

## Chapter 6: The Idea

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*22 June 1864*

Maggie stewed about the situation all day until she could stand it no longer. After the dinner crowd had departed for work and school, after everything had been cleaned up, and after the youngest children had been put down to nap, she brought Emily, Rosa, and Frankie into the back parlor.

Frankie took a seat on a wing chair by the window. “What’s wrong, Mama?” Her mother had been possessed of a slight frown all morning, and she knew something was bothering her.

Maggie sank onto the sofa. “I need to investigate something and would like all of you to come with me.”

Rosa said, “Is it about the Blaineton School?”

“Yes. Well, no, not exactly. It’s about the school on Water Street.”

“I thought you said it was closed.”

Emily spoke up. “It is – at least as far as the School Board is concerned. But we heard one still might be there.”

“And I’d like to see precisely what is going on.” Maggie gazed at the others in the room. “Would any of you like to talk a walk with me tomorrow morning after breakfast?”

Rosa’s eyes lit up. “I’ll go!”

Frankie looked disappointed as she said, “I’m afraid I need to be at the hospital. But the ladies and I will include you in our prayers.”

“Thank you, honey.” Emily smiled at the young redhead. Then she turned to Maggie. “Our visit may lead to something interesting.”

“I never said that,” her friend responded.

“Maggie, I know you. When we do things like this, they almost always get interesting. I’m thinking this will be no exception.”

#

*23 June 1864*

Many of the houses and little business that once had made up Water Street had been abandoned and were starting to show neglect. The street used to be home to Blaineton’s thriving black community, but many of the families had departed after the war began, some going as far north as Canada. Out of the 20 families present in 1860, only six remained. They left as white attitudes in the town toward people of color had shifted from grudging toleration to poorly disguised anger and sometimes outright hostility.

The people of Water Street always had been accepted as long as they lived within certain parameters – service, skills, and silence. Their peace and safety

therefore had depended upon two things: their near-invisibility and what they could provide for the white community. But things had changed, and now it was not unusual for people of color to encounter outright fear and resentment.

Having left Moira and Birgit to serve dinner to the rest of the family, Maggie, Emily, and Rosa had walked to town. As they crossed the railroad tracks, the Water Street community stretched before them. This section of town extended for four blocks, bounded on the west by railroad tracks and a wooded swath that stretched toward the Delaware River, and to the east by Mill Road.

“Oh, my,” Maggie whispered as they stood at the intersection of Ferry Avenue and Water Street. The community’s deterioration and abandonment was plain.

“Mm, hm,” was Emily’s sour reply, as she put a protective arm around little Jarena, who was snuggled close in the shawl. “People don’t stay where they aren’t wanted.”

Rosa gave a disgusted hiss. “White people...”

Maggie accepted the young woman’s comment without surprise and with understanding. “Where do you think the school is located?”

“This way.” Emily turned right and began walking.

They passed the shop where Nate once had worked, then past the old barn where the African Methodist Episcopal Church used to hold services. Both barn and shop were empty now.

“There it is,” Emily said.

On the other side of the street from the old barn was a shack. Its doorway was set at an angle. The building’s roof was missing shingles and gaps had appeared in the places where the clapboard siding was loose. It would be a cold, uncomfortable place to study come winter, and a dark, damp environment in summer.

As they continued toward the building, the women saw five children emerge from it and scamper off.

“I suppose they’re going home for noon dinner,” Maggie said.

Emily nodded. “I think their teacher must still be in there. I didn’t see a woman come out.”

“Well...” Maggie stepped toward the door. “Let’s see, shall we?”

But Rosa gently took her arm. “Let me do it, please. It might frighten her to see a woman like you.” Her dark brown eyes met Maggie’s. “Understand?”

“Is it because I’m white?”

“Yes.” Rosa took a breath, turned, and opened the door to the shack as she called, “Hello! Are you the teacher?”

Neither Maggie nor Emily could hear the reply, but Rosa turned and motioned for them to follow as she continued to speak to the person inside. “We wanted to talk to you about the school.”

As the other women entered, they saw who had been teaching the class. Maggie struggled to keep her expression bland but friendly. A girl no older than fourteen years of age was at the front of a makeshift classroom comprised of rough-hewn desks and chairs. There was no chalkboard. Five or six well-used

books sat on an improvised shelf made of a plank that had been set upon two barrels.

