house a home.”

Emma nodded.

“Is there anything you need, Miss Field?”

“I...”

“I know that you will be most content here in our company. Odd, you know, I don’t recall seeing you before, but Elizabeth Bowerman tells me that you used to attend the Methodist services with your father. That’s it with girls your age, though. One minute they are scraggly little things one hardly notices, then all of a sudden they are young women – beautiful, young women in their prime. Had I known you were such a beauty, I might have asked for your services long before now.”

“That is kind of you, sir, but few would describe me as beautiful. I trust that you will be satisfied with my care of your children.” Emma stood to take her leave.

“Oh, but you needn’t go yet. We are just beginning to get acquainted.”

“What am I expected to do with the children in the morning?”

“Have them ready for breakfast at seven-thirty. Mrs. Anderson serves breakfast promptly. And, Miss Field, I was thinking that the children could enjoy a picnic and a little swim at the creek one of these days, especially when it is as hot as it is at present.”

“Naturally I don’t swim, sir. I would be happy to take them on a picnic, but I would be uncomfortable about their being near water, especially if it was deep.”

“Oh. Hmm. Well.” He grinned, showing his teeth. His eyelids fluttered. “We must look into that. Well, if you must go to bed so soon, I will wish you a good night.”

Emma pulled the sitting room door shut behind her and felt her way through the dark along the dining room table and out to the banister in the lower hall. She took each step with composure – until she reached the first landing. Then she raced up to the attic and pulled the door firmly behind her, shuddering.

Chapter XXXIV

Swimming

The Franklin Hotel felt like a pressure cooker all the next week. Emma rose each morning in the orange haze of sunrise with a resolve as firm as cast iron. It remained with her until she flopped onto the straw mattress just after sundown each evening, her stomach churning as dread for the following day rose up in her.

The evening meeting in the sitting room had become a routine. Mr. Franklin had come to expect this moment of forced intimacy. On Friday night, after asking with little interest of his children, he leaned back, hands clasped at the back of his neck, and announced, “You shall have

swimming lessons tomorrow, Miss Field. I know that it is not something that a woman does, but I cannot have you tending the children by the creek without some ability to rescue them. This heat is too oppressive for man and beast. It is time that you took the children out of doors. The boys do need to splash about as I did as a lad but you will need to mind the sun on Dorcas in particular. I want her to stay as pure of skin as you are.”

He pressed his fingertips together and peered at Emma over his spectacles. “Tomorrow I will show you where to take them and I will offer you basic instructions on how to stay afloat. Meet me in the carriage shed at one o’clock, after you have the children settled for their afternoon naps.”

“As you say, sir.” Emma rose and curtsied without looking at her employer. “Good evening.”

She took one heavy step after another to the attic. She laid her clothes in a neat pile upon her trunk and pulled the thin fabric of her nightdress over her head. It smelled of perspiration. Her heart felt twisted like a knot of hair – one started by the wind and made worse by a comb tugging it to its tightest.

Emma didn’t want to be what she was expected to be in this house. She hated every room. She hated every demand. She hated Mr. Franklin. She hated hating this much. She cried angry tears until her heart, and the knot in it, loosened. She pulled the cotton sheets under her chin, turned on her side, and handed her worries over to her dreams.

“Leave,” they said. “Leave while you are still able to see the sickness that is here. Go back to where you are safe. Things will take care of themselves from there.”

“You can remove your clothing to your chemise and petticoat over there,” said Mr. Franklin, pointing to the highbush cranberries lining the creek bank.

“I don’t think...”

“Don’t worry, I can’t see you from here,” he retorted, his hand loosening the tie about his neck.

Emma looked at the screen of bushes.

“Leave,” the voice advised again, before a louder voice hissed, “He is your employer. You must do as he says – for the benefit of the children. Do you want them to drown because of your incompetence? Do you want to be independent or don’t you?”

Emma scanned the undergrowth for the familiar, glossy leaves of poison ivy before hoisting her skirts and creeping behind the bushes. Her teeth clenched and her temples burned with an unbearable tension. Her undergarments felt strangely moist. She removed her dress and wrapped the towelling around her like a shawl, as if it were the coldest day of winter. Retracing her steps to the bank, she found that Mr. Franklin now had only his trousers and hat on. He was standing with his back to her, his hands on the rolls encircling his waist. He looked as if he owned the pool of water that swirled in front of him.

