

Chapter 2: New Life

Upstairs at Greybeal House, Emily was starting to feel the urge to push. Lydia set about laying towels down on the floor and setting a wooden chair upon them. "We're going to improvise a birthing stool," she explained. "I think it will be more comfortable for you, Emily."

Café-au-lait skin coated with sweat, Emily panted, "I don't think anything's gonna be more comfortable."

Lydia gave her an encouraging smile. "That's true. But it might help move things along for you and baby. Birgit will sit on the chair first and, Emily, you will sit before Birgit and let her support you."

Birgit took her position while Lydia led Emily to the chair.

"Very good. Now, Birgit, put your arms around Emily just under her bosom. Hold tight to keep her from sliding. Meanwhile, I..."

The door abruptly opened, interrupting Lydia's instruction.

The women's heads swiveled, eyes lighting on Nate as he sheepishly entered the room and shut the door behind him.

He cleared his throat. "I thought I'd come up. That is if it's all right."

"It's fine, Nate. Why don't you take Birgit's place on the chair?"

"Me?"

With Lydia's help, Emily struggled to her feet again. Then Birgit hopped up and gestured at the chair.

Nate hesitantly walked over and sat down. He had no idea what was going on.

"Spread your legs, Nate," Lydia said.

His eyes widened. "Beg your pardon?"

The dark-haired young woman chuckled. "You're going to support your wife by surrounding her with your body. I think having you here with her is just what she needs."

Nate did as he was told.

Birgit eased Emily onto the chair again.

"That's right, Emily," Lydia coached. "Lean back against Nate but keep your bottom on the edge of the chair so I can catch the baby. Nate, put your arms around her and hold tight."

"I'm not sure I like this," Nate muttered, wishing he had stayed downstairs.

"Oh, hush up," Emily snapped and then shut her eyes and groaned. "I want to push. Lydia, I want to push!"

Lydia knelt before her friend. "That's what we want. Birgit, would you put Emily's feet on my shoulders?"

As Birgit maneuvered the other woman into position, Nate became increasingly uncomfortable. "Maybe I should just go..."

"You keep your damn ass on this chair," Emily snarled.

Nate was struck speechless. Emily *never* cursed.

“Don’t worry,” Lydia told him soothingly. “Childbirth is difficult. Women often become quite blunt, especially at the end. Hold on to Emily tightly so she doesn’t slide away. Press your legs around her to keep her in place. That’s it, Nate. Very good.” Squatting in front of them, Lydia lifted Emily’s nightgown. “Oh, you’re doing beautifully, Emily. The next time you feel the urge to push, do it.”

Nate squeezed his eyes shut. “Oh, sweet Jesus! What have I got myself into? I’m gonna kill Eli...”

#

About an hour later, the family had finished a dessert of fruit pudding and was getting ready to resume daily activities. They were interrupted when Nate, wearing an enormous grin, walked from the winder stairs into the room. In his arms, he gently was cradling a swaddled newly-born infant.

All heads turned in his direction.

“It’s a girl,” he proudly announced. “And Em’s fine, thank the Lord. She’s sleeping right now. Plum wore out, and I can’t say as I blame her.” He brought the baby to the table and displayed her for all to see. “Ladies and gentlemen, I give you, Jarena Lee Johnson.”

Everyone hurled effusive congratulations at him, as Nate grinned the grin that all proud fathers have.

Maggie came to Nate’s side to see the baby up close. “Oh, my! She’s lovely!” She glanced up at her friend. “She’s got your eyes, Nate. Jarena Lee is such a beautiful name. What made you choose it?”

“A long time ago Emily heard a preacher woman named Jarena Lee speak.”

Frankie sat up straight. “Emily heard a preacher woman?”

“Yes. Miss Lee preached the Gospel wherever she could gather a crowd, and she traveled all over. Because she was a woman, the church never ordained her. Never so much as gave her a license. But the church did authorize her to preach.¹ She didn’t care, though. Authorized, licensed, ordained, or not, nothing was gonna stop her. Yes, sir, God called that woman and she answered.”

Nate’s story was too much of a coincidence for Frankie. Recently, her stepfather had advised her to preach without ordination. Now Nate and Emily had named their baby after a woman who had preached without ordination, too. The slim short redhead wondered if she had Jarena Lee’s courage. Could she do the same thing? People said God worked in mysterious ways. Did those mysterious ways include her? They must, because she felt called do preach and minister.