A quick glance at Emily told Maggie that her friend was trying to conceal her shock, too.

“You’re not in any trouble,” Rosa said comfortingly as they all drew near. “We just want to talk about something.”

The girl was thin and clothed in a faded blue dress. “Yes, ma’am.”

“What’s your name?”

“Mandy Hancock.”

“Pleased to meet you, Miss Hancock.”

Rosa’s friendly expression put the girl at ease. She offered up a smile. “Pleased to meet you, too.”

“I’m Miss Hamilton, and this is Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Smith. We heard you have a school for colored children here.”

“I do,” Mandy replied.

“How many students do you have?”

“Five. We used to have more before the war happened.” Mandy glanced sadly around the classroom. “I was a student. That was when we had Miss French as our teacher. But she left in March when the School Board said our numbers were too small to have a teacher. So I decided to do it. The parents give me what they can afford, but it ain’t much.” She indicated the benches. “Won’t you please sit down?”

It touched Maggie to see one so young bravely trying to educate the remaining children. As she, Emily, and Rosa perched on the benches, Mandy dragged a stool over and sat down, too.

“I hold school every morning ‘til noon,” she said. “Then I go help my mama keep house at the Randolph place. I let the children go early today because Mrs. Randolph’s planning a party. Mama needs my help with the baking. But I can talk to you for a little while before I leave.”

Maggie knew Frederick Randolph. He was one of the lawyers in town and was married to a woman named Clarissa. They were kind people. She wondered why they didn’t try to help reinvigorate the school. Then she wondered if they even knew that the school was closed.

“Miss Hancock,” she said, “how do you feel about teaching? Do you like it?”

Mandy heaved a sigh. “I do, ma’am. But I want to be better at it. The children aren’t doing as good as they did with Miss French. I just don’t know enough.” She gazed down at her hands. “But I’m better than nothin’, I guess.”

“You’re a God-send, Miss Hancock,” Maggie assured her.

“Do you think the men on the School Board’ll let us open up and get a real teacher?”

“I’m afraid that seems unlikely at the moment.”

There was a long silence.

Rosa scrunched up her face in thought. “You know...”

Three pairs of eyes turned to her.

“There are five students here...”

“And?” Emily asked, confused.

“Well... I’m wondering why someone can’t just start a *private* school for colored students.”

Mandy sat up straight. “A new school, y’ mean?”

“Yeah. Why not?”

Emily looked skeptical. “For one, you’d have to pay the teacher. And what about a building? You’d either need to get something better than this or fix this place up.”

Mandy agreed. “Yes, ma’am.” She laughed. “Every time it rains, it rains inside.”

A sly smile crept onto Rosa’s face. “Well, seems to me that *we* have plenty of room.”

Emily frowned. “We do? Where?”

“Greybeal House, of course.”

Maggie’s eyes widened. “Goodness! We do!”

“Mm, hm. Just *where* in Greybeal House?” Emily wanted to know.

“Maybe the music room, the library, the dining room. We have so many rooms, Emily!”

“But it’s not a matter of rooms, Maggie. It’s a matter of the town’s responsibility.” Emily waved an arm. “Look at this place! This is a shack, not a schoolroom. And here’s this poor little girl trying to teach school in it. Why has our town abandoned them?”

“Because our *town* isn’t interested,” Rosa countered. “They don’t think our people are worthy of an education. In fact, they don’t think of us at all, unless they’re forced to.” She stubbornly folded her arms across her chest. “While we’re wrangling with them about treating our people the way they treat their own people, Water Street’s children aren’t getting an education. And they *need* an education!”

Rosa’s passion convicted Maggie’s heart. She knew every word was true and wanted to say something, but decided it was best to remain quiet for the moment.

Emily meanwhile sighed impatiently. “So we just stand back, educate our own, and let them pretend like the children of Water Street are no one’s responsibility but our own?”

Narrowing her eyes, Rosa gave this some thought. “No. They *should* see that all children are the town’s responsibility. But while we’re fighting for them to take that responsibility – and that may take a while, a *long* while – shouldn’t they be receiving an education?”

“Yes,” Emily allowed. “They should.”

Maggie now spoke up. “Then could not a school at Greybeal House be established as a *temporary* measure? I mean, obviously this present school is meant to be a private effort to educate the children. A school at our house would do the same. In the meantime, we can fight to get a town school re-established on Water Street or better yet fight to open Blaineton School to *all* children.”