“I can’t swim at all,” she stated, clutching her bundle of clothes to her chest. “The water moves very quickly through here, doesn’t it?”

“Yes, it does,” he grinned, showing all of his teeth. “Don’t worry, I am a good swimmer and I’ll take good care of you. Come, Emma,” he said in a voice normally reserved for speaking to babies. He took her hand in his pudgy fingers.

Emma pulled her hand back as much as Mr. Franklin would allow. She concentrated on her dusty feet as she picked her way around the rocks. Hearing a splash, she looked up to see only a circle on the surface at the centre of the pool.

“What was that? A snake? Are there snakes here?”

“Could be, but they wouldn’t hurt you. They’d just brussssh against you, like this.” He brushed her thigh with his hand. “Then they’d be gone.” He smirked again. Emma held her stomach with her free hand.

“Don’t worry about the muck at the edge. Once you get a little further in, the bottom is sandier.”

“But is it over my head?”

“I don’t think so. Besides, I’ve got hold of you. I won’t let you get swept away.”

“Oh! It’s...so *cold*. Wait, let me get used to this.” Black, shiny mud squeezed between her toes. Squirts of chocolate brown swirled away in the water. “It’s *so* cold,” she repeated, shivering from head to toe.

“What do you expect of a spring-fed creek?”

“How does that work?” asked Emma.

“How does what work?”

“A spring-fed creek?”

Mr. Franklin flung his arm out to steady himself. His pink skin was covered in goosebumps. “There’s water under the ground,” he responded self-assuredly. “There’s water under the ground in rivers and in places like this creek. It bubbles up and flows above the ground. It *is* cold.”

“But why does it bubble up here?” Emma asked, trying to buy more time.

“Because it just does. Come a little deeper. The bottom is so much firmer a few feet out.”

The water looked yellow now. It crept higher and higher up Emma’s thighs as she inched her way. She stood on her tiptoes, dreading the tingle of cold which would replace the warm moistness between her legs. Mr. Franklin’s fat hand was as tight as a rope around hers. Pain shot through her and she dropped so that the water was now up to her shoulders.

“Hoo. Hoo. Hooooo!” Emma gasped. “It is *frightfully* cold. I have to get out. Mr. Franklin, I *have* to get out.”

“It’s not so bad once you get used to it.” His lips were blue. “Just remain for a while. You’ll feel warmer before you know it...especially if I...here, let me warm you.” He grabbed her left wrist and pulled her toward him.

“I can’t swim. You know I can’t swim.”

“Don’t worry. You have nothing to be afraid of. I will take care of you, and warm you up. Put your arms around my neck, like this. You’ll be more secure. You can take your feet off the bottom, you know. Put your legs around me. Pull up that petticoat – dreadful, heavy thing. There. I have a hold of you. Don’t be afraid.”

His body was cold and slippery. Smooth, in the softness of the water. She felt tingly, as if a million tiny pins were pushing against her skin. Her nipples swelled like tiny peas in a tender pod.

“It’s cold. It’s terribly cold, Mr. Franklin.” She searched his eyes for some compassion but saw only a vacant look and his clenched jaw.

“Come closer then.” He squeezed her against his chest. “Ohh, you feel so good. You are beautiful, you know.”

“I’m just cold.”

“You don’t feel cold to me. You feel deliciously warm. His lips tugged on hers. She stiffened and struggled to be free of him.

“Don’t worry. I just want to kiss you. This will warm you up. I promise.”

His tight lips pulled on hers again and his tongue pushed through her lips to her chattering teeth.

“Relax, Emma. You can’t kiss that way. Open your mouth a little. That’s it. Your lips feel so good. Have you never kissed before?”

“Mr. Franklin, we should...”

“You haven’t even given it a try. You won’t know you like it until you try. Open your mouth just a little more. You are so tense.”

“You would be too,” the frightened girl mumbled as his tongue pried between her teeth. She shook her head free and locked it over his shoulder.

“You don’t like that do you? It just takes practice. A little practice and you’ll be just fine.” His hand slid from her waist to her breasts. She braced her knees on his side to hold herself against the water.

“Oh. That feels nice,” he responded, bouncing her on his knees.

“I didn’t intend for it to; I only want to ensure I don’t get swept away.”