Meanwhile, Nate was gazing lovingly at his daughter. “Em says Mrs. Lee had God’s grace on her. We hope and pray our little girl has God’s grace on her, too. So, we’re naming her after Mrs. Lee.”

Three-year-old Natey scurried over to his father, and Nate squatted down for him see the infant. “Here you go, son. Meet your baby sister.”

¹ Jarena Lee was the first authorized female preacher in the African Methodist Episcopal Church (1819). She was posthumously ordained in 2016.

Natey wrinkled his nose. "I wanted a brother."

Nate laughed. "That's the great thing about having a baby, boy. You never know what you're going to get."

Natey wasn't so sure about that.

Bob quickly left the table and joined his friend in observing Jarena. He put a reassuring hand on the other boy's shoulder.

"A sister's not so bad, Natey," he allowed. "Having a little sissy makes you and me the same. We both got one now. That means we can teach 'em things and keep 'em out of trouble. Girls need protection, you know."

Frankie cleared her throat. "I beg your pardon, little brother. When I was a girl I could best the strongest boys in town. Girls are *not* weak and helpless."

Bob frowned at her. "That's not what Jimmy at school told me."

Maggie put a hand on her son's shoulder. "Jimmy is wrong, Bobby. But just the same, I'm glad you feel protective of Faith."

"I'm not gonna let anyone hurt my sister, Mama."

"Amen to that," Eli replied, ruffling his son's hair.

Inspired, Natey puffed out his chest. "Nobody's gonna hurt Jarry, either!"

"Jarena." Nate chuckled. "Her name's Jarena."

"I like Jarry."

"Little man, I think you're getting way too big for your britches." Despite his words, Nate smiled with deep affection at his son. "Come on, let's take *Jarry* upstairs and see your Mama."

#

Maggie's Journal, 14 June 1864

It is true that a woman's work is never done. Once The Register staff returned to work and Bob went back to school, Moira, Frankie, and I cleaned up, scraped scraps into the slop pail for the pigs, and washed and dried the dishes.

While we were employed, Birgit and Lydia brought soiled laundry downstairs and prepared to scrub the sheets, towels, and clothing used in Jarena's birth.

Once the dishes were clean, Moira went outside and offered to help with the laundry. Frankie, however, lingered in the kitchen with me. Finally, she said that she wanted to talk.

Once upon a time, I would had been all too happy to talk to my girls, but these days it seems that when either of them wish to converse with me it is to say something important - most often something about a plan they have for their lives. It is not so much a conversation, as it is an official announcement.

Today was no different.

I do not know why I have not expected my girls to grow up so quickly, but here we are. They no longer wish to ask my opinion, but rather tell me what they are thinking and planning.

My girls are on the cusp of womanhood.

#

Frankie and Maggie had repaired to the rocking chairs on the front porch and for a while chatted about inconsequential matters. Finally, Frankie screwed up her courage and said, "I have something to tell you."

Maggie steeled herself. "Go ahead."

"Back in May I had a question and asked Papa for his advice. And he was quite helpful." Frankie bit her lower lip as she mulled things over.

"What did he say?"

"Well, he believes God is calling me to be a minister."

Maggie's heart simultaneously lurched with joy and contracted in concern. "Oh."

"I asked him how I could do it. I mean, it seems impossible, doesn't it? Women aren't welcome in seminary and our church won't ordain us. So, why even try?"

"What did Papa suggest?"

She took a big breath and finished in a rush, "He told me to go west and start a church."

The floor seemed to open up and swallow Maggie whole, but she managed to stammer, "West? He recommended that you go *west*?"

"He says there are fewer rules out there and not very many churches. It's a good place for a woman preacher to go. So I thought it over and decided why not?"

Maggie's heart screamed: *Why not? Because you might get hurt out there. Because people are wild out there. Because you're my little girl and I can't bear the idea of you going so far away. Because, God forgive me, I'm afraid even God couldn't protect you the way I could.*

"Also, Papa said I might want to consider another church."

"Another church?"

"Yes. Not the Methodists. But perhaps the Universalists."

Maggie's eyes widened. "The Universalists?"

"Well, the Methodist Episcopal Church won't ordain me it, will it?"