Mandy had all the tension of an excited puppy as she watched the conversation bounce from one person to the next.

Emily was quiet for a few seconds. "But starting a school isn't easy. And none of us are teachers."

"But my sister-in-law was," Maggie replied. "She taught until she married my brother. We can ask Abigail for help."

Emily still wasn't convinced.

"Oh, can we not at least try?" Maggie pleaded. "I see no clear path, other than allowing Miss Hancock to continue her efforts in this dreadful place."

Mandy's grinned widely. "I gotta be dreamin'. I been praying for something like this to happen for so long. I ain't no teacher. I'm just trying. But... if you all could help..." She left the rest unsaid.

Rosa and Maggie waited for Emily's answer.

"Well," Emily slowly replied, "in that case... maybe God is answering your prayers today." She addressed her two friends, "But we promise nothing until we have talked to the other folk living at Greybeal House and get their agreement."

Rosa eagerly asked, "Tonight?"

Maggie grinned. "Tonight. When the men from *The Register* return, we'll gather on the back porch and discuss the idea."

And Mandy leapt up, clapping her hands in girlish enthusiasm.

#

"Why the privacy?" Eli asked once he and Maggie were behind the closed doors of the front parlor. Suddenly his dark eyes grew wide. "Maggie! You're not expecting again, are you?"

"No. Of course not."

"What do you mean 'of course not'? It could still happen."

Maggie sighed, somewhat impatiently. "Eli, Lydia says that while it is still possible, it is not probable. My monthlies are... well, they hardly can be considered a monthly event. Besides," she took Faith from him and propped the baby on her hip, "we have a young lady and gentleman to raise. And *they* are plenty." After brief a pause, she added, "What I want is to tell you that Emily, Rosa, and I might be undertaking something new."

"Don't you have enough to do?"

"Well, I suspect I won't be doing all that much. My main job probably will be to provide guidance. You see, the town's school is closed to colored children and the Water Street school is all but gone and –"

"You want to start a school, don't you?" he interrupted.

Maggie was taken by surprise, but quickly recovered. "Why, yes, we do. We want to start a private one."

"Uh-huh. Where?"

"Here. At Greybeal House."

"Thought so."

Sometimes he could be so frustrating. "We're hardly there yet, Eli. In fact, we're just starting, if indeed we start anything. Tonight we'll be speaking with

everyone who lives here because we won't start the school unless everyone in our household agrees."

Eli chuckled.

She frowned. "I fail to see the humor in this."

"Oh, Mrs. Smith! Don't you see? You're about to break the town's rules, but not before you follow our house rules."

Maggie huffed a little.

"Now, now... I'm not being critical." He gave her a peck on the cheek. "Come on, let's gather the household and get 'em all on the porch. I'll be interested in hearing what they say."

#

The household was all assembled: Carson, Edward, Grandpa, Nate, Emily, Lydia, Frankie, Rosa, Birgit, Moira, Eli, and Maggie. The Brooks sisters, meanwhile, were in the old part of the house watching the children

As Frankie, the last person in, plopped herself down on the porch steps, Maggie stood and cleared her throat. "Thank you for coming out here, everyone. I have something to ask of you."

All eyes expectantly turned to her.

"The other day we tried to enroll Addie and Mary at the Blaineton School but were told the School Board does not permit white and colored students to study together."

There were sounds of disapproval and disappointment, as well as a bit of muttering.

Maggie went on. "Then we learned that the colored school on Water Street had been closed by the Board because they deemed it unnecessary to pay for a teacher of so few children."

"Why that's outrageous," Carson protested. "Are you telling us that the remaining children are to forfeit their education merely because the town wants to save a teacher's salary?"

"Yes. It's a bleak situation, but please you hear me out. The five children remaining on Water Street now are being taught by a young girl of fourteen. Rosa, Emily, and I met with her today. The building in which they are located is unsuitable for learning. So much so that we fear it may collapse upon them." Maggie paused to take a breath. "We had a discussion and here is what we want to present to you." She glanced at Rosa. "Will you speak now?"

"Thank you." Rosa stood up and referred to a piece of paper upon which she had written their idea. "We realize that the School Board and the town Blaineton needs to resume its responsibility to the colored community. Either the children must have a school of their own funded by the town, or the current law forbidding the mixing of colored and white students must be repealed."