“I have a hold of you. You won’t get swept away – except by me. I think you are a little excited, Emma Field.” His white fingers brushed over her nipples under the sodden chemise. His hands squeezed, relaxed, and squeezed again.

“Oh,” he groaned, his eyes shut. “This is soooo beautiful. You are so beautiful.”

A tiny spasm shot through her.

“You like it too, don’t you, Emma?”

“Mr. Franklin, I’ve never done this before...” Her teeth clattered against each other. His lips poked through hers and his tongue twisted like a water snake between her teeth. She coughed in his face.

“Excuse me.”

“Did I go a little too far inside poor little Emma’s mouth? She’s not used to this. Are you all right, Emma?”

She clamped her chin against his shoulder again. Mr. Franklin pulled her toward the root of a tree in shallower water. He slid his hands down the length of her back and under her petticoat.

He clasped her buttocks, first with one hand, then both. He leaned back and pulled her on top of him.

Her mind raced. “What was that? So hard! Something felt like a stick in there. Were men like bulls and boars, which stiffened hard then slammed their member inside the female? Was that what Mr. Franklin was going to do to her, right here in this water?”

With sudden strength, Emma pushed her hands against his chest and twisted herself free. Franklin fell sideways into the water. She stumbled through watercress and mud, her one petticoat feeling like ten. “I am finished, Mr. Franklin!” she shouted at him.

“But I haven’t taught you anything yet!” he called back, wiping water from his face. “If you are too cold we can have a picnic...”

“I am finished. You will have to look for another governess.”

Emma didn’t look back. She grabbed up her dress and, clutching it to her shaking body, stumbled north along the creek bank until she came to the charcoal remains of the last of the cleared trees. She dropped to her knees in the bronzed grasses and looked through the choking tears until she was certain that that awful man had not followed her.

“Could I have a baby from this? Am I now a sinner?”

She vowed to never, ever place herself in the hands of a man again. Ever! Her father had been right: she needed to become a teacher to ensure her own survival.

Chapter XXXV

The Root Cellar

Elizabeth said not a word when Emma appeared beside the root cellar, her suitcase in her hand, her head bowed, her hair wet and stringy, her grey dress torn. Elizabeth leaned on the basket of beans and looked into the girl’s eyes.

“Thee can stay here,” she said plainly.

Emma didn’t move, but her eyes were choked with tears. Her face twisted, her shoulders shook with wrenching sobs. Elizabeth stepped carefully over the beans and peas and took Emma’s hands in hers.

“God is within thee and around thee, Emma.”

Emma buried her face in Elizabeth’s feather-soft bosom. She wrapped her arms around the girth of the big, comfortable woman.

“I know. I know that, Elizabeth, but it was awful, just awful. I hate Mr. Franklin. His eyes followed me everywhere, just like a hawk. Today he touched me – all over, he touched me...in the water...with his hands and his...his tongue...and it felt awful. Like he would eat me or kill me.”

Sobs wracked her body. When she finally quieted a little, she continued. “And the children...I hate tending those children. They are never happy. They fight each other all the time. They ask for so much. I spend all day longing for the time when they are in bed, and all the time they are asleep I am dreading the time when they will awaken.”

“God is within thee and around thee,” the Quaker repeated. “Thee has listened well to God within. Thee need not suffer; that serves no one. Come here, Emma child.” Elizabeth took Emma’s case from her and they sat on the step to the root cellar.

There was silence for a long time, as slow and steady tears coursed down Emma’s face.

“I feel like such a failure, Elizabeth. You were so good to take me in after Father died; but I don’t want to take advantage of your goodness. I need to make my own way.” Her face twisted again and she covered it with both hands.

Elizabeth cleared her throat. “Emma, I will tell thee a story I have told few people. I know of the pain of which thee speaks...I too once spent time with a man who made me feel dirty; and he was a weighty Friend. He was respected by many, including my parents. He was respected and he also...he also had his way with me when I was young and uncertain and unable to defend myself.”

Her voice tightened. Emma looked up and saw the woman’s eyes were clouding with tears.

“That was a long time ago, yet look at the power he still has over me,” she smiled as though looking at herself in a mirror. “I know little of these things, but I do know that it should never be like that – ever. The true union between man and woman is the union of equals. Neither person should feel sullied by it. I didn’t know that then, so I did not remove myself from the situation as thee has just now done. And so, a child resulted.” She hesitated.