"No, it won't." But the information was too much for Maggie. She tried to keep her voice steady, as she said, "Papa has told me that you feel called to be a minister, but he never mentioned anything about you going west. *Not once.* And as for the Universalists..." Maggie stopped herself from going further.

It dawned on Frankie that she just might have gotten her stepfather in trouble. Perhaps even big trouble. "Now, Mama," she said in a soothing tone, "it was a conversation between Papa and me. I didn't think I needed to report it to you."

Maggie huffed. “Well, *someone* needed to tell me. And that someone is your stepfather! Why would he suggest that you find another church? You have been Methodist all your life! That idea that you would give it up to become a – a Universalist! And advising you to move all the way out west! It’s all so radical. I’m your *mother*, Frankie! Eli Smith is your *stepfather*. I have a right to know what he says to you. Especially when it’s advice like that!”

“Now, Mama...” Frankie said firmly, straightening her shoulders. “You know I always discuss things with you before I do anything. And, anyway, you were the one who told me that if I were to become a preacher, I would need to be brave and strong.”

Maggie felt a blush creep up her neck. “It slipped my mind.”

“Don’t you understand, Mama? *You* were the one who helped me figure out what I was feeling.”

“I?” A very uncomfortable light went on in Maggie’s head. She was the one. Not Eli. It was she who had planted the seed that now was bearing fruit. “But I had no idea you would consider leaving the Methodist Episcopal Church and moving far away. If I had, I never would have – “

“Oh, Mama!” Frankie interrupted with a laugh. “Don’t you see? You had no more control over this than I. It’s the Holy Ghost’s doing. What will happen and where I’ll go is not set in stone. As of now, I have no plans as to what I shall do or when I shall do it.”

Maggie relaxed and sat back in her chair.

Frankie leaned toward her. “Mama, it’s likely that Patrick and I will be wed in a year once he is mustered out of the army. That will be the time for us to make decisions about our lives. Not now! Pat hopes to be a doctor and I may feel called to ministry. But rest assured, Mama, when it’s time, I will share everything with you.”

The tone of Frankie’s voice and the look in her eyes were no longer those of a young girl. Maggie was struck by the hard realization that her little daughter had become a woman, or at least was stepping into womanhood.

Pushing her pride and fears aside, she said, “I’m sorry, Frances. I know you always consult me when you need to make a big decision. I’m afraid I’m acting foolishly. But sometimes mothers do that.”

“You haven’t been acting foolishly. It’s clear to me that you’re acting exactly like my dear mother who loves me.” Frankie leaned across the arm of her chair and kissed Maggie on the cheek. “And I promise to come to you before I make any more decisions. I need you, Mama. You’ve always been my rock.”

#

“So...” Eli said to Josiah Norton. “What do you think?”

The two men were sitting in Josiah’s lavish office located in the new Norton Arms Hotel. Josiah had another office, of course, one in the factory he owned south of the town. No matter where he went, he had assured himself of being perfectly comfortable. It was something men of wealth and power liked to do.

The industrialist sat back in his chair. Its leather squeaked ever so slightly.

He and Eli had little in the way of love for each other, especially since *The Register* had published a critical editorial regarding his usurpation of the Western New Jersey Hospital for the Insane. Eli had a problem with a businessman turning a medical facility into a profit-making institution. He also had a problem with the resulting abuses the patients had endured. Josiah, on the other hand, had a problem with a newspaper attacking a business activity that had been perfectly legal. He also was angry because the editorial had claimed that it wasn't morally right for Josiah to take over the hospital. He didn't trust the scruffy, portly man in the rumpled sack suit. Nor did Eli trust the ostentatious, handsome man sitting across the desk from him.

Josiah stared unblinkingly at his adversary for a minute. Finally he said, "You want me to advertise my hotel in *The Register*?"

Eli nodded. "And your factory and mill, as well, if you wish."

"In effect, you're saying that you need my help."

"What we at *The Register* want is for you to take advantage of an opportunity that will help the both of us and our respective enterprises. You will benefit because people'll see your ads, become curious, and stay at your hotel. We will benefit because the money you pay for advertising will help us expand our reach as a newspaper."

"Intriguing. Tell me more."

"Does your woolen mill produce fabric for clothing other than uniforms?"

"Yes. It does."

"Good. Depending upon how we advertise the quality of your product and the prices you ask, a shop owner looking for bolts of cloth might just be disposed to purchase from you, rather than from its regular source. A dressmaking factory just might do the same." Eli smiled easily. "You would do well to try advertising with us for a month or two."