"Hear, hear!" Carson cheered.

"But that will take a great deal of time, effort, and organization," Emily warned.

“In the meantime,” Rosa continued, “the Water Street students need to be educated. To that end, we propose that we start a private school and hold it at Greybeal House.”

Edward raised a hand. Rosa recognized him.

“Pardon my asking,” he said, “but do any of us know anything about teaching? And if we don’t, how shall we prepare to do such a thing?”

Rosa grinned. “Excellent question!”

Pleased with her comment, the young man sat back. The smile on his face said everything.

Maggie replied, “My sister-in-law, Abigail, taught school for many years before she married my brother. We shall speak to her tomorrow to see if she would wish to become involved in our proposed school.”

“And I have a strong interest in teaching,” Rosa added. “I never got an opportunity to apply to normal school because of other circumstances. So, I’d love work at the school and have Mrs. Beatty tutor me.”

Edward whispered to Eli, “She’s a resourceful young woman, isn’t she?”

“Very.” Eli stifled a grin. Edward was smitten.

Maggie stood up again. “So what we have to ask you tonight is this: should we find the proper teaching staff and funding, would you want a school to be held in our house? There will, no doubt, be some confusion and noise when the students are present, but we will endeavor to make sure that they stay away from the kitchen and bed chambers, and, of course, they will not be here in the evening.” She looked around. “All in favor of the idea?”

Not surprisingly, all hands went up.

“Are any opposed?”

No hands.

Maggie, Rosa, and Emily exchanged thankful smiles.

“Well, then,” Maggie concluded, “the motion is passed.”

#

Even though she could have afforded a better piece of furniture, Maggie still preferred to use a simple wooden chair as an improvised prie-dieu<sup>1</sup>. That night she knelt and began to immerse herself in prayer.

Awakened by his wife’s movement as she got out of bed, Eli lay and watched as she prayed. It gave him a twinge of jealousy. Maggie prayed so easily. It was like breathing to her. And it should have been as easy for him. Raised as a Quaker, Eli was well-acquainted with sitting and listening in silence. And yet the practice of prayer was difficult. He never could figure out how he ought to talk to someone whom he could neither see nor hear.

*Anyway*, he thought, frustrated, *I can’t kneel, so that’s the end of that.*

But a new idea abruptly cut in: *Do it seated. Do it standing. It matters not. Do it.*

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<sup>1</sup> A bench used for devotional purposes. There usually is a kneeling bench and shelf on which one may rest one’s elbows or a book.

And so he gave up trying to avoid the inevitable. Even though his attempts at prayer probably would be poor, Eli decided that something or Someone was prodding him to join his wife. Well, if he did, then maybe he could absorb some of Maggie's faith.

Suddenly he frowned to himself.

Wait. Was that what he wanted? Faith? Especially Maggie's kind of faith? It made no sense. How could he be a rational free-thinker and yet have faith?

But whatever it was would not let him go: *Do it. Pray with her.*

With a sigh, Eli heaved himself out of bed, grabbed his cane with one hand and the chair beside Faith's crib with the other, and struggled to Maggie's side.

She looked up in surprise as he set the chair down and plopped onto it.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"Praying with you."

"Oh," Maggie tried to hide the amazement in her voice. "Very well. I'm meditating on this verse: Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you..."<sup>2</sup>

"What are you seeking, Maggie?"

"Strength and wisdom. I have a feeling I shall need both."

"Because of the school situation? Because you think people may take offense that you care about colored children?"

She nodded.

"Worth praying about. Tell you what. You do the asking. I'll sit, keep the verse in mind, and wait for Light."

She smiled. "Thank you. That would be most helpful."

Eli returned her smile, then straightened his shoulders, took a breath, and closed his eyes.

It was good to sink into silence. He had not done it for quite some time. He went into the quiet with no expectations, but soon a welcoming, delicious sense of peace settled over him.

After a while, Eli realized that he had something to say, which took him by surprise. He had expected nothing. He wrestled with the prompting for a while. Was the message there because he personally wanted to say something to encourage his wife? Or had they come from another source?

*No matter. Speak.*

So he did.

"Maggie."

His wife looked up.

"I think... that is... I feel I must say this."

"Go ahead, please."

Eli took a breath and continued, "Don't invite trouble. But if trouble comes, fight."

Her brows knit in a frown.