Crows cawed from high in the ash tree. Elizabeth looked directly at Emma and, in a voice as quiet as a sunrise, whispered, “That child was Prue.”

The crows cawed again. Emma straightened her back. Elizabeth rested her elbows on her knees, clasped her hands together, and stared unseeing toward the strong brick building.

“Prue is *your daughter*?” Emma asked quietly.

“Yes.”

There was silence as the two reflected on what had been revealed.

“Yes. She was born of that union which should never have been. Yet, here she is – a girl I could never imagine my life without. I was fortunate, Emma. In most circles I would have been banished as a ‘fallen woman.’

“My parents were not at all happy. It was very hard for them, especially as they had held this man in high regard. But, in many ways they were weightier Friends than he was. They bore my pain with me, and helped me to create a life for us both. They raised Prue until she was able to join me as a student at the Nine Partners Boarding School. When this boarding school opened we were able to come here.

“But I speak too much. All of that does not matter now. What does matter is that that experience has made me afraid to be with a man – to even consider being a wife. Thee does not want to feel like that, Emma. If I had really lived what I believed, that God was within me, I would have left as thee has left and perhaps now I would know the love of a husband, and I would have children able to grow up in a happy family.”

“But you had Prue.”

“That I did.”

The crows took to the air.

Emma didn't know what to say. She felt cleansed, somehow unburdened of the load she'd been carrying. There was no need to say anything. Finally, she laid her hand on Elizabeth's.

"Thank you, Friend."

"Thee is welcome. Sometimes, I think of thee as a Friend too, Emma. Thee could be, thee knows that?"

"Sometimes I think I am too. Maybe some day I will be. But you, Elizabeth, will always be both a capital-F and a small-f friend to me. It's all right to say that to an adult, isn't it?"

"Friendship is a very fine thing indeed. Bring thy case inside. Thy bed is awaiting thee. We will speak with Mr. Franklin after we have all eaten...yes, I will come with thee. He needs to hear the message directly from thee. Ahh, I have sat on this cold, stone step for far too long."

Emma felt as though a stone had splashed in her stomach and sank to the bottom. Yet, she knew that Elizabeth was right and that she would keep her word.

And she did.

Elizabeth and Emma returned in silence from speaking with Edmund Franklin. In the cool of the kitchen Elizabeth handed Emma a bunch of savory she had plucked from the garden. She laid the cutting board and knife on the table and passed the mortar and pestle to the girl.

"Elizabeth, I don't know how to teach and I don't even want to; but I..."

Elizabeth scrubbed a handful of baby carrots. Her head nodded, ever so slowly. "Yes," was all she said.

"But I don't know where to begin."

"Thee begins where thee begins. Unless, of course, thee doesn't begin at all."

"Oh, stop, *please* stop. I'm so *tired* of it all." Emma rocked forward and back, hugging her belly tightly.

"I received another letter from Nine Partners School yesterday. They are still in need of a teacher's assistant. They will no doubt be able to hire a Quaker in time, but in the meanwhile they require help."

"But that is in New York – and besides I'm not a teacher!"

"Thee sounds like Moses did at the burning bush. 'Don't ask me to do Thy work, God! I am a banished murderer. Thee doesn't want someone like me to lead the Hebrew people to the Promised Land.'"

"Moses was a murderer?"

"Yes. He killed an Egyptian for smiting a Hebrew, then fled to escape his own slaying."

"But I thought that he was a great man – one of the great men of the Bible."

"He was, Emma. Greatness always comes from the darkest of places. From the fallen come the risen."

"I feel fallen, but I don't want greatness. I don't."

“Thee has no choice in such matters. But thee needn’t worry about greatness – God takes care of that. Thee need only worry about rising up. Does thee want to rise again, Emma, or remain fallen?”

With the tip of her finger Emma coaxed the pestle around and around the lip of the mortar. She was mesmerized by the circles of the mortar, the pestle and her finger. Elizabeth laid the shiny carrots on the table and chopped the summer savory. Emma continued to study the circles.

“I’ve never been away from Bloomfield, Elizabeth. I’ve been to the sand dunes and I’ve been to Picton a few times, but until I came here, I had never slept anywhere but in Father’s cabin. What is it like in New York?”

“Dutchess County is very much like here. It has been settled longer. Everything but the land is older and more established. But the countryside is much like here: the trees the same, the smells the same. The heat of summer and the cold of winter – they are much the same.”