"And the cost?"

"Depends on the size of the advertisement. You can have an eighth of a page, a quarter, a half... a whole page."

"Intriguing." Josiah sat back in his chair and fastened his brown eyes on Eli. "Tell me what each option will cost."

#

Feeling like a conquering hero, Eli marched in the door to the Greybeal House kitchen as if he were carrying the head of his adversary in his hand. After hearing the costs of the advertising options, Josiah chose the half page ad and signed a contract with *The Register*.

But before he could say a word, before he could begin to bask in his success, he noticed that Maggie was brooding.

Oh, she had greeted him as usual with a warm kiss and welcoming words, but clearly her mind was on something else. His news would just have to wait until the clouds parted.

However, his wife's moody silence only intensified once they withdrew to their bedchamber. Eli now had the distinct impression that she was bothered by something he had done. The trouble was, she hadn't told him yet what that "something" was.

Egad, he thought, cringing inwardly, *she's going to chew me up and I'm going to have to wait until it happens.*

Immersed in the husbandly version of living hell, he undressed and slipped into his nightshirt. Then he sat in bed and watched Maggie nurse Faith.

Happily for him, Maggie's expression smoothed out as she fed her daughter. She even smiled and sang a soft lullaby as she gazed lovingly into the infant's eyes.

Maybe things weren't as bad as he imagined.

Eli enjoyed watching the nightly ritual. It was something he always would remember: the image of the love that his wife had for their child. He let the vision sweetly burn itself into his mind.

And yet, the second the baby was tucked into her crib, Maggie returned to her ruminations, and Eli's hope for a pleasant goodnight kiss, and perhaps more, evaporated.

He finally decided that there was no use in fretting. His wife simply wasn't ready to let him know what was wrong. He just prayed that the problem wasn't too big – because he simply didn't remember doing anything to merit getting chewed up.

After giving his wife a perfunctory goodnight kiss. Eli rolled onto his side and fell asleep, hoping his unconscious state would fend off her desire to suddenly launch into a discussion.

Fortunately, Maggie also went to sleep, too. However, her concerns about Frankie swirled stubbornly throughout her dreams. Shortly before dawn, she abruptly awoke and, no matter what, could not get back to sleep. It wasn't the dreams involving Frankie that caused her to awaken. Rather, it was something else. Another dream altogether. Surrendering to the inevitable, a wide-awake Maggie sat up.

Her movement woke Eli, who stirred and muttered, "Is it time to get up?"

"Not quite yet."

"Did the baby cry?"

"No." Maggie lay back down and turned on her side so she could face her husband. "I had an odd dream."

Eli rolled, sleepily slid an arm over her, and mumbled, "What about?"

"Mrs. Greybeal."

One brown eye creaked open "Mrs. Greybeal? I thought you didn't know her."

"I only met her once and that was at our church's bazaar. That's why the dream was so odd."

"Want to tell me about it?"

"I do. Thank you. You see, Mrs. Greybeal and I were here, in our house. She smiled at me and said, 'This old place wants people, Maggie. It needs life. See that it is filled.' Then I woke up."

Eli chuckled. "I think we're doing a good job of filling this behemoth up. Mrs. Greybeal needn't worry."

"Yes, well, we do have quite a group. Thirteen of us. But Lydia only sleeps here a few nights out of the week. All the other nights she stays in her room at the hospital. And we have the three empty bedrooms over the music room and two empty rooms over the kitchen."

Eli pulled her close. "My dear wife, just because you had a dream doesn't mean it's an order that you must obey." He kissed the tip of her nose. "And just because we have five empty bedrooms doesn't mean we need to fill them all up."

"But it's wise to pay attention to a memorable dream, don't you think? Dreams have great importance in the Bible."

"That's the Bible, not real life."

"Oh, Elijah! You can say that after the dream *you* had about God?"

"It was about *you*," he corrected.

"You said it *wasn't* me. It just looked like me. But it was God."

He sighed. "Fine. I had a strange dream, that may or may not mean something."

"And I have had a strange dream, too."

"So what do you propose, Maggie? Should we open Greybeal House to more boarders?"

"I don't know."

Eli gave her backside an affectionate pat. "Come on. Tell me what's troubling you."