Eli slipped into plain speech. "Thee needs to protect the school, its students, and its teachers until it starts to thrive."

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 7:7

His words made Maggie recall how she had fought Lemuel Opdyke after the battle of Gettysburg. He had tried to rape her. She had been pregnant with Faith and so fought not only for herself, but also for the life of her child. Now she might have to fight again for something yet unborn.

“This is thee’s moment. Step forward. Speak.”

Maggie digested what Eli was saying. “I understand fighting to protect the school, dear. But my *moment*? What moment? And how shall I step forward? What should I say?”

Her husband smiled apologetically. “I don’t know, sweetheart. I think you have to figure that out.”

“I understand.” Maggie rose from her prie-dieu, went to her husband’s side, and kissed him. “Thank you. I’ll keep the words in my mind and heart.”

Eli impulsively pulled her onto his lap. He gave her a kiss on the cheek. How he loved her! And how he respected her. “Maggie, thee is strong. Thee is powerful. And thee will know it soon.”

She took a startled breath. “Good heavens! With the message and with your Quaker plain talk, I feel as if a prophet is with me.”

“No prophet, Maggie. Just a man.” He kissed her again. He pressed his forehead to hers. “A man who loves you and will love you always.”

They paused a moment, keeping their faces close.

Their breath gradually began to deepen.

Maggie put a hand to her husband’s face. “My love,” she whispered and pressed her lips to his.

Eli dipped his head and kissed the hollow of her neck. As he did, Maggie tipped her head back. With a sigh, she shut her eyes.

Eli slid a hand under her nightgown. “My Maggie...”

Suddenly, she didn’t want to think about decisions and speaking and Blaineton. The only thing she wanted was her husband.

“Let’s go to bed,” she murmured.

“No. Let’s stay here.”

“Here? On this chair?”

“Mm.” He brushed his lips along her neck.

“How, precisely, shall we... you know... on this chair?”

Eli paused and blinked as he thought it over. “Well... I think if you sort of hold on to my shoulders... and if I support you by putting my hands on your... backside...”

Maggie laughed softly. “I’d much rather we go to the bed. I fear I have neither the balance nor the flexibility for this sort of thing on such a narrow little chair. In fact, I suspect one or both of us would soon topple onto the floor. And that, dear husband, would ruin the mood entirely. It also might wake the baby.”

Eli uttered a disappointed grunt as she slipped off his lap.

“Come along.” She smiled and held out a hand. “I want to love you and love you well.”

Eli grinned now, took her hand, and stood up.

24 June 1864

Later that morning, Abigail arrived to pay a visit to Maggie and Emily. Together, they prepared tea and raisin bread.

When all was ready, Maggie went looking for Rosa. She found her helping the Brennan sisters with the housecleaning.

Upon returning to the kitchen with her young friend, everyone sat at the big dining table. Maggie poured tea and distributed buttered raisin bread as Emily began to nurse a fussy Jarena. Maggie then plopped Faith on her lap and fed her daughter bits of bread while updating Abigail on the goings on at Greybeal House.

When the proper time arose, Rosa, Emily, and Maggie told Abigail what they had learned about the Blaineton School's new policy.

Abigail's response was an irritable sigh. "I was afraid of that. I have heard such opinions from some of our more outspoken – and may I add, ignorant – citizens."

"Copperheads..." Emily muttered. "All of 'em."

"Copperhead or not, it seems the war has given some permission to be as nasty as they wish."

"They never needed permission, Abby." Emily's tone was bitter.

Maggie laid a comforting hand on Emily's arm.

Rosa spoke up, "We've got a long row to hoe, there's no doubt about that."

Jarena had finished nursing. Emily covered herself, put the infant on her shoulder and patted the baby's little back. She set her own mouth in a determined line. "I could hardly believe it! A fourteen-year-old child trying to teach five other children in a broken-down building. Can you imagine? White folk don't have to put up with that!"

"And it's all because the School Board won't pay for a teacher," Rosa added bitterly.

There was a pause.

At length Abigail smiled wryly. "So... tell me, ladies. What are you going to do about this?"

"Why, start a school for colored children, of course," Maggie replied.

"Mm." Abigail took a sip of tea. "Of course. And you'll hold it here, of course."

Her sister-in-law's comments took Maggie by surprise. "Well... yes. I mean, there isn't a suitable building on Water Street. And since ours will be a private school, we are free to hold it where we wish."