“And the people?”

Elizabeth dried her hands on her apron.

“God’s children are the same everywhere, Emma. There are those who allow that of God to shine from them, and there are those who do their very best to keep all that is good hidden.” She resumed the chopping. “And there are those, like most of us, who manage to do a little of both.”

“But wouldn’t that be foolish, Elizabeth? You belong there, but are here, and I belong here, yet...”

“I am no teacher, Emma. God gave me the ability to cook and bake, and thee may have the ability to teach. Nine Partners doesn’t need a cook; they need a teacher. At least, at the present they do. But things change. Thee has no idea what will come thy way.”

Emma scraped the savory into the mortar with the side of her hand and started to grind. She closed her eyes and thought of the Christmas goose and how she had wished for more than her father’s company. She stopped crushing and held the pestle to her nose, enjoying the freshly released fragrance. She felt Elizabeth’s broad hand on her shoulder.

“Why is it all so hard? Why can’t life be easier? It’s not fair!”

“No, it isn’t fair. But nothing stays the same forever. Life has plenty of beautiful and joyous moments to offer thee, Emma. That, I can promise.”

“I will miss thee, Elizabeth,” she said in a hoarse voice.

“I will miss thee, Emma.”

Chapter XXXVI

Leaving for New York

Emma had her suitcase sitting by the door of the attic. She added her nightdress and descended the two flights of stairs to the kitchen.

“Good morning, Elizabeth,” she said tightly.

“Good morning to thee, Emma.”

“I’m not hungry. Please don’t serve me much. Do you think that it’s too much for Ezra to take me to Picton? I could walk. If I left now, I could be there in time. Oh, I forgot something upstairs. I’ll be back in a moment.”

She raced up the first set of stairs two at a time, took the steeper set more slowly, then stood, her hands gripping the floorboards of the entrance to the attic. She stared blankly across at the legs of the beds, her stomach churning as she tried to recall what she had planned to do.

After a few minutes, Emma returned to the kitchen and sat at the place Elizabeth had set for her. “I don’t remember what I went up there for,” she said, turning the handle of the cup like the hands of a clock. “Do they serve cocoa at Nine Partners?”

Elizabeth took porridge from the black pot on the hearth and put it into a bowl, placing it in front of the agitated girl. “They do,” she said pushing the jugs of maple syrup and cream in Emma’s direction. The Quaker woman sat on the opposite bench, calmly placing her hands in her lap.

“You know, it would be so much easier if you would talk,” declared Emma, a little too curtly. “I don’t know what I am doing, going to live with people who never talk.”

Elizabeth pursed her lips together and nodded slowly. Emma spooned a little porridge into her mouth. It sat there, her throat already filled with too many lumps to take yet another.

Suddenly the outside door swung open. Ezra called across the room, “Good morning to thee, Elizabeth...Emma.”

Emma swallowed hard. “Morning.”

“Today, thee becomes a teacher!” He squeezed Emma’s hand and sat down beside Elizabeth. “What a beautiful August morning thee has been given to start out on such an adventure. Does thee like August mornings, Emma?”

“They make me sad.”

“Oh. I am relieved when August comes. I thank thee, Cook Elizabeth. Has thee eaten?”

“Yes. The horse is not hitched yet?”

“No.” Ezra drenched his porridge in a ribbon of maple syrup. “John will be taking Emma to Picton.”

Emma’s head bolted upright. “John? Why is he doing that? Why can’t he just leave things be?”

Ezra, his eyebrows raised in surprise, put the syrup jug back on the table. “He wishes to see thee off. He is fond of thee. It is kindness...”

Tears welled up in Emma’s eyes. “Why do others always interfere?” She pushed herself from the table and fled up the stairs.

Ezra looked apologetically at Elizabeth. “I didn’t know. John offered and I thought it would be something Emma would appreciate. They are such good friends...”

“It will be fine, Ezra. The girl is in pain. She is frightened. She just needs to know that...” There was a knock at the door. Elizabeth rose from the table again. “Good morning to thee, John. Come in. I will go to Emma for a moment.”

Elizabeth hesitated where the stairs hinged to the attic floor. “May I come in?” No answer. Elizabeth waited. Silence.

“Very well.”

She went and sat on the end of Prue’s bed. More silence.