Maggie sighed. "I had a talk with Frankie today and..."

Eli tightened his arm around her as he asked, "And what?"

"I suddenly realized that shall miss her when she marries and leaves."

Eli kissed the top of her head. "I understand, sweetheart. That girl is quite a force in this household."

Quite abruptly, she threw the bomb he had been fearing at him. "Frances told me that you spoke with her about her calling."

"I did, yes. I told you that."

Anger suddenly flashed in Maggie's soul. "Oh, do stop that, Elijah! You didn't tell me everything about that conversation!"

Now he knew what he was in trouble for. "Yeah, well, it...uh... wasn't important?"

"Wasn't important? A girl having a calling isn't important? Apparently you didn't feel that way when you told her to *answer* the call."

"Well, isn't that what you want for her, too? I mean, we both know that she has this *thing*... this call."

"But I don't want her to stop being Methodist! You told her to join the Universalists, for heaven's sake!"

"Sweetheart, all those churches are simply different ways of understanding Jesus."

"But the Universalists! How could you?"

“Because they’re one of the few out there who actually have ordained a woman. Let’s be logical, Maggie.”

“And I suppose telling Frankie to go west, away from her family, away from all that she knows, is logical, too?”

Eli now wished he had stayed asleep. “It was only a suggestion. The truth is a woman minister in Blaineton could never have congregation. But out west people see women differently.”

“Well, I should say so. Those frontier towns have saloons and houses of ill repute even *before* they have a church. That tells me exactly how they see women.”

Eli had to admit his wife had a point. The prospect of Frankie – and Patrick – living in a ramshackle town and preaching to people who barely had heard the name “Jesus” made him feel uneasy. His stepdaughter could get in real trouble out there. He could just see her marching into a saloon to preach and getting thrown out on her behind.

Trying to calm his wife down, Eli said, “Now, sweetheart, it’s highly unlikely that Frankie will take my advice.” He reassuringly stroked her hair. “I mean, when has she *ever* taken my advice?”

“Oh, Eli, I couldn’t bear it if she went that far away.” She snuggled up, pressing her face against his shoulder.

The shoulder of his nightshirt suddenly felt damp.

“Are you crying?” He gently felt her cheek. It was wet. “Oh, Maggie, don’t! Children grow up. Sometimes they move away. It’s what’s supposed to happen. I mean, Lydia might move away, too. She’s already done it once. She stayed behind in Gettysburg after we left.”

Maggie abruptly lifted her head. “Liddy will never leave for long. She’s my homebody. She’ll always be nearby. She says Philip plans to move to Blaineton, too, after he’s mustered out.” She suddenly began to sob. “But my Frankie! She’s going to fly away, I just know it. If she goes west, we might never see her again. I think that’s why I had that dream. She’s leaving! Our house is going to become empty!”

“Now, now,” he cooed. “Let’s not get ahead of ourselves. Besides, when Frankie and Patrick get married, we’ll probably have grandchildren. And let’s not forget Liddy and Phil. They’re good and married. A grandbaby might be on the way even as we speak.”

Maggie sat up, appalled. “A grandbaby? When we’ve got a six-year-old son.” She gestured at the crib near the fireplace. “And a babe in arms? I’m not ready for grandchildren! I am not old enough.”

He couldn’t help but chuckle. “Why, that’s the vainest thing I’ve ever heard come out of your mouth, Mrs. Smith. You certainly *are* old enough. We just got a late start on our own family. Bob and Faith are going to need the both of us for quite some time.”

Maggie sniffed.

“And when Frankie and Patrick *do* have a baby, it just might keep them from packing up and moving. So, don’t fret. Please.”

“Hold me,” she whispered, sounding utterly pathetic.

Having his wife pathetic and worried was preferable to having her furious with him. So, Eli obligingly (and happily) wrapped his arms around her. He kissed the top of her head. "Better?"

"Yes." With a little sigh Maggie cuddled close and, in the space of minutes, was breathing softly as she drifted off to sleep.

Now Eli was the one left wide awake and staring at the ceiling.

Weddings.

Grandchildren.

The ideas were intimidating. He barely had managed to have children of his own, for crying out loud. What did all this mean? Would they be grown and gone in the wink of an eye? Eli wasn't ready to be an old man. Not yet. Not for a long time.

Brace yourself, Smith, he thought. Looks like you're on a runaway train.