"That's logical." Abigail set her cup onto the saucer. "No one would have cause to complain because you wouldn't be taking public monies. Brilliant idea, ladies. And economical, too. How many students will your school have?"

"Five," Rosa replied. "Well, seven counting the Brooks sisters."

"And if you hold it here, I daresay no one would be the wiser unless you let it be known."

Jarena burped loudly.

“Excuse you,” Emily chuckled to her infant daughter. The other women smiled.

Maggie picked up Faith’s teething ring and gave it to her. “What do you think, Abby?”

“What do I think?” Abigail’s eyes lit up. “Why, I think it’s a splendid idea! You could teach basic subjects – reading, writing, sums, history. But you also could teach a skill should a student or family wish.”

“Like we’re doing with the Brennan girls, you mean.” Maggie shifted Faith to the other side of her lap. “Girls could learn to be maids, cooks, or nursemaids.”

“Or nurses, if Lydia agreed to apprentice one or two.” Abigail got to her feet. “Have you paper and pencil?”

Maggie nodded toward the sitting area. “In the drawer of the table nearest the fireplace.”

“What about the boys?” Emily settled Jarena into the crook of her arm. “We’ll need something for them. Nate might be able to apprentice one or two as carpenters.”

Excited, Maggie added, “Perhaps Eli could apprentice some boys with *The Register*.”

“Or maybe he could be enticed to apprentice a *girl* or two,” Abigail put in with a wicked little smile. She returned with a sheet of paper and a pencil in her hand.

Rosa grinned. “I’m *really* gonna like living here! You all know how to get things done.”

“We certainly do!” Laughing, Abigail readied herself to take notes. “The first step is to put our ideas on paper.”

“I’d be happy to teach baking and cooking,” Emily offered. “I’m already doing that with Moira and Birgit. It won’t be much of a change, and I can have Jarena with me.”

“Perhaps I could help those who wish to enter into service,” Abigail volunteered and made a note. She sat back in her chair. “But I would like to teach the older students. I do so miss teaching.”

Maggie grinned. “I was hoping you would say that!” Faith grabbed the teething ring from her mother began to chew on it. “Now... what subjects shall we offer?”

“The usual,” Abigail replied. “The things they will need to go out in the world are reading, writing, and sums.”

Rosa hesitated, then said, “Would it be all right if I taught the young children?”

The other women’s eyes landed on her.

“I received an education: attended school in Flemington and did very well. I even planned to go to normal school, but the war came, and my brother went to work with the army...” Her voice grew soft and sad. “Mrs. Beatty, he was all I had. So, I followed him and worked as a laundress. That is, until he was killed.”

“Oh, dear,” Abigail murmured. “I’m so sorry to hear that.”

Rosa squared her shoulders. "I'll never forget him, ever. But... well... this is my home now and I intend to shift my weight. I want to learn to teach and, if you don't mind, I would like to have you tutor me."

"I would be delighted to do that!" Abigail made notes on the paper. "You know, Miss Hamilton, I think we two will make a fine team."

"You do?"

"Oh, yes." Abigail grinned and winked at her. "I sense we are made of the same cloth, so to speak. You may not believe it now, but once upon a time, I spoke my mind and carried my own weight, too"

Rosa laughed, leaned across the table, and offered Abigail her hand. "I'm happy to be working with you."

Abigail took her hand and the two exchanged a firm shake.

Emily said, "Don't we need a headmistress?"

"Yes." Maggie stood Faith up on her feet, since the baby was tiring of the teething ring. She let her daughter bounce up and down on her lap, as she continued, "Someone must oversee the school."

"Don't you dare do that, Maggie," Abigail ordered. "You have enough on your shoulders overseeing this house, caring for a baby, and helping Eli with *The Register*. Since Rosa and I will be teaching partners, I'll happily serve as headmistress. If a time should come when we receive more students, then we can always hire another teacher and I shall remain headmistress. That is, if you all think it is a workable plan."

"I do," Emily said. "But won't Samuel have something to say about your teaching?"

Abigail laughed lightly. "Oh, my dear Emily! My sons are grown. I have nothing to do all day but rattle around in that big house and call on other ladies. Frankly, I find all that frightfully dull. I fully expect Sam will be delighted to have me smile more and complain less."

Emily blurted, "Wait. We'll need money. Schools don't run on air."