“Thee knows that Quakers are not known for anything but plain dress; yet I have something fancy I wish to give thee.”

Emma turned her head. Her face was blotched and her eyes were puffed like dandelions in June. Elizabeth went and sat on the edge of Emma’s bed. She took a shiny oval from her pocket and cradled it in her hand. “When I left Dutchess County, my mother gave me two brooches – one from her father’s family, one from her mother’s. I would like thee to have the one from my father’s family, the Bowermans. I am fond of thee, Emma, and thee knows the love of God is within thee; but if ever thee forgets either notion, this brooch can be a reminder of both.”

She held her hand out to Emma, who propped herself up on her elbow.

“It is beautiful. The center is made of hair, isn’t it?”

“That it is. My grandmother’s hair.”

Emma studied it closely, then reached out to give it back. “No, Elizabeth,” she said, shaking her head, her eyes filling again. “I – I couldn’t take it. It belongs to your family and Prue should have it.”

Elizabeth kept her hands palms-down on the quilt and shook her head. “Prue shall have my mother’s when the time is right. I want you to have this.”

“I don’t know what to say.”

“Then say nothing.”

Emma smiled. She threw her arms around Elizabeth and again buried her face against the kindly woman’s chest.

“Thank you. Oh, thank you, Elizabeth.” Finally, raising her head again, she mumbled, “I should be leaving, shouldn’t I?”

Elizabeth nodded. Emma rose from the bed, straightened her pillow, buckled her case, tied her bonnet under her chin, and pulled on her gloves. The two slowly descended the stairs. Ezra and John were standing talking by the gig at the front of the house.

“Let me take your case,” said John.

Emma handed John the leather suitcase without looking up at him. She turned toward Ezra, her eyes on his boots, and he took her in his arms and crushed her to him. His coat smelled of cows and the wool scratched her face. With her wet cheeks in his hands, he tipped her head back slightly and kissed her forehead.

“I shall miss thee, Emma.”

Emma could only nod her head and bite her upper lip. She kissed Ezra’s bristly cheek and hugged him, then reached toward Elizabeth, who pulled her sideways and whispered in her ear. “God is with thee. Thee need not be afraid.” Emma nodded again and took John’s outstretched hand as she stepped up into the gig.

“Giddy-up, Jeb!” John called and they lurched forward. Emma swallowed hard, looked up, and gave a smile with half her mouth and a wave with half her heart. The horse turned east toward Picton at the foot of the drive. They passed a stagecoach heading west toward Bloomfield.

“Good morning, Mr. Harris,” called John. He slid slightly toward Emma and placed his hand over her hands clasped on her lap. Emma turned her face to the south so that he would not see the river of tears coursing down her cheeks. They rode in silence to the first crossroad.

“It’s all right, you know, Emma. It’s all right to be sad. It’s all right to cry.”

“But I feel so *stupid!*” she burst out.

“Why?”

“Because I probably should stay and marry you. I *know* I should, but I can’t.”

John squeezed her hands, then relaxed his grip. Emma looked at the brown hairs curling around the top of his glove.

Quietly he said, “There are no shoulds, Emma, remember? You are doing what you need to do. Go and do that. We will see what comes of it.”

Emma nodded and bit her lip again. Neither spoke for the rest of the journey but she found comfort in the feel of his arm against hers. At the top of Picton hill John pulled back on the reins. They could see the *Spartan* docked in the harbour below. The wharf was congested with long stacks of drying wood and crowds of people. They descended the hill slowly. John tied Jeb to the last spot on the hitching post.

“What do I do *now?*” Emma asked as her eyes roved the length of the steamboat. “Do you know what I am to do, John?”

“No idea at all, but that is why you were given a tongue and voice, my friend. Remember, most of the others have never been aboard a boat either. You will all have to ask questions. It will be easier than you think. Go ahead, ask that man over there.”

“No, *you* ask!”

“I am not the one going on this journey – though at this moment I wish I were. You are the one going. I will stand right here behind you, but you ask the questions.” He picked up her case. Emma felt his hand on the small of her back.

“Excuse me, sir. I am going to Dutchess County, New York.

The man tipped his hat. “Miss.”

Emma glanced over her shoulder. John nodded.

“Could you tell me what I need to do to go there?”

“You have a ticket, miss?”

“A ticket? What’s a...”