"Well, tuition's out of the question." Rosa stood and fetched the kettle from the stove to refresh their pot of tea. "Our students can't afford it."

"How about subscriptions?" Maggie glanced at the women around the table.

"Who'd donate to a school for colored children?" Rosa poured hot water into the tea pot.

"When we took in Birgit and Moira, Miss Moore suggested that she would help them find placement, should they wish," Maggie told her. "Perhaps I can see if she would do this for the children in our school. She knows quite a few people." She smiled as she added, "And I have some money set by that I'd like to donate."

"Could you get my pin money, too, Maggie?" Emily asked.

Nodding, Maggie rose and, carrying Faith on her hip, retrieved the two jars from a cupboard.

Abigail watched her. "Well, since you two are offering to make the first donations, then I shall make one of my own. I have a little nest egg set by, too. I never knew what I was saving it for but know now. Our contributions can help

fund the school's start." She scribbled more notes on the paper. "That means our students may come for free."

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*Maggie's Journal, 24 June 1864*

*Yesterday, we visited with the Water Street families who have children in the colored school. Journal, I am so glad that Emily and Rosa did the speaking! It seemed politic to do so. After all, I am not colored.*

*I do know what I see, though. Many are poor because they are not allowed to rise, despite their gifts, talents, and skills. They are perceived as a threat by those of the white community who also happen to be striving to rise.*

*And yet because my skin is white, I do not know what it is to be colored. I only may observe. Rosa and Emily, on the other hand, know and thus are able to communicate and sympathize in ways that I cannot.*

*My heart desires a more just society. Oh, I know that all people cannot be wealthy, but cannot most be comfortable? Must so many feel the heavy weight of poverty on their shoulders without hope of doing better? Of ever doing better? How grinding, how disheartening that is. I know what it was like trying to keep my boarding house afloat after John and Aunt Letty's deaths. I feared I would not be able to feed my boarders or my daughters. Poverty is a burden that sticks one's feet in a mire of muck so deep that one cannot move. Sometimes faith in God and hope in the future are destroyed by it.*

*Oh, that I had the power to persuade and move people toward love rather than hate, jealousy, greed, and suspicion! But alas! I am small and insufficient to the task, despite Eli's faith in me. If I am powerful, as he claims, then I simply do not feel it.*

*Eli, of course, has tried to help by giving me opportunities to write for *The Register*, but I never will attain his voice in our community. Whether he is admired or deplored, he is still a force to be reckoned with, while I - I am perceived as "Smith's wife." I am a woman and I fear that I am not seen for who I really am.*

*But now I find I must be brave and strong and confident. Despite my fears, I am called do something to help my community. Giving space in our home for the children from Water Street ought to, God willing, change their lives. I hunger for them to learn and then leave us and move*

*on to better lives. If I could but see this happen, then I will be content, knowing that I have done my part to change the world for the better.*

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“There you are, girls,” Emily said upon finding the Brooks sisters in the formal parlor. They were helping Moira and Birgit dust. “I’m glad to see you’re helping.”

“We need to do something, ma’am,” Addie said, “seeing as we can’t go to school.”

Emily smiled. “Well, now that is precisely what I’m here for. I have some very good news for both of you. You *will* be going to school. And it will be right here at Greybeal House.”

“Are you doing that just for us?” Mary asked.

“For you, and for others like you. But I want you to know that it all began *because* of you. And I also want you to know that Mr. Johnson and I love you both to pieces. You’re part of our family now.”

“Ma’am?” Mary’s voice quavered. “Seeing as how you love us to pieces... well, should we keep on calling you Mr. and Mrs. Johnson?”

Moira and Birgit immediately stopped dusting and tactfully slipped out of the room.

Emily indicated the sofa. “Why don’t we sit down for a spell?”

The girls sat. Emily situated herself between them.

“You asked a very good question, Mary. I know we can’t ever replace your mother and father. I don’t think you ought to refer to me as Mother and Nate as Father. But you girls *are* part of our family now. What would you think of calling us Aunt Emily and Uncle Nate?”

Dark brown eyes wide, the two girls nodded.

This pleased Emily. “Then aunt and uncle we’ll be! Welcome to our family.” She opened her arms and was awash in love as Mary and Addie fell into them. “Oh,” she sighed, “I am so glad Mrs. Beatty brought you to us! Our family is complete now.”