“I don’t know where Dutchess County is, but to get to New York you will need to have a ticket to Kingston and another one to Oswego. You can buy one over there, in that building with the sign saying, ‘Canadian Inland Steam Navigation Company.’ Do you see it, miss? Don’t waste any time, we’ll be leaving in...” he pulled a silver watch from his pocket “...in fourteen minutes sharp.”

They turned. Emma whispered, “What’s a ticket, John?”

“It’s a piece of paper saying that you have paid the fee to travel on the boat. People use tickets when they don’t know one another. Go ahead, tell him what you’d like.”

“I’d like a ticket to Kingston and another to Os...Os-we-go, please. I am going on to Dutchess County.”

“Dutchess County? North of New York City?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then you’ll need to go by canal boat to Rome and take a train from there. I can only sell you a ticket as far as Oswego. That will be twenty-five shillings, miss, or five dollars.”

Emma’s head felt fuzzy. Frowning, she fumbled the coins without recognition.

“Is that American or Halifax currency?” John asked the ticket man.

“American.”

“Do you have a British pound, Emma? Good, then, give him a pound note and five shillings. Yes, that’s right. When you get to the United States you will only have to worry about one currency. It will be much easier then. Thank you, sir.” They walked toward the *Spartan*.

“I’m so stupid. How do I think I will ever be able to teach?” Emma’s throat was tight again.

John placed his strong hands on her shoulders and turned her gently toward him. She buried her face in his neck and collar. “You are *not* stupid, Emma. You are overwhelmed. Everything is so new. *Everything*. But things will start to become familiar and you will feel like yourself again. Trust me.”

“Five minutes till departure!” called out the man at the gate.

“Emma?”

Emma could only nod her head slightly as her eyes met his.

“Emma Field, I feel more fondness for you than I have felt for *anyone*, ever. I want you to know that and remember that. If all is not as you expect it to be in Dutchess County, please come back, *please* come back – even if not to me – at least to the place where you know you are loved.”

He reached into his pocket and extracted a swatch of tan woollen fabric. “I have something for you. It’s very small, but I think it might help. Smell it, go ahead and smell it,” he said.

Emma sniffed, then buried her face in it. “Father! It’s father, isn’t it?”

John nodded. “I took it from his coat and mother hemmed it into a handkerchief for you.” He hugged her tightly. “You’d best go now, Emma.”

“Thank you, John. Thank you,” she said quietly.

John tipped her face up and kissed her softly on her lips. “Be well, Emma.”

“I shall. Be well, John.”

She waved at John only once after the boat pulled away from the dock. When she was certain he could no longer make out the details of her face, she leaned heavily against the rail and gazed at him until he was just another sparkle off the water of Picton harbour.

End of Book One

About the Author



Carol Williams grew up on land swept by the winds of Lake Ontario and farmed by members of her family for two hundred years. She now lives on a sheep farm in eastern Ontario and has two almost-grown children.

Emma Field

Book Two

Chapter I

Nine Partners

Emma Field?" asked the tall, strong man, with hesitation.

"Yes! Yes, I am Emma Field," the young woman replied. She placed her suitcase on the wharf and firmly shook his hand.

Instantly his eyes widened. He touched the brim of his hat.

"My goodness," he said, "I was expecting someone older and in plain dress. My name is Jonathon Spier. I live near the boarding school. I was asked to fetch thee. When I did not see thee aboard the steamboat I was certain –"

"I came by packet sloop," she said, nodding toward the elegant sailboat behind her. "I have never seen such a beautiful craft. It has a fireplace in the forecastle and mahogany on every wall of the cabin. Come, I will show it to you."

"No. I thank thee," Jonathon smiled and shook his head.

“Last night there was dancing on the deck. It was a most glorious night with music playing and the sails snapping in the gentle breeze.”

Jonathon picked up her suitcase and nodded toward a team of sturdy brown horses standing under the shade of the nearest tree. “Then thee may find my grain wagon a little crude,” he said apologetically. “The stagecoach from Gregory’s Hotel does not run on First Days and since I was delivering grain to the wharf yesterday, the Superintendent of the school asked me to stay the night and meet thee.”

They walked toward the wagon.

“The wagon may be crude,” said Emma, “but your team is certainly not. They are lovely beasts. My father worked only with oxen.”

“I thank thee,” said Jonathon.